

**THE ENLIGHTENMENT MOVEMENT AND CULTURAL
REVIVAL IN AZERBAIJAN IN THE LATE 19TH CENTURY**

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Abstract

In this thesis I focus on the late 19th century Azerbaijani history from the perspective of intellectual history. I mainly talk about the Enlightenment Movement with an emphasize on the intellectual debates on Religion and Secularism. Intellectual influences of the newly emerged intelligentsia with a special focus on cultural and intellectual life in Baku is also one of the main focal points of the presented work. My main argument in the thesis is that, without cultural and intellectual revival of late 19th century, which became possible with Baku oil boom, establishing the first Democratic Republic in Muslim world in 1918 wouldn't be possible. I start with Baku Oil Boom of 1870s and continue with the establishment of the first Azerbaijani newspaper, "Akinchi" and then after examining the main intellectual debates, I conclude the thesis with the two most influential Azerbaijani intellectuals of the late 19th century.

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INTRODUCTION

The presented thesis focuses on the late 19th century Azerbaijani history from the perspective of intellectual history, which in comparison with political history has been relatively disregarded in Azerbaijani Historiography. Therefore, taking the risk of writing history from a different perspective, I will mainly emphasize the intellectual debates on Religion and Secularism, intellectual influences of intelligentsia with a special focus on cultural, intellectual life in Baku at that time. My main argument in the thesis will be that without cultural and intellectual revival of the late 19th century, which became possible with Baku oil boom, establishing the first Democratic Republic in the Muslim world in 1918 would not have been possible. Throughout the thesis I will try to prove this argument by answering the following questions: How did the unprecedented development of Baku oil industry play a fundamental role in cultural reestablishment of Baku? What were the main issues being discussed and why was religion the most important focus of these discussions as the intelligentsia touched upon democracy, religion and women issues? What was the institutional framework where the main debates took place? Moreover, one of the questions will also be about the sources of the progressive ideas that were being debated and how intellectuals were influenced by European thinkers.

Finally, I will try to explain the important role played by the two main figures of the intellectual movement and their ideas on secularism, religion and progress. The years that I decided to choose as a timeframe are due to several reasons. First of all, 1875 has a symbolic importance as the year of creating the first newspaper in native Azerbaijani language. On the other hand, 1870s saw the radical changes in Baku oil industry which eventually changed the whole destiny not only of Baku, but also of Azerbaijan. I will conclude with 1918, in which the First Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan was established. Since this topic is widely

researched in Azerbaijan and is part of political history I will not focus on the establishment of the Democratic Republic.

Based on primary and secondary sources the main idea of the thesis is to examine the enlightenment movement with specific focus on emerging political discourses of nationalism, modernity and how different discourses were debated, argued and examined. The main primary sources that this thesis will be based on are the newspapers and the periodicals of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. More precisely, I will use the following newspapers and periodicals: All the numbers of “Əkinçi” (1875-1877), Articles in “Ziya” (1879-1884) and some articles from the New York Times which date back to the late nineteenth century.¹ Among them the first Azerbaijani newspaper “Akinchi” will be heavily relied on, since it was one of the main platforms of national intellectual debates. Therefore, examining all 56 numbers of “Akinchi”, published during 1875-1877, has provided valuable insights on the intellectual atmosphere of Baku at the end of century. Considered as the successor of “Akinchi”, the second newspaper published in Azerbaijani, “Ziya”, is also very useful in order to become familiar with the literary works of Azeri writers and thinkers of the late nineteenth century. Since both “Akinchi” and “Ziya” is written in old Azerbaijani language and with Arabic alphabet, it was a bit challenging to grasp the main ideas in the articles. However, thankfully recently all numbers of both periodicals have been published in a book in Latin alphabet with the meanings of Arabic and Persian phrases.

Beside above mentioned primary sources, this work is also to some extent relied on the use of several secondary sources. Although intelligentsia’s role in nation building process in Azerbaijan is not well researched both in Azerbaijan and abroad, there are many works on the

¹ In native Azerbaijani language the name of the periodical is written as “Əkinçi”. However, in this work I will use the version with Latin alphabet, which is also accepted in the foreign historiography.

lives of intellectuals and their activities. Especially after the collapse of Soviet Union many books were published on pre-soviet Azerbaijan. Although these book are different in terms of methodology and approaches, I will use them since in English there are only few works available. Recently both in Azerbaijan and abroad several works have been published on the history of Azerbaijan during the early late 19th century and the early 20th century. For instance, prominent Azerbaijani historian Jamil Hasanli's book "*Tarixi şəxsiyyətin tarixi: Əlimərdan bəy Topçubaşov*" (*History of a historical figure: Alimerdan bey Topchubashov*) gives extensive information on the life and activities of main public figures such as Topchubashov, who was one of the main figures of Intelligentsia and the first speaker of the Parliament. Since Hasanli is known as a historian, who successfully combine archival materials with fascinating mellifluous language this book has a huge academic value. However, since this book is mainly about Topchubashov and it particularly focuses on his political activities, yet several other intellectuals, such as Zardabi is also mentioned at several times in the book.

I have also looked at some other books in order to have broader image of intellectual life of the late 19th century. In this regard Steve Levin's "*The Oil and the Glory: The Pursuit of Empire and Fortune on the Caspian Sea*" is particularly useful in terms of examining oil boom in the different cities on the coast of the Caspian Sea from a comparative perspective. I have also used the two books by Tadeusz Swietochowski, who is better known for his works on Azerbaijan.² Since according to some Azerbaijani historians his works fail to explain the interaction between religious clergy and intellectuals, I will also look at the works by Firouzeh Mostashari. Mostashari's "*On the Religious Frontier: Tsarist Russia and Islam in the Caucasus*" gives some thought provoking arguments on making Azerbaijani identity which is highly complicated topic. The common feature of this work is that it gives valuable insight to

² Both *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920: The Shaping of a National Identity in a Muslim Community*, and *Russia and Azerbaijan. A Borderland in Transition*.

the academic and cultural processes of that time, but does not tell more about the individual intellectuals and their ideas on secularism, religion and national identity.

The thesis is structured with a respect to chronological order and the importance of the main cultural events during the enlightenment movement. The first chapter will be about the foundations of cultural revival and its main argument will be that without growing oil industry funding cultural and educational initiatives would be impossible. In this chapter I will also talk about Haji Zeynalabdin Taghiyev, who was a philanthropist national oil baron sponsored almost all cultural and educational projects in Baku. In this chapter the primary resource will be the articles of the New York Times published in the late 19th century which are very significant sources in order to see the image of Baku through the eyes of American journalists.³ One of the main scholarly innovations of this thesis is to understand the impressions about Azerbaijan through research of the US media of the 19th and 20th centuries, which provide useful insights to the economic and cultural life of Baku of that time. Along with that, the development stages of the Baku oil industry and the role of oil in the history of Baku and the place of Baku in the history of Azerbaijan are also discussed in the presented work. I first had access to the early numbers of the New York Times in my previous research projects that were mainly focused on the history of the Humanitarian and Military missions sent by the US Government to the Caucasus during the first two years after World War I. During my one-year research in the USA, last year, I also became familiar with some works, especially newspaper articles on the history of Baku Oil fields - the first involvement of the US companies and individual expeditions of oil companies and journalists. Also, the topics, which are still important, were looked upon from the perspective of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The second part of the first chapter is devoted to the innovative cultural projects, such as opening

³ Especially the numbers of the New York Times between 1879-1896 are extensively used.

of the first opera building, the first theater, the first school for girls and many other projects that changed the face and the fate of Baku forever.

In the second chapter, I talk about the main intellectual debates that were influenced by various ideological inclinations such as Modernity, Pan-Turkism and nationalism and to some extent even atheism. What particularly interest me are the issues of religion and progress, and women issues. Azerbaijan in the late 19th - early 20th century was a unique Muslim majority region in the sense that issues of secularism and even atheism were debated which was very unusual case in comparison with the most of the Muslim world.⁴ I believe that, Azerbaijan's relative distance from Moscow and the fact it had a Shi'i (not Sunni) Muslim majority, gave the secular-atheist modernity discourse a different "flavor". Almost all of the periodicals of that time provide significant insights into the discussion between intellectuals and Pan-Turkist, nationalist and secularist debates circulating in Azerbaijan, Russia and the Ottoman Empire. I argue that, it is a very interesting prism for understanding the early 20th century Azerbaijan, the Muslim territories of the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire in general. Azerbaijan's relative isolation, on the periphery of the Ottoman, Tsarist and Qajar empires, along with the wealth and growing levels of education of some of its elite (especially, though not only, in oil-rich Baku, with its Western influences brought by entrepreneurs and foreign workers), made it into an exciting laboratory of ideas. By using the Azeri periodicals of the late nineteenth century, I will focus on the debate between Political Islamists, conservatives who wanted to "keep things the way they are", Muslim modernizers, secularists regarding questions of modernity, women's rights, democracy, the role of mosques, Imams and Islam in a modern society, etc. These debates on secularism, religion, women rights which were circulating through national periodicals such as "Akinchi" and "Ziya" will be the main subject of the second part of the second chapter.

