

# ETHNIC-POLITICAL PROCESSES

## AND ETHNIC STRUCTURE OF AZERBAIJAN

Azerbaijan has a rather complex ethnic structure. Azerbaijan inherited its historical past together with the nations who created the history of South-East Caucasus. However, the physical extinction resulting from various invasions, as well as the ethnic assimilation which continued for the last three centuries brought to the minimum the ethnic presence of the nations of Caucasus Albania and neighboring Armenians and Georgians who were merged into various administrative and political units. In the course of the middle ages and the new history the "old nations" either gradually moved to highlands or were merged with some groups who did not form individual ethnic groups yet. According to the Azerbaijani historian A.K. Alekperov (cf. "Surveys on Archeology and Ethnography of Azerbaijan", Baku, 1960), "In the 9th and 10th centuries the territory was settled by Pecheneges and Kengerlis.

The territory of Azerbaijan was more expansively populated with Kipchaks and Poloves in the region of Borchali-Kazakh during the reign of the Georgian king David in the 12th century. The period covering the 13th and 14th centuries was notable for the severe struggle between the Mongol states: Juchids of the Gold Hordes and the Iranian Ilkhans. In the 10th century the process of migration of the Turkish-speaking tribes from the north to the south started. Meanwhile, another movement from the south to the north, i.e., from Iran, was launched. A particularly huge wave of migrants moved to the above-noted territories from Iran in the 15th century. Those were the Cara-Coyunlu tribes. In the 14th and 15th centuries the territory was inhabited with a big number of major Turk tribes.."

The process of diverse ethnic-cultural contacts of the newly settled invaders and the local Caucasus and Iranian-speaking nations, Georgians,

Armenians, as well as the minor Arab-speaking tribes who had settled there since the times of the Arab caliphate continued for a long time. Even at the beginning of the 20th century it was difficult to somehow determine the level of the ethnic self-consciousness and exo-perception of the Turkish-speaking groups inhabiting in the territories of the former Baku and Yelizavetpol Provinces, part of Erivan Province and Zakatal District of the Tsarist Russia. Later these territories were included in one of the Soviet republics which was named Azerbaijan (in light of the political program aimed at merging the Iranian Azerbaijan with the newly established administrative unit, Soviet Azerbaijan).

At the beginning of the 20th century the Turkish-speaking population of the region who were later officially acknowledged as the "Azerbaijani" (the name derives from the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan) had numerous ethnic names. Each of those names indicated a specific form of self-identification or exo-perception. Motivated by the pursuit for the self-identification through the collective names the Turkish-speaking poets and writers searched for alternatives in the existing lexical practice. Thus, Vagif, the court poet of the Karabagh khan distinguished between these tribes only by the nomadic tribes of "el". Mirza Fatali Akhundov called them in the Russian manner: "Caucasus", "Moslems", "Tatars". Sabir used exclusively the word "Moslems". The non-Turkish-speaking authors often used the terms "Karapapakhs", "Kizilbashes", "Kajars", "Tarakiyama", as well as "Turks", "Tatars", etc. Each of these names had a definite historical background. A similar diversity of collective names for identifying the Turkish-speaking population of the South-East Caucasus was traced among the neighboring nations. A. K. Alekperov writes that the Azerbaijani were called "Kizilbashes" by the Dagestan peoples (the term derives from the name of the soldiers of the Sefivid Army) or "Kajars" by the name of the former rulers of Iran who attempted to conquer Transcaucasus in the 18th century. In addition, the Dagestans more widely used the tribal names, such as "Mugals", "Padars" with respect of individual Azerbaijani tribes and groups. The name "Padars" was applied to the nearest neighboring groups of the Azerbaijani, the Tats...".

The variety of the self-identification names within the group is also indicative of the diversity of self-perception. A. Alekperov writes, "Self-identification was defined by the level of development of the society. For example, the semi-nomadic inhabitants where some of the patriarchal relations were still preserved, were called by the name of the family or tribe to which they belonged. This is how the names of "Avshars", "Tekels", "Ayrums", etc. originated. The settled rural and urban population was called by the territorial characteristic such as the people of Shirvan, Karabagh, Sheki, Kuba and Baku...

It is more likely that as a result of such practice preconditions were created for the spreading within a short period of time of the term "Azerbaijani" which is the derivative of the newly created toponym-politonym "Azerbaijan".

Thus, the word "Azerbaijani" which means "residents of Azerbaijan" (nowadays understood as the citizens of Azerbaijan) was readily accepted by many nations who had survived since the times of Caucasus Albania and were absorbed by the process of assimilation. For 500-600 years these nations had co-existed side by side with the Turkish-speaking groups as neutral tribes and the process of assimilation of the remaining minor aborigine people, as well as all Kurds of Azerbaijan was completed.

Nevertheless, relatively small ethnic groups who lived in the periphery and remote mountainous areas of Azerbaijan continued their ethnical existence. Those were mainly Lezgins, Armenians, Georgian Ingeloyes, Iranian-speaking Tats, Talishes, as well as the remaining Udins and the so-called nations of the "Shahdagh group", i.e., Krizes, Khinalugs, Budgougs, Jheks and Gaputlins who had miraculously survived. In the north of Azerbaijan several villages of the Avars and Tzakhurs also survived.