⁴ Svante E. Cornell, *Politization of Islam in Azerbaijan*, (Silk Road Paper, 2006), 18.

In the last chapter I will focus precisely on the activities of two main figures of the newly established intelligentsia - Mirza Fatali Akhundov and Hasan bey Zardabi. Both Mirza Fatali Akhundov and Hasan Bey Zardabi are only a few amongst many Azerbaijanis who did not ask to reform and modernize Islam, but went so far as to warn of the danger of religious extremism.

For my thesis I will not use only one methodology. I will try to use different methodologies and especially cultural history and annals schools can be very relevant, since my thesis will be part of intellectual history. Although I chose a broad time span for my thesis, the main focus of the thesis will be on the late 2 decades of the 19th century.

CHAPTER 1. ECONOMIC FOUNDATION OF CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL REVIVAL- BAKU OIL BOOM

Almost in its entire history, Baku has been known as the place of oil or in another word “the land of eternal fires”.⁵ Several works by early authors describe some of the unique facts about the oil reserves in and around Baku. Information about Baku oil is often found in travelogues from scholars and merchants of antiquity and medieval times. When the oil industry was established in the late nineteenth century, Baku was already recognized as a city of oil. Travelers, who were in Baku at different periods, provided very valuable information about Baku oil. According to the medieval sources, Khan of Baku, who owns most of the oil wells and salt mines had considerable income and was considered as a one of the wealthiest rulers in the region. As one of the oldest cities in Azerbaijan, Baku’s economy was based on oil and salt production and madder and saffron trade.⁶ Because of the oil boom of 1870s, the nineteenth century saw broad development of the oil industry and Baku began to play a crucial role in the fate of the Azerbaijan. The establishment and further development of the oil industry created a new and developed Baku, resulting in a unique story of development as compared to other cities. Baku was now growing and diversifying a little more each day and was poised to play a role in the country's political scene, one that no other city had played before. A year after the devastating earthquake in Shamakhi in 1191, Baku became the capital city of the Shirvanshahs State and since that time always remained as the capital city and the center of economic and political life.⁷ However, since the first oil boom in Baku, this "City of Fires" started to become home for workers, millionaires and big thinkers, creating the conditions for a proverbial, but a unique mixture of bitter-sweet destiny.

⁵ The term “The land of fire” in generally is referred to Azerbaijan and especially lately became wide-used that be found in almost every history book.

⁶ Sara Asurbeyli, *Bakı Səhərinin tarixi* [The history of Baku], (Baku, Avrasiya Press, 2006), 232.

⁷ Ibid., 70

Growing Oil Industry

Following the oil boom, Baku was the place only for innovations: new people, new life and a new city. The nineteenth century saw many radical changes and initiatory events in Baku. For instance, the first paraffin plant in the world was established in 1823, in 1848 for the first time in history oil wells were used to extract oil from the ground, in 1863 the first kerosene plant came into existence, and in 1877 the first oil tanker was seen on the Caspian Sea.⁸ In more poetic words these were all the “acts of obedience” to the innovative soul of the city.⁹ With the beginning of the first oil boom some people, especially the Baku oil barons, became millionaires and some achieved great fame, including many chemists, the scientists who introduced the first technical innovations. In the list of the people who owe their fortune to Baku oil, we see oil barons like Taghiyev, Naghiyev, Mukhtarov and industrialists like the Nobel brothers, which are now household names in Baku.

In the late 1870s, the oil industry of Baku was founded and by this, Baku became an important city not only for politicians, but also for the emerging intelligentsia. It is important to note that, development of the oil industry in Baku not only caused economic changes, but the transformation of cultural and social life of Baku and Azerbaijan in general. One of the most important features of this transformation was that the national entrepreneurs emerged and became well known not only for their wealth, but also for their philanthropist activities and acts of social responsibility. Creation of a strata of new millionaires like Haji Zeynalabdin Taghiyev, Musa Naghiyev, Murtuza Mukhtarov, Shamsi Asadullayev changed the face of Baku fundamentally. These national entrepreneurs also played a crucial role in supporting the national intelligentsia during the enlightenment movement. In the next chapter I will talk more about how they were supporting cultural and intellectual projects.

⁸ *Azərbaycan Tarixi Yeddi Cildə. IV Cild. [The History of Azerbaijan in Seven Volumes. IV Volume]*, 9Baku, Elm, 2008), 137.

⁹ This term was used by many times by different historians, especially after the independence from the Soviet rule.

The 19th century opened a new period in the history of Baku. The significance of Baku oil was not understood by everybody until the 19th century. However, starting from the late 19th century this situation dramatically changed. The reason for this was the astonishing news about the oil fountains in Absheron peninsula beginning in the 1870's. In August, 1873 a large oil fountain in the “*Khelefi*” oil well in Balakhani and in 1883 an oil fountain in the *Dostluq* oil well astonished foreigners, particularly Americans.¹⁰ It is worth noting that at that time, oil was extracted by primitive methods, which caused damage to the environment and endangered the workers' health. Nevertheless, the demand for oil quickly increased, requiring new methods. However, the application of new technologies did not happen until the abolition of the *iltizam* system in 1872 in the Russian Empire. The *iltizam* system or the lease system was a right sold by the government to wealthy business owners to obtain a monopoly over tax collecting by selling lands with natural resources to rich notables who were not interested in implementing new technologies.¹¹ Although the state increased oil production by selling those fields to wealthy notables, yet the owner of oil-rich land did not introduce any major work to improve the industry.

The existence of lease system without the use of technical innovation allowed ruthless exploitation of both the workers and the lands and hindered the economic development of the industry. The lack of a wide transport routes between the provinces of the Russian Empire did not allow to transit the oil produced in Baku, thus failed to meet the demands of the Empire. Therefore, the needs of oil of the Russian industry were met by importing oil from the United States. This situation was one of the main obstacles to the rapid development of the oil industry. Besides this, the existence of leasing system in the oil industry was also one of the major issues

¹⁰ *Azərbaycan Tarixi Yeddi Cildə. IV Cild. [The History of Azerbaijan in Seven Volumes. IV Volume]*, (Baku, Elm, 2007), 170.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

as already mentioned. As a result of the lease system, wealthy notables who had a monopoly over oil rich fields did not tolerate the newcomers in the industry and with primitive methods they were continuing to drill new oil wells, to extract oil and to sell it. Leasers, who were guaranteed against the risk of losing the oil fields, were not interested in investing in the application of new technologies which was necessary for the production. The leasers were trying every possible way to prevent all the efforts by industrialists to apply new techniques and practices in drilling of new oil wells. Despite the increase in oil production, in 1860s it became clear that the lease system was outdated and for the development of the oil industry new technologies and new methods of management were needed. On February 1st, 1872 Tsar signed the decree on the abolishing of lease system which included all the fields of industry in the Russian Empire. As a result of the new law, oil fields were sold to new small group of entrepreneurs, who later became oil barons.¹²

The abolition of the lease system caused a dynamic change in the oil industry. In the first year after the abolition of lease system, oil production in Baku doubled.¹³ It was the new record and from that time on new stage of oil industry started, although there are various opinions on the exact stages of its development. There are several stages of development of the oil industry in Azerbaijan and each of them is characterized with specific achievements. There are several stages of development of the oil industry in Azerbaijan and each of them is characterized with specific achievements. If we divide the development of the oil industry into stages with a respect to the level of productivity, then the first stage started in 1874. This is also the year when the Nobel brothers came to Azerbaijan, who contributed a lot to the

¹² *Azərbaycan tarixi. Ali məktəblər üçün mühazirələr kursu. II volume (XIX-XXI əsrin əvvəli, [The History of Azerbaijan. Series of Lectures for University Students. II Volume. 19th-early 20th centuries], (Baku, Baki Universiteti, 2010), 107.*

¹³ *Azərbaycan Tarixi Yeddi Cildə. IV Cild. [The History of Azerbaijan in Seven Volumes. IV Volume], (Baku, Elm, 2007), 170.*

development of the oil industry. In fact, the history of the Nobel brothers' successful business coincides a lot with the history of Baku oil industry. For instance, the development of Baku oil industry reached its peak in 1901, when it produced more than half of the world's production with 11.5 million tons.¹⁴ 1901 was also the year when the International Nobel Prize was first introduced. The prize introduced by Alfred Nobel, who invented dynamite and was founded with the funds of the Nobel Brothers company, a wealth that gained from Baku oil fields, as rightfully argued by many historians. This is not the only event happened in 1901 and connected to Baku oil. That year another important event took place in the history of Baku and Azerbaijan; the first school for girls opened in Baku again with the financial support of Azerbaijani oil baron Taghiyev.¹⁵ In the second part of the chapter I will talk more about Tagiyev and his philanthropist activities.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the stories about Baku and its oil started to appear in the pages of various newspapers and journals published abroad. These articles were mainly about the oil fields in Baku. Primary sources on Baku oil industry at the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century can mainly be found in the archives of the New York Times and in the archives of the Washington Post, The Boston Globe and The New York Daily. However, unlike these newspapers, the opportunities of the online archives of New York Times are broader and an efficient search system in the website of the newspaper makes it easier to find articles about any topic since its first edition. News about Azerbaijan and particularly about Baku and its oil fields were mentioned not just in the 20th century, but as early as the late 19th century editions of the newspapers. When investigating the archives of these newspapers, American journalists payed special attention not only to Baku oil, but also

¹⁴ *Azərbaycan Tarixi Yeddi Cildə. IV Cild. [The History of Azerbaijan in Seven Volumes. IV Volume]*, (Baku, Elm, 2007), 19.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 163

foreign policy inclinations of the countries of the region and came up with the assumptions after analyzing the existing situation in an interesting way.

After a large oil fountain of 1873 in Balakhani, Baku was mentioned more often in American newspapers.¹⁶ Events happening in the region in the following years were covered in the newspapers as well. In the newspapers of the early 20th century, two important issues concerning Azerbaijan catch attention. The first is, of course, Baku oil. An article appeared in the New York Times in 1879 can be a good example. Levis Emery from Pennsylvania noted in his articles about Baku oil that, Absheron oil is of high quality and when burning it does not make smoke.¹⁷ Such analogies were made by other journalists and oilers. Under the influence of these articles numbers of Americans came to Baku to get acquainted with the oil industry despite a long and hard trip.

In the early August, 1883 the news about a large oil gusher in the *Dostluq* oil well in Balakhani quickly spread outside of the region as well. According to several sources, the fog covering the gusher stayed in the air for 4 months.¹⁸ The consequences of the articles on Baku oil fields had economic resonations too. The consequences of the articles on Baku oil fields had economic resonations too. As stories about Baku oil fountains spread, the American oil companies began to send their representatives to Baku. Americans and Europeans who were becoming rich by investing in the oil industry were spending a considerable amount of money to cross thousands of miles both by train and ship in order to come to Baku. Averell Harriman, Henry Ford, Henry Mason Day and others were the first Americans showing interest in Baku oil.¹⁹ The oil companies represented by these famous businessmen later were negotiating with

¹⁶ Ibid.,170

¹⁷ The New Work Times Archives, September 1879

¹⁸ *Azərbaycan tarixi. Ali məktəblər üçün mühazirələr kursu. II vome (XIX-XXI əsrin əvvəli, [The History of Azerbaijan. Series of Lectures for University Students. II Volume. 19th-early 20th centurie], (Baku, Baki Universiteti, 2010), 123*

¹⁹ Steve LeVine, *The Oil and the Glory: The Pursuit of Empire and Fortune on the Caspian Sea*, (Random House, 2007), 203

the Soviet government in the 20's to monopolize Baku oil. However, it worth noting that, even before establishment of the Soviet government, there were attempt to negotiate with American experts and oil industrialists in Baku.

The other reason for the arrival of Americans to Baku was the activity of the Nobel Company and technology it applied. The news about the first oil tanker of the world, *Zoroastr* being seen in the Caspian waters in 1878 aroused great interest.²⁰ In order to learn its construction technology and design, Americans, British and Germans came to Baku. A model of a tanker construction by applying the latest technologies using steel was later used by Americans and English companies and eight years later, the first trans-Atlantic tanker moving between London and New York was constructed.

Examining the articles in American newspapers drew many parallels between Baku and American oil wells of the late 19th century that can be felt from comparisons made by journalists unaware of each other. Although the oil gusher in Titusville, Florida was considered as a wonder by Americans, they were shocked by the amount of oil extracted from the Vermishov well every day.²¹ The second issue about Azerbaijan that was widely covered by American newspapers was the Southern Azerbaijan and its main city Tabriz, especially the role of Sattarkhan and Tabriz in the Constitutional Revolution in Iran (1905-1911) and the importance of the province of Azerbaijan.

The other issue in the newspapers was the analysis of the Caucasus region and relations among the peoples living there. Ethnic confrontations among Muslims, Armenians and Kurds were also covered by the journalists.

At the beginning Baku was known to Americans as a “city of black cats”.²² There are a number of reasons for this. First of all, this was linked to oil and “black cats”, was referred to

²⁰ Ibid., 177

²¹ New Work Times Archives, Juen, 1886

²² Sara Asurbeyli, *Baki Seherinin Traixi [History of Baku]*, (Baku, Avrasiya Press, 2006), 24

oil industrialists coming to the city with a dream of becoming wealthy. Baku consisted of two parts – the white part, which was the cultural center of Baku and the black city, where the majority of the oil industry was situated. However, it is very interesting that, the amount of cats in Baku was surprisingly high for foreigners. It was possible to meet them mainly in the central part of the city. Many would agree that, it is still possible to see the accuracy of this fact in the Sabail and Nasimi districts of Baku now.

Creating a new city: Innovative Cultural and educational projects

As a result of the increase in oil production in Baku and utilization of new technologies, the oil industry and as a consequence, Baku entered the period of unprecedented cultural development and educational innovations.

There are several opinions on the cause of the cultural revival started in the late nineteenth century in Azerbaijan. For instance, according to one of the most prominent Azerbaijani thinker, Ahmet Agaoglu, it was linked with the Russian schools and Imperial policy of Russian Empire in Azerbaijan. He argued that, the reason why publication of “Akinchi” was banned, was due to the fear of Imperial Russia that people in Azerbaijan would feel ethnically connected to the Ottoman Empire and as a result national movement would be triggered. In his opinion, the revival of the nineteenth century could also be explained with decreasing influence of Iran in the political and cultural life of Azerbaijan.²³

In Baku technical innovations at the beginning of the 20th century, as a consequence of investing oil wealth helped spreading progressive ideas. The first electric station in Baku was

²³ Gulsere, Akalın, *Türk düşüncə və siyasi həyatında Əhməd Ağaoğlu [The Role of Ahmed Agagoglu in the Turkish Intellectual and Political Life]*, (Baku, Azatam, 2004), 5.

built in 1906 and electric lamps could be seen in Baku streets.²⁴ A year after that, the first automobiles started to be seen in Baku.²⁵

Like the Nobel brothers, another person who made millions from Baku oil was the first national oil baron Haji Zeynalabdin Taghiyev. Taghiyev not only amassed a huge fortune from his oil wells, but also played an unparalleled role in the social and cultural life of Baku and established a basis of social responsibility in our history as a philanthropist. The majority of new establishments in Baku, which was the city of innovations in the beginning of the century, were linked with Haji Zeynalabdin Taghiyev's name. Leyli and Majnun, the first opera in the Muslim World composed by the famous Azeri composer Uzeyir bey Hajibayov in 1908 was staged at the theatre built by Taghiyev.²⁶ This opera was based on the poems by the well-known classic Fuzuli.²⁷ It gained so much attention and appreciation that was staged for several days both in Azerbaijan and abroad. The "*Kaspi*" newspaper, which was owned by Taghiyev, united progressive intellectuals of the time and played a huge role in the formation and spreading of national democratic values in Azerbaijan.²⁸ In 1901 with Taghiyev's financial support, the first school for girls in Baku was opened. That year the building of the construction factory of Haji Zeynalabdin Taghiyev was completed as well. As we will see in the next chapter, Tagiyev especially played an important role as a philanthropist funding almost all initiatives for women and for society in generally.

Interestingly during the late 19th century in Baku a leading role in construction of the city's architecture was played by civilians, not by government.²⁹ It is explained with the fact that, as the oil barons extracted profits from the oil, they paid more attention to erecting

²⁴ *Azərbaycan Tarixi Yeddi Cildə. IV Cild. [The History of Azerbaijan in Seven Volumes. V Volume], (Baku, Elm, 2007), 183*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 183

²⁶ *Azərbaycan Tarixi Yeddi Cildə. V Cild. [The History of Azerbaijan in Seven Volumes. V Volume], 210*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 210

²⁸ Aşırılı, *Azərbaycan mətbuatı tarixi (1875-1920), [The History of Azerbaijani Press], 44*

²⁹ *Azərbaycan Tarixi Yeddi Cildə. V Cild. [The History of Azerbaijan in Seven Volumes. V Volume], 316*

magnificent buildings both for public purposes and for their own use. For instance, on the order of Taghiyev, his own edifice, a Muslim girls' school, a theater, a technical school, as well as a textile factory and its surrounding settlements for the workers were all built in a specific architectural style which later became the mainstream in Baku. All of these projects were drawn by the Polish architect Józef Gosławski. Gosławski was also the architect of the building of Baku City Duma (see Figure 1).³⁰ He was one of the most famous architects of his time along with Hajibababeyov, Ziver bey Ahmedbeyov and few others.