Throughout the 20th century those Armenians who still lived in the territory of Azerbaijan had to protect themselves against the physical extinction and fight for their ethnic-cultural unity. In particular, the "ethnic self-protection" was manifested through active migration. As a result, many Armenians fled from Azerbaijan to Russia, Central Asian countries, and, naturally, Armenia, long before the Karabagh events. This process was completed at the end of the 20th century: the indirect pressure exerted on the Armenian population grew into an aggressive attack against the Armenians at the time when the Azerbaijani authorities took full advantage of the chaotic period. As a result, all Armenians were forced to flee from Azerbaijan.

The main areas of Azerbaijan inhabited by Tats include the Siazan, Divichinsk, Kuba, Konakhkend, Semakh, Ismail Regions, Baku and the Apsheron Peninsula. According to the census of 1926, there were 28 500 Tats in Azerbaijan, and 30 years later, according to the official data, their number was 11000. The Iranian-speaking Tats lived in the said area for around 1500 years. Until recently both Moslems and Christians (Gregorians and Judas) lived among the Tats. The Christian Tats or otherwise Armenian Tats were intensely being ousted from their historical homeland during the last two centuries. Many of the Armenian Tats settled in Dagestan in the 18th-19th centuries and they still live there. The survived Armenian Tats who lived in the village Kilvar (Divichinsk Region) and Madras (Shemakh Region) were forcefully ousted from their settlements together with the Armenians in 1988 - 1990 and nowadays live in Armenia. The Judaic Tats are called Highlander Tats. Very few of the survived Judaic Tats live in Bardashen (currently Oguz), in the village

Krasnaya Sloboda (Kuba Region), as well as in the town of Baku.

The homeland of the ancient nation of the Caucasus Albania, the Udins, covers the territory of Vardashen (currently Oguz), including the regions of Kutkashen (currently Kabala) and Sheki, as well as some part of Zakatali region. Despite the intensive forced assimilation with Turks and conversion into the Islamic religion the Udins desperately continued to survive till the 18th -19th centuries. Kazar Hovsepian, an Udin historian sorrowfully gives the list of those Udin villages where the population was assimilated into Turks at the beginning of the 20th century: Vantam, Vardanlu, Ermanit, Mukhants, Oraban, Ptez, Kungyut, Kokhmukh, Kutkashen, Kormukh, Zaizit, Gis, Jourlu, Soultan-Nukhi, Mirzabeilu, Bum and many others. Even at the beginning of the 20th century the people of these villages who had been forcedly converted into Moslems made attempts to revive their native language. Some of the aforementioned villages, such as Mirzabeilu, Jourlu, Soultan-Nukhi were still bilingual (Azerbaijani and Uinish) till the 60s' of the 20th century. The Uinish language and the ethnic self-consciousness of the Udins was maintained only in two of the Christian settlements, Vardashen and Nijh where the Udins continue to live by now. The Armenian massacres in the 20s' of the 20th century which grew into felony against Christians, including the Udins. As a result, part of the Udins moved to Georgia, and a separate Udin settlement, Octoberi, was established.

The ethnic names of the survived five minor nations of the Caucasus Albania, known as "Shahdagh nations" (this name derives from Mount Shahdagh in Konakhkend region where these ethnic groups live) originate from the names of their main villages: Budukh, Kriz, Khinalug, Jhek and Gaput. No records about these ethnic groups were made in the censuses after 1924, although in the 70s' only in Khachmas Region 12 Kriz villages were identified during the ethnographic expedition of the Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan. The unnoticeable sustentation of the "Shahdagh nations" in the remote mountainous areas of Caucasus (the altitude reaches 2000-2300 meters) helped these nations to survive. Because of the scarcity of land and the conditions of mountainous landscape they had to live in small settlements with massed houses ascending one on another. They no longer cultivate land and are basically involved in cattle-breeding. The connection between these villages and other regions of Azerbaijan is operational mainly in the summer time.

The remaining minor groups of the Georgian Ingiloy, Moslem Sunits are trying to revive their ethnic culture

The south-east and south Azerbaijan (Lenkoran, Astar, and partially Lerik and Masal regions) are inhabited by Iranian-speaking Talishes. According to the census of 1926 their number reached 77000. Later the Talishes were no longer recognized as an ethnicity. Probably, this nation has a

preemptive right to be called the "Azeris", an ethnonym which has become the second ethnonym of the Azerbaijani during the last decade. The Azeri language which has been formerly spoken by the Talishes and existed till the Medieval period was absorbed by the Turk languages. During the last few years the Talishes have been attempting to fight for the maintenance of their ethnicity .

It is hard to tell the precise number of Iranian-speaking Kurds of Azerbaijan. The Kurdish tribes who first appeared in Transcaucasus in the 10th - 12th centuries, mainly settled in the area between the Rivers Arax and Kur. At the beginning of the 20th century the major Kurdish settlements were concentrated in the Zangelan and Lachin Regions where the Kurdistan District was established in 1923 (the administrative center of the district was Lachin). Later, the dissolution of the Kurdistan District, the administrative unit of the Kurds, practically meant the eviction of the Kurdish ethnicity from the ethnical palette of Azerbaijan