Fig. 1: Building of Baku City Duma (Today it is the building of Baku City Executive Power).

When talking about the nineteenth century architecture of Baku, Ziver bey Ahmedbeyov deserves particular emphasize. As the Azerbaijani architect graduate from Petersburg Civil Engineering Institute, Ahmedbeyov was also the first chief architect of Baku.³¹ The majority of significant buildings were the products of his talent and creativity. Although, among the architects the number of Azeris were few, they established a national architectural style which

³⁰ *Azərbaycan Tarixi Yeddi Cildə. IV Cild. [The History of Azerbaijan in Seven Volumes. IV Volume]*, 204

³¹ *Ibid.*, 205

was characterized by combining classic European (mainly gothic) and Oriental styles.³² Z. Ahmedbeyov, I. Q. Hajinski, N. Q. Babayev, were one of those few Azeri architects whose masterpieces still remains in old parts of Baku. For obvious reasons, such as having better access to proper education and being relatively close to Europe, majority of the architects who played a remarkable role in making the new image of Baku, were Russians including K. A. Borisoglebski, D. D. Buynov, J. V. Gosławski, K. B. Skurevich, J. K. Płoszko and G. M. Germikelov.³³

As an example of the late nineteenth century architecture the following buildings should be mentioned with particular emphasize. Also known as Ismailiyya Palace (see Figure 2), the current building of Presidium of the Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan, was built in 1885, by one of the Azeri oil barons Musa Nagiyev. Deeply saddened by the timeless death of his young son Ismayil, Nagiyev asked the Polish architect Józef Płoszko to immortalize his son's memory. The palace was built in Venice Gothic style and housed several historical events. In 1918, the independence of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was first declared in the halls of that building. Through the years, the palace was damaged by fire and several incidents and renovated few times. One of the oldest buildings in Baku, the building of the State Oil Company was built in 1893.³⁴ Famous for its grandeur and elegance, the building combined the elements of French Renaissance style with some oriental touches (see Figure 3). It is one of the buildings that was built upon the orders of Taghiyev and served as a central department store for the residents of Baku. Built between 1898-1901, known as Tagiyev's Girls school (see Figure 4) or the first Muslim Girls school was built in Medieval Arabic style in order to sooth the

³² Ibid., 205

³³ *Azərbaycan Tarixi Yeddi Cildə. V Cild. [The History of Azerbaijan in Seven Volumes. V Volume]*, 316

³⁴ *Azərbaycan Tarixi Yeddi Cildə. IV Cild. [The History of Azerbaijan in Seven Volumes. IV Volume]*, 307

relations conservative circles who were against the construction of the building.³⁵ Like Ismailiyye, this building also hosted one of the most important events and was the Parliament building of Azerbaijan Democratic Republic during 1918-20. Its architect was Goslavski, who was also the author of the building of Azerbaijan History Museum, which first was built as the residence of Tagiyev. For its interior this building is one of the most beautiful and probably the most luxurious historical building in Azerbaijan (see Figures 5, 6). Its construction took six years and was completed in 1901.³⁶ The architect used various styles in the design of the building and gave specific emphasizing the Italian Renaissance style. In different halls of the Palace French rococo and Flemish Baroque style is dominant.³⁷ During the soviet times the building housed the Azerbaijan History Museum.

One of the buildings that was built around the same time was the Baku Lutheran Church that architected by German, Adolf Eichler (see Figure 7). Its construction was mainly financed by the Nobel brothers and for a long time it served as a worship place for Swedes and the Germans living in Baku.³⁸ One of the religious buildings built during that time was Baku Armenian Church (see Figure 8). Built in 1887, the building was heavily used by the Armenian community in Baku. The Church was renovated few years ago and today stands as one of the most unique buildings in the city. Also known as De Bure's Palace, the building of the Museum of Art (see Figure 9) was built between 1888-1895 by German engineer N.A. von der Nonne in classical style.³⁹ Current Literature Museum Named After Nizami was built in 1860 as a caravansary. It was also built in the style of Gothic architecture was considered one of the most successful projects by the architect Gasymbay Hajibababayov. During 1914-15 few changes

³⁵ Azərbaycan tarixi. Ali məktəblər üçün mühazirələr kursu. II volume (XIX-XXI əsrin əvvəli, [The History of Azerbaijan. Series of Lectures for University Students. II Volume. 19th-early 20th century], (Baku, Baki Universiteti, 2010), 204.

³⁶ Ibid., 204-206

³⁷ Ibid., 204-206

³⁸ Ibid., 204-206

³⁹ Ibid., 205

made to the building and it became to be known as “Metropol Hotel” till it was renovated and turned into a museum in 1945.⁴⁰ This list of buildings can be extended, considering the fact that the cultural revival and economic boom in Baku in the late nineteenth century gave a new life to the city.

Unfortunately, historical buildings in the center of Baku were demolished as a part of the urban policy of the government. Within only two years, number of buildings that were built in the nineteenth century were destroyed, despite the protests by the civil society and the activists.

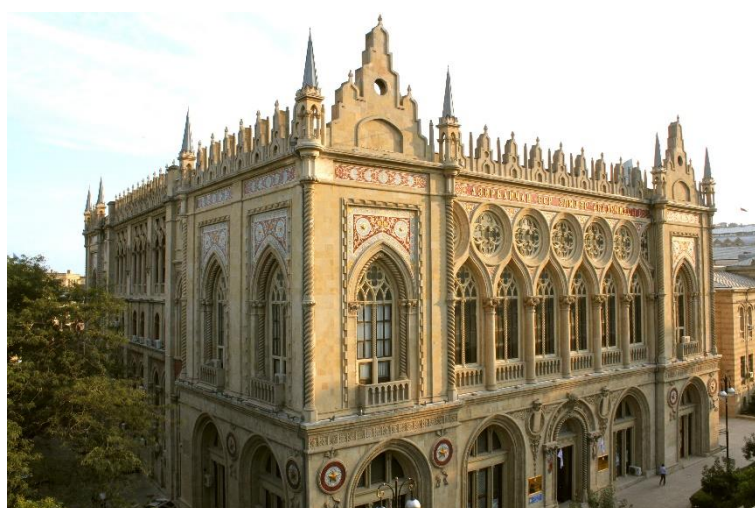


Fig. 2: Ismailiyiyya Palace.
Current building of Presidium of
the Academy of Sciences of
Azerbaijan.



Fig. 3: The building of Old
Department store. Currently, it serves
as the house of State Oil Company.

⁴⁰ Azərbaycan tarixi. Ali məktəblər üçün mühazirələr kursu. II volume (XIX-XXI əsrin əvvəli), [The History of Azerbaijan. Series of Lectures for University Students. II Volume. 19th-early 20th century], (Baku, Baki Universiteti, 2010), 204.



Fig. 4: Taghiyev's Girls School.

Figures 5 and 6: Also known as Taghiyev Palace, the Residence of Zeynalabdin Taghiyev. Today it serves as the Azerbaijan History Museum.



Figure 7: Baku Lutheran Church.



Figure 8: Baku Armenian Church.



Figure 9: De Bure's Palace. Current building of Azerbaijan National Art Museum.

CHAPTER 2. THE ROLE OF NEWLY ESTABLISHED MEDIA- JOURNALS, NEWSPAPERS IN CHANGING THE INFORMATION FLOW IN THE COUNTRY

This chapter focuses on the main debates on secularism, national identity and most importantly women rights. I will try to explain how in Azerbaijan, a Muslim country it became possible to give women a right to vote in 1918, much earlier than all of the Muslim countries and the most of the western countries. I will also try to portray the intellectual atmosphere of the early twentieth century in Baku where new political processes and various debates on political rights, secularism and religion were taking place. This chapter also illuminates struggle between religious obscurantism and progressivism in Baku during the early 20th century.

Although, I will mainly use the articles of newspapers of the time, I will also provide examples of women rights movement. For instance, Zardabi who was the editor of the first newspaper in native language (who was also father in law of Topchubashov, speaker of parliament during the Democratic Government of 1918 which gave the women a right to vote) walked in the streets of Baku with his wife arm in arm, while she was not wearing a hair cover, but wearing modern dress for the time (around late 1890s); people, especially clerics were outraged and even tried to stone them.⁴¹ The same incidents happened when the first school for girls opened in Baku, or the first plays were staged on the first national theater. ⁴² Despite the challenges and the opposition by the religious figures, it was that government lead by Topchubashov gave the right to vote for women, for the first time in the history of Muslim Countries.⁴³ Therefore, I'm also interested in the cultural, intellectual developments which made political processes possible. It also should be mentioned that, in Azerbaijani academic

⁴¹ Hanife, Melikova, *Hasanbey Melikov Zerdabinin Tercüme-yi Halı, [Biography of Hasanbey Zerdabi]*, 32. This book was written by the wife of Zardabi Hanife Malikova.

⁴² Hüseynov, *Azərbaycanda XIX əsr ictimai və fəlsəfi fikir tarixindən*, [The history of the Philosophical and Political thoughts in Azerbaijan], 287

⁴³ Hasanli, *Tarixi şəxsiyyətin tarixi: Əlimərdan bəy Topçubaşov [The history of the Historical Personality: Alimerdanbey Topchubashov]*, 4

discourse the historical role played by the Women, their presence in the history is neglected and there are very few works on this topic, which shows the need for more academic works in this field.

Main Intellectual Debates on Secularism and National Identity

After the Russian Empire's defeat in Russian-Japanese war in 1905, the Tsar was forced to grant political freedoms which in turn resulted in reemergence of newspapers and journals in local native languages. *Acıq soz (Honest Word)*, *İqbal (The fate)*, *Yeni Iqbal (The New Fate)*, *Basirat*, *Dirilik (Revival)*, *Molla Nasraddin* were some of those periodicals.⁴⁴ These periodicals can be categorized into two groups according to their contents: satirical and non-satirical newspapers and magazines. However, both types promoted education and most importantly they raised awareness about women issues. The most famous satirical journal *Molla Nasraddin* was edited by the novelist Jalil Mammadguluzade (Mirza Jalil), who severely criticized the *ulema* with his biting sarcasm. Since the intellectuals were fighting for women rights, they opposed Islamic teachings, which was the main reason of the violation of women rights and their desperate situation. *Molla Nasraddin* was particular merciless in attacking on religion with its cartoons, portraying traditionalists in comical situations because of their ignorance. According to Mirza Jalil, the reason why women were suffering was the observation of religious practices that were useless remnants of the past.⁴⁵ Considering the majority of the population, other newspapers were more careful not to directly attack Islam, but rather criticize general situation and protest against the colonialist authoritarian rule of the Russian Empire. There were few more periodicals which were very moderate, writing about only the educational issues.

⁴⁴ Aşırılı, *Azərbaycan mətbuatı tarixi (1875-1920)*, [The History of Azerbaijani Press (1875- 1920)], 4

⁴⁵ Hüseynov H. *Azərbaycanda XIX əsr ictimai və fəlsəfi fikir tarixindən* [The history of the Philosophical and Political thoughts in Azerbaijan], 396

Close reading of the periodicals of the early twentieth century shows that, for intelligentsia women rights were the second biggest issue after the question of national independence. The issue of freedom for women or as the intellectuals of the time puts it, *Hurriyyeti-Nisvan* was an emergent social issue.⁴⁶ As in all the Muslim countries in Azerbaijani society women had no rights and were subject to threats of physical and emotional violence. However, unlike the most of the Muslim societies, in Azerbaijan there were men and women who were raising their voice against domestic violence and violation of women rights. The press, more precisely the newly established newspapers were unique platforms for them to address the social issues. There were organizations and societies with the aim of solving women issues and social issues in general. In 1906, the first charity organization lead by a woman – Sona hanim Tagiyeva was founded for the purpose of helping people suffering from diseases and food shortage.⁴⁷ There were very few women activists and as Audrey Altstadt says in her article “these Muslim women were the wives, daughters and sisters of the upper class men who were so active in the community.”⁴⁸ These upper class men sometimes faced criticism by the traditionalists for letting their wives be active in public sphere.

In their fight against social injustice, the intelligentsia adopted European societies as an ideal example. Female members of the upper class progressive families dressed in European style. Although the number of active women was very limited, they managed to make a difference in their community through volunteer charity activities. In the early 1910s, journalist Huseyn Talat published an article on *İqbal* newspaper about the activities of women philanthropists. He even named the article as “Intellectual Revolution of Caucasian Women.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Ceferov, *Milli-Ictimai Fikir Tariximizden [History of our national philosophical thought]*, 23

⁴⁷ Hüseyinov H. *Azərbaycanda XIX əsr ictimai və fəlsəfi fikir tarixindən [The history of the Philosophical and Political thoughts in Azerbaijan]*, 213

⁴⁸ Suny, *Transcaucasia, Nationalism and Social Change* 206

⁴⁹ Ceferov, *Milli-Ictimai Fikir Tariximizden [History of our national philosophical thought]*, 23

Another article about women was published in *Aciq Soz* in 1916. Titled as “Woman’s feelings” the article took a strong stand in advocating women’s rights and protesting against the undignified place of women in the society.⁵⁰ The author did not appeal for the help from men, but called upon the women to help one other, to be brave and to educate themselves. The author of this article is unknown for the obvious reason that at that time, it would have been very risky for a woman to have written such an article. However, despite their anonymous presence, from that time on there appeared were more and more women who occasionally published in the press.

The most prominent political activists of the time, who wrote about women’s issues were Memmed Emin Resulzade, later head of the first Democratic Government, ambassador to Turkey, Yusif Vazir Chemenzeminli, the influential ideologist Ahmed bey Agaoglu and journalist and novelist Omer Faiq Nemanzade.⁵¹

In one of his articles Chemenzeminli declared that “the Women issue posed a problem to progress that the nation faced. During our debates tragic consequences of women illiteracy were discussed. Thankfully, recently there have been developments in the solution of this problem.”⁵²

For the women who were brave enough to publish their articles on various newspapers, *Aciq Soz* was the main platform for expressing the concerns.⁵³ In almost every number of the newspaper, an article about women issues appeared. The newspaper also published open letters from its female readers. For instance, in one of those open letters a female writer explained the reason of women’s terrible situation. She argued that men deprived women of their rights to education and freedom by buying them jewelries and flowers as a substitute, while the most

⁵⁰ Ceferov, *Milli-Ictimai Fikir Tariximizden [History of our national philosophical thought]*, 21

⁵¹ Ibid., 22

⁵² Ibid., 23

⁵³ Yaqublu, *Məmməd Əmin Rəsulzadə [Memmed Emin Resulzade]*, 36

precious thing could be given to a woman was an education. In this article men also were accused of being jealous about the potential success of women in public offices, thus preventing them from achieving independence. A few intellectuals of that time made comparisons between East and West, coming to a conclusion that unless women were educated, the Muslim societies would fail to develop. They made it clear that the absence of women in public life creates economic problems hampering the full development of the society. According to their observations, since in European countries women had more rights and freedoms those western societies were more advanced and Muslim societies would continue to be dependent on them.

Debates over women rights divided intellectuals and political activists into two main groups: on one hand there were secular nationalists who were against religion and considered Islam as the main obstacle to women's rights.⁵⁴ On the other hand, there were Islamists who claimed that women rights were included in Islamic law and for a fully developed Muslim society women's participation was important. Although both of these groups were aware of the women's position, they followed different strategies to address those issues. In making this comparison, however it should be stressed that it was the liberal democrats and nationalists rather than the Islamists, who contributed the most to improve the situation of women. As a result of their activities, the first schools for women were opened, women were given opportunities to express their concerns in different platforms and most importantly women gained a right to vote in 1918 under the first democratic government.

I would argue that if the intellectuals were not able to see the real face of religion and aware of its dangerous nature, there wouldn't be any developments in improving women's situation. The fact that progressive minded intellectuals had studied in Europe and were heavily indebted to European thinkers, made a significant difference between their political agenda and that of the traditionalist groups.

⁵⁴ Ceferov, *Milli-Ictimai Fikir Tariximizden [History of our national philosophical thought]*, 13.

During the First World War an unprecedented increase occurred in women's participation in public life, due to the lack of men. Women started to make their voice heard through press, societies and charity organizations. In his article about women charity organizations, Resulzade praised the activities of the first women charity organization of Caucasian Turks. According to him, active women participation in public affairs had a great potential to eliminate backwardness and ignorance among society. During the war years, one of the most prominent women activists was Shafiga Afandizade, who published articles on women issues.⁵⁵ She argued that without solving women issues, no progress would be sustainable. She deeply believed that the national independence would not be permanent, if the women were not given independence. Moreover, she also criticized women for not having enough courage to take responsibility for their own lives. In her article "Successes and faults of women" Afandizade expressing her view that "Women should not be afraid of getting involved in scientific activities. They should pursue career not only in academic field, but also in arts and literature. Women have come a long way and have already achieved some success. However, we still have problems and we are still making mistakes. It is quite natural, but we also have to admit that we tend to make more mistakes than the European women. We are dealing with complex and primitive problems which define our current situation. Azerbaijani women can be categorized in two groups: educated women and illiterate women. Those educated women have more independence to make decisions about their lives, while the rest are suffering more. [...]"⁵⁶

Since educated women obtained their education in a foreign language, they tended to speak in that foreign language and even used this language to communicate with their children. To the majority of the intellectuals, it was a mistake on their part and should be corrected. In

⁵⁵ Ceferov, *Milli-Ictimai Fikir Tariximizden [History of our national philosophical thought]*, 26

⁵⁶ Ibid., 27.

one of the articles the author wrote: “Our women should study, learn languages but it should not alienate them from the national community. Unfortunately, in our society there is a larger number of illiterate women and they are incapable of even helping themselves. That’s why there are so many women in our streets begging for a piece of bread. To eliminate this disturbing problem we have to realize that women should have a profession. Our intellectuals who fight for the future of this nation must first educate women.”⁵⁷ Here, in this article, beside a strong statement about the importance of education, we can also see the sign of an awakening national consciousness.

Almost every journalist, intellectual was trying to make a link between national revival and women issues. To say that the national independence would not be sustainable without providing women with fundamental rights, was a strong statement, and it gained support from the liberal democrats. One of the active supporters of women rights was Ali Abbas Muznib, who was the editor of the magazine *Dirilik* (Revival), which provided a space for women on its pages. According to Muznib, women issues should not be separated from the national revival and it was an integral part of the national question.⁵⁸ He was also turned his anger against the men, who violated women’s rights. Muznib’s journal soon became a platform both for the men and the women, who were raising awareness by publicizing the incidents, tragic events happening to women on a daily basis. In one of the numbers of magazine, the poet Badraddin Al-Huseyn wrote: “While in every society woman is considered as a symbol of grace, why is it that only in our society are women treated with disrespect and perceived as slaves? How we can be free if our women are taken hostage by our backward thoughts.”⁵⁹

Moreover, women rights were also discussed in scholarly articles. In these articles authors sought to uncover the roots of women issues and to propose solutions. *Dirilik* (Revival)

⁵⁷ Ceferov, *Milli-Ictimai Fikir Tariximizden* [History of our national philosophical thought], 25

⁵⁸ Aşırılı, *Azərbaycan mətbuatı tarixi (1875-1920)*, [The History of Azerbaijani Press], 37

⁵⁹ Ceferov, *Milli-Ictimai Fikir Tariximizden* [History of our national philosophical thought], 28

was one of the main journals, where progressive intellectuals were producing articles on women issues comparing the Eastern culture with that of Western countries. It published on the historical background of violence against women in the East and provided stories of influential women of the previous times as an example that women were capable of improving themselves and contributing to their community. There was a column titled as “Famous Women” that was devoted to the successful stories of the women throughout history. The aims of this column were to motivate women to go to schools, to acquire a profession and to be active in community life. Although this journal did not have a long life, it was influential in motivating women. One of the most famous columnist of the journal, Huseyn Talat, wrote an article “About Women Issues” in which he discussed about the women rights movement in France. Like many other intellectuals, he strongly supported the idea that without women participation in public life, progress was not possible. He considered women issue as a vital issue that must be solved in order to raise the society to that of European standards. He argued that “the way to enlightenment and revolution is through the education for women.”⁶⁰ He authored many articles giving his support to women. He was one of the first intellectuals who demanded equal rights for women, an act that was very radical, considering the traditional Muslim society of the early 20th century. He was also a very strong supporter of education and social justice.

Muhammed Hadi, famous Azeri poet had also raised his voice for equal rights for women. He not only demanded equal rights, but also even placed women on a higher cultural level, appraising women’s intelligence and capability. He totally rejected the traditionalist view that women had to be servants to the men. Obviously, at that time it was very unusual for a man to write these ideas openly. Even most of the progressive minded intellectuals didn’t go that far. Since for a Muslim society women rights was a very sensitive topic, intellectuals were

⁶⁰ Ibid., 29.

trying to be moderate in order not to provoke religious groups from boycotting educational and cultural projects that were implemented by the intelligentsia with the financial support of oil barons namely by Haji Zeynalabdin Tagiyev. Tagiyev especially played an important role as a philanthropist funding almost all initiatives for women and for society in generally. His most significant contribution was to open the first school for girls in 1901 at the center of Baku.

At the dawn of the twentieth century the political atmosphere was relatively favorable for the intelligentsia to express their ideas through various newspapers, journals and intellectual societies. *Molla Nesreddin*, *Babayi - Amir*, *Zanbur* and few other periodicals served as a platform for progressive ideas and contributed to the information flow in the country.⁶¹ Unfortunately, except *Molla Nesreddin*, none of the above mentioned journals have been researched. The reason why *Molla Nesreddin* was extensively researched both by Azeri and foreign scholars is that, it was a satirical journal with cartoons and sarcastic stories about daily life of the Muslims.⁶² Another reason why this journal captured enormous attention was that its editor was Jalil Mammadguluzade who was one of the most prominent Azerbaijani novelist of all time. It was erudition and literary talent of Mammadguluzade that made the journal very popular among the people. Since the articles on the journal were written in a very simple language and sarcastic style it had an impact on shaping public opinion. The target of the journal was Muslim clergy as well as the corrupt public officers. It also addressed to women issues. In of the articles provocatively titled as “The Man is coming”, the editor attacked the men who violated women’s rights in his unique sarcastic style by using an old, traditional man as a figure of fun. The old man complained that, “there are some “mouthy men” who are writing in the newspapers demanding the women to get education, to get profession to enlighten

⁶¹ Hüseyinov H. Azərbaycanca XIX əsr ictimai və fəlsəfi fikir tarixindən [*The history of the Philosophical and Political thoughts in Azerbaijan*], 395

⁶² Ibid., 396.

themselves, their children and the society. What a babble.”⁶³ Another periodical that shed a light on women issues was *Babayi – Amir*. Articles in this journal were representing very pessimistic opinion about the future of women rights. Unlike *Molla Nesreddin* (published during 1906-1931), it considered that all activities for improving women’s situation were in vain. The argument was that freedom for women as an idea didn’t have any ideological, historical and social background in Azerbaijan. Therefore, it would be very naïve to believe that, Azerbaijani women would ever be as independent as those in Europe.

Despite the fact that the intellectuals were belonging to different political inclinations and representing different social backgrounds, in the end they all contributed to newly emerged intellectual political discourse. The main topics of the discussions were social justice, political representation and revolution. Each intellectual group proposed different approaches and solutions for the main political and social issues. However, Resulzade was more successful in addressing the social issues more in depth and presenting his ideas in a very simplistic way that everyone could understand. According to Resulzade, the Azerbaijani intelligentsia should create a third way of dealing with the current issues.⁶⁴ In his understanding this third way must combine national, European and Islamic values. Although when it came to women issues he also criticized religion, when it came to political response to social issues he was very moderate, seeking to avoid splitting society over sensitive issues. Interestingly, intellectuals who were very radical in their hostile views of Islam, did not enter active politics and remained in literature. It was probably due to the obvious reason that, with a very critical view of Islam, they could not stay in politics and even would risk their reputation and even their lives.

As the intellectuals became more politically active, freedom of speech, social rights and women rights were discussed more often than before. Although the government of 1918 was

⁶³ Hüseynov H. *Azərbaycanda XIX əsr ictimai və fəlsəfi fikir tarixindən [The history of the Philosophical and Political thoughts in Azerbaijan]*, 219

⁶⁴ Yaqublu, Məmməd Əmin Rəsulzadə *[Memmed Emin Resulzade]*, 76

short lived (less than 2 years), it managed to make some progress in solving women issues. However, political and cultural conditions of that time didn't allow to do more. Since the majority of the population were traditional Muslims, it was very difficult to implement cultural projects such as theaters, girls' schools and similar initiatives. In other word, political initiatives didn't meet needed support from the people.

“Akinchi”- The First Azerbaijani Newspaper and Its Successors

The Azerbaijani press at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, contrary to expectations, revealed that our intellectuals of that period possessed sufficient information on America and generally about the West and commented extensively on the events that happened during the period. Meanwhile, they familiarized themselves with the progressive ideas of American authors, thinkers and this played a very important role in the formation of their ideas. In the early twentieth century and during the World War I, the political situation in Azerbaijan was very complicated in terms of conflicting political establishments and ideologies. Although, the Tsar promised reforms in his policy towards the subjects of the Empire, after the massive protests of 1905, in reality there was no improvement in providing people with fundamental political rights.⁶⁵ On the other hand, the ongoing war had a devastating effects on economic life. For the Russian Empire it was a time of famine, disease, long term depression in almost every field. In case of Azerbaijan, economic problems were intensified by the discriminating colonialist policy of Tsarist regime. This complex situation paved the way for the rise of nationalist sentiments and liberal political ideas. A newly formed intelligentsia created platforms for nationalist debates for independence and protested against despotic Tsarist rule. Azerbaijani intelligentsia aimed to educate the people in order to create a national identity, a very fateful mission. For this purpose, the first newspapers, journals,

⁶⁵ *Azərbaycan tarixi. Yeddi cildə. IV cild (XIX əsr), [History of Azerbaijan. In Seven Volumes. IV Volume. XIX century], 211.*

magazines soon appeared and they played significant role in circulating progressive ideas. The national intelligentsia was not only fighting against the Tsarist regime, but also against religious backwardness.

The first newspaper in Azerbaijani language “Akinchi” was one of those newspapers promoting progressive values and education. This newspaper was not accessible to the peasants, who were the majority and the traditionalist conservatives boycotted it because of its content. As Swietochowski says “Akinchi” inevitably became a forum for the intelligentsia.”⁶⁶ However, “Akinchi”’s editor Hasan bey Zardabi’s restless fight for education for women continued and concluded in opening of a very first school for girls in Baku in 1901.

On July 22, 1875 the first issue of the newspaper in Azerbaijani “Akinchi” was printed. The reason why the newspaper was called “Akinchi” was due to some political and social reasons. Akinchi, which means Ploughman, was chosen in order not to incite the government, and to show that the newspaper didn’t have any political agenda.⁶⁷ On the other hand, Zardabi’s purpose was to reach the majority of society- the peasants. His aim was to educate those, who didn’t have the opportunity and an access to study. *Akinchi* was successful in addressing its audience and creating unifying spirit. One of the significant fact about “Akinchi” was that, unlike the other publications and despite the fact that it was in Azerbaijani, its language was very understandable to ordinary people since it had common words that were used by people in daily life. The other fact is that the printing machine that was used for printing “Akinchi” was bought by Zardabi with his own money in Istanbul. In the very first number of “Akinchi”, Zardabi stated that one of the objectives of the newspaper would be to spread the news about science. He was also promising to talk about trade and politics. He was saying: “Without

⁶⁶ Swietochowski, Tadeus. Russian Azerbaijan 1905-1920. 28

⁶⁷ Ibid., 28

cooperation, no society would succeed. Since our former charity society was not successful and theatre room was left abandoned, obviously it is impossible to gather our fellowmen together, to open new schools for our children straying in the streets. And without education it is not possible to survive in our modern time. Especially when our neighbors improve themselves by education, slowly possessing our properties, in the near future we will find ourselves as their serf. What must be done? When I invite you, you don't come, I want to show you, you don't want to see, I tell you, you don't understand. Then I decided there is no other way out of this, except addressing you directly."⁶⁸ His decision was to publish a newspaper as an appeal to the whole nation.

Zardabi's "Akinchi" newspaper united and inspired many young talents such as Ali Mardan Topchubashov, Ali bey Huseynzade, Ahmed bey Agaoglu, Mirza Jalil Mammadguluzadeh, Sultan Majid Ganizade, Akbar Sabir Tairzade, Rasulzadeh who formed a new generation of intellectuals. Among them Ali bey Huseynzade and Ahmed bey Agaoglu were the Azerbaijani intellectuals who shaped Turkish nationalism. They were the philosophy theorists and thinkers coming from the outside of the Ottoman Empire, who were very influential and even according to some scholars were the fathers of Pan-Turkism and Turanism.⁶⁹

National literature, newspapers, magazines of the nineteenth century were censored until 1905. Tagiyev bought the "Kaspi" newspaper and later turned it into an intellectual platform for young generation of thinker. Tagiyev's main purpose was to publish a newspaper in Russian in order to raise the voice of the Muslim Turks in the Russian Empire. He appointed young Ahmed Agaoglu as the chief editor of the newspaper.⁷⁰ The defeat of the Russian Empire

⁶⁸ Həsən bəy Zərdabi. Rusiyada əvvəlinci türk qəzetəsi.// Həyat, 1905, December 28.

⁶⁹ Turan, *Əli bəy Hüseynzadə [Ali bey Huseynzade]*, 137

⁷⁰ Aşırlı, *Azərbaycan mətbuatı tarixi (1875-1920), [The History of Azerbaijani Press]*, 17

in Russian-Japanese war gave an impetus to the Russian revolutionary movement. Using the weakening of the Tsarist government Tagiyev, started to publish “Heyat” (“Life”), a newspaper in native language. The editors in chief of the newspaper were Ali bey Huseynzade and Ahmed Agaoglu.⁷¹

In the last numbers of Akinchi, we can see the obvious shift in its language. More precisely, the rhetoric of the periodical is more concerned with the future of the nation. Moreover, we can see more comparisons of the situation in Azerbaijan with that of the advanced societies of the West with a warning tone. We can say that contradictory to its name, the newspaper was very aware of the developments in the international politics, technological and demographic changes. To me one of the most significant feature of Akinchi is its liberal and individualistic approach to the certain social issues. Unlike todays media in Azerbaijan, in Akinchi it is almost impossible to see the sign of public condemnation while corresponding some unusual news around the country.

⁷¹ Akalın, *Türk düşüncə və siyasi həyatında Əhməd Ağaoğlu* [The Role of Ahmed Agaoglu in the Turkish Intellectual and Political life], 121

CHAPTER 3. REVOLUTIONARY FOUNDERS: EXTRAORDINARY LIVES OF THE MAIN FIGURES OF INTELLECTUAL MOVEMENT

This chapter is devoted to the extraordinary men whose activities were revolutionary and changed the course of the events in the intellectual life of the late 19th century Azerbaijan. The intellectual atmosphere of the late 19th century Azerbaijan was very open to debates on truth, liberties, reality, education and religion. In such an environment, new thinkers emerged who took these debates to another level, in other words, they gave it an intellectual essence. In order to understand the essence of the cultural and intellectual revival in Baku in the late 19th century, the reasons that made this particular period of time so important for later developments in Azerbaijan must be examined. Particular emphasize will focus in this chapter on the life and the activities of the main figures of the intellectual and cultural movement in Azerbaijan in the late 19th century. In this chapter I also explain, how Akhundov, as a pioneer of dramaturgy, the founder of literary criticism and one of the forerunners of theaters in Azerbaijan, changed the thinking of the next generations of philosophers, writers and thinkers. His legacy can still be seen in literature education and culture. Without any exaggeration, it can be said that Akhundov's activities as an active member of the intelligentsia and critic made the creation of Azerbaijani national identity possible.

As Baku was gaining economic importance due to the developing oil industry, it was becoming the center for young intellectuals. These young intellectual gave political content to the national identity that was created by Zardabi. Almost all of these young intellectuals had studied in Europe (mainly France) and they made the historical transformation from Muslim *ummah* to Turkish nationalism. Zardabi was the spiritual father of these young people and founding father of the concept of national identity. It was also Zardabi who established *usuli-jadid* (new method) schools in Azerbaijan, the first journalist who wrote in his native language,

one of the founders of national theatre and teacher of the nation. Most of all cultural and educational projects were sponsored by Haji Zeynalabdin Tagiyev, a philanthropist oil baron.

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3.1.The Most Outspoken Anti-Religious Thinker: Mirza Fatali Akhundov

This subchapter is about Mirza Fatali Akhundov, a brave atheist thinker of the late nineteenth century, founder of Azerbaijani dramaturgy and a true inspiration of the progressive movement. I will try to examine the reasons that made Akhundov extraordinary and try to create the portrait of the late nineteenth century Azerbaijan with Akhundov's ideas on education and secularism.

Mirza Fatali Akhundov was born in Sheki in 1812 to a wealthy religious family. His family wanted him to be a cleric. Their plans were destroyed when Akhundov met with his teacher, Mirza Shafi Vazeh, who encouraged him to go to secular school.⁷³ Akhundov's teacher, Mirza Shafi Vazeh, who was the leading figure of the early enlightenment movement in Azerbaijan had a huge influence on Akhundov's ideas. Vazeh was the first person who opened his eyes to the disturbing reality of religion.⁷⁴ Vazeh first told Akhundov to think critically and question the generally accepted religious rules and traditions. Soon Akhundov and Vazeh became close friends and they both together were south to awaken people to the reality by the means of education. As a result of his friendship with Vazeh, Akhundov made up his mind that he wouldn't go to religious school, instead he decided to continue his education at a secular school.

⁷² Steve Levine, *Oil and the Glory*, (Random House, 2007), 29.

⁷³ Mirzə Fətəli Axundzadə – 200: bibliografik göstərici, 23. (*It is the inclusive bibliography of Akhundov devoted to his 200th anniversary*)

⁷⁴ Ibid., 24.

After graduating from the district school, Akhundov started to teach at schools in different parts of the country. After several years of teaching, he started to write poems and stories published in several newspapers. For many years, Akhundov worked at different public offices of the Imperial Russian Government in the Caucasus region and served in the Russian army as colonel. This experience, however, didn't make him turn into a public servant, who stayed indifferent to the social issues.

Akhundov was inspired by the ancient East, antique philosophers and as well as Medieval thinkers. His philosophy was mainly shaped by the influence of Spinoza, Holbach, Feuerbach, seventeenth century French thinkers and the nineteenth century Russian revolutionary democrats.⁷⁵ Although in his early studies he extensively read Oriental thinkers and was heavily inspired by them, he rejected the myths in his scholarships and developed himself as a materialist thinker. He rejected the idea that everything exists as a result of the will of a divine power. He argued: "Existence is the reason and the result of itself. This Universe is a mighty, sole existence that doesn't have a beginning or an end. Time depends on conditions of the Universe and place on its qualities."⁷⁶ As an atheist Akhundov rejected the idea of an afterlife and immortality. Akhundov defended materialist view and with few exceptions he was accepting peripatetic views and pantheism too. According to him we are living in a materialistic universe and the universe itself is the manifestation of coexistence of material, time and place. In his novel "Deceived Stars" Akhundov was describing an ideal King, but later he changed his conception about justice and came to a conclusion that there should be a fight for justice, and not be presented as a gift. Akhundov believed that the purpose of dramatic art was to improve people's morals and that the theater was an appropriate vehicle for conveying a message to the largely illiterate public.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Firdun bey Köçərli, Axundzadənin ictimai-siyasi və fəlsəfi görüşləri, [*Political and Philosophical Thoughts of Akhundzade*], 26.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 223.

⁷⁷ Swietochowski, Tadeus "Russia and Azerbaijan" 29.

In Akhundov's scholarship "Deceived Stars" (1857) and "The Kamiliddovle Letters" (1866) have an exceptional significance.⁷⁸ Because in both novels Akhundov examines the social issues, poses philosophical questions regarding cognition, human life and the causes of development and decay. In "The Kamiliddovle Letters" he portrays a European minded youth who fights for development of his nation. Although he faces confrontations from religious members of the society, he continues his struggle and with every possible way tries to expose the lies that are told by mullahs. He accuses clerics of spreading hatred among people and for depriving them of their rights of knowing the truth.

As the author of the first European style plays in Azerbaijani language, Akhundov was called "Tatar Molière" or "Molière of the Orient" by his contemporaries.⁷⁹ His play writing made him also the founder of theater in Turkish speaking world. He was also "a tireless campaigner for the simplification of the Arabic Alphabet, a reform he saw as a medicine with the effect that the letters of this script dating back to the barbarian era would be written jointly... that the letters would be distinguished one from another by their shape without recourse to the dots."⁸⁰

Akhundov argued that in order to reveal the truth, old poems dating back to medieval times should be totally abandoned and they must be replaced with novels telling the truth. According to him all the poems about love and nature do not help us to understand our existence in the world and most importantly they do not provide us with a realistic view of life. For this reason, he took the initiative to create the first samples of Azerbaijani dramaturgy which can also be considered as the first of its kind in the whole Muslim world. For many historians, he

⁷⁸ "Kəmalüddövlə məktubları" in Azerbaijani language. Could also be translated as "The letters from and to Kamiliddovle"

⁷⁹ *Mirzə Fətəli Axundzadə – 200: bibliografik göstərici*, 14

⁸⁰ Swietochowski, "Russia and Azerbaijan", 26

is considered the founder of realism in Azerbaijani literature. He defined his realism as “to be useful for the progress of the people and to be understood by everyone.”⁸¹

Akhundov claimed that in order to create a realist national literature new genres of literature should be introduced. By being true as a writer he was meaning to bring real-life characters and real-life events into literature and to talk about the daily issues of people. In other words, he aimed to break the old traditions and to build a new stage to express the new ideas. In fact, before Akhundov there were literary works where we can see real-life characters. However, what Akhundov initiated was to analyze the daily issues in a philosophical language with the presence of real-life characters. In order to accomplish this mission Akhundov wrote several novels in different genres. These works were the first samples of Azerbaijani realism and they all promoted progressive ideas.

Although Akhundov was a realist, his novel “The Deceived Stars” can be considered the first example of Azeri utopian literature. The story begins with very brief introduction and goes on with the description of the despotic reign of Shah Abbas who has ruled the country for more than 7 years. Astrologers of the Shah just 3 days after the Novruz holiday, warn him that in 15 days he will be overthrown. Shah gather all his Vezirs to consult the fateful situation. After the long discussions the prime astrologer suggested that in order to deceive Satan the power should be given to an infidel temporarily and after that dangerous period pass the shah would get his power back. A saddler, Yusif, was chosen to be the new king. The second part of the novel is devoted to the adventures of the new king. He was a man of deep knowledge and honor. He dismisses all the *Vezirs* as soon as acquiring the power and replace them with more intelligent, honest men. Soon new roads, bridges, caravan palaces, schools and hospitals were built. He reduces the taxes and introduces unprecedented higher life standards. People

⁸¹ Cəlilov, *Mirzə Fətəli Axundzadənin fəlsəfi görüşləri*, [Philosophical thoughts of Akhundzade], 107

start to enjoy and ideal, almost a utopian life. However, after a while people got used too much to comfortable life, rebelled against the new King and overthrew him demanding even more privileges which were unrealistic. The former despotic Shah Abbas took advantage of this situation and came back to the throne. After he had resumed the power everything returned to its old situation, and became worse.⁸²

With his most famous novel, “Deceived Stars” Akhundov established realist fiction in Azerbaijani literature. In this novel for the first time in Azerbaijani literature he also advocated the idea of separation of powers and government with participation of the people. The main idea of this novel is that education was the only one way to reaching the common good. Because of the illiteracy of people, the clerics deceived the people and led the whole nation toward disaster. As a solution he proposed reforms to make education accessible for the people. Akhundov realized that like the rest of the society he had been deceived for many years. After extensive reading and researches, Akhundov came to the conclusion that religion was the biggest lie ever told to human beings. It may have been one of the reasons why he called his novel the “Deceived Star”.

Akhundov also wrote poems with a penname Sabuhi.⁸³ His first poem which brought him fame was “An Oriental Poem” he devoted to the death of Russian poet Alexander Pushkin. In his poems he criticized and complaining about the backwardness of Muslim societies. His poems also advocated education, as the only way for progress. He wrote six comedies which made him the founder of Azerbaijani dramaturgy.

Like his main characters in his novels Akhundov was also using every possible way to spread his ideas in order to open the eyes of his people. In one of his articles he wrote: “My purpose is to eliminate the backwardness that destroys Muslims, to develop science, arts and

⁸² *Mirzə Fətəli Axundzadə – 200: bibliografik göstərici, 501*

⁸³ *Mirzə Fətəli Axundzadə – 200: bibliografik göstərici, 432*

for the independence and progress of our nation to restore the justice that once was existing in our lands before Islam. [...] Through embracing progressive ideas, to restore justice in society and to rebuild moral values is possible. Only in this case all members of society regardless of their status will have equal opportunities.”⁸⁴ In order to educate people about their rights Akhundov strongly advocated popular participation in decision making. He called the government to implement reforms in economy and in all other related fields. He declared that in order to develop educational reforms and promote rights a free press was crucial. One of his significant contributions was to reform the alphabet. He deeply sought a society which had free flow of information and access to truth. Akhundov came to Istanbul in 1863 to meet with Ottoman *sadr-azam* Fuat Pasha to discuss his project to change Arabic letters into the Latin alphabet. Later he went to Iran to get support for his alphabet project. However, this proposal was not accepted by either government.⁸⁵

His activities influenced thinkers not only in Azerbaijan, but in some other Muslim countries, especially in Iran.⁸⁶ For some historians Akhundov is one of the thinkers who established the ideological background of the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911 in Iran.⁸⁷ In Azerbaijan his legacy was incomparable opening the way for later thinkers. The great Azeri poets, Shirvani and Sabir, and the novelist Mirza Jalil was highly influenced by Akhundov’s progressive ideas. As a literary critic, Akhundov criticized pervious literary works. His main criticism was that these writers were not addressing the real issues of the society. For Akhundov, the main problem that the society was facing was religion. He argued that the tragedies people face everyday life will continue to happen unless they start to question religion. As it was mentioned in Suny’s book as the first and most renowned representatives

⁸⁴ Hüseyinov, *Mirzə Fətəli Axundzadə: İctimai və fəlsəfi fikri*, [Mirza Fatali Akhundzade: Political and Philosophical Thoughts], 187.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 21.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 33

⁸⁷ Ibid., 41

of the intelligentsia, Akhundov “encapsulated in his writings the leading ideas of what was to become the credo of the modernizing elite: the spread of education, the formation of a literary language comprehensible to the mass reader, and secularism as a means of overcoming sectarian divisions.”⁸⁸

Akhundov started studying philosophy at an early age and during his most active years produced significant philosophical works such as “The Kemaliddovle Letters”, “Answers to English Doctor Yum”, “On the word of One”, “On the Doctrine of Bab”, “On the needs of Human” etc.⁸⁹ In all of these works he explained his materialist views on the existence of the universe. Unlike his contemporaries, Akhundov was brave enough to go so far to claim that there is no divine creator. He passionately defended his materialist ideas with these words: “The Universe exists without needing anybody or anything to rule it. It rules itself according to its own rules. Therefore, it doesn’t need any moderator.”⁹⁰ Akhundov had a strong belief that, human mind is capable of solving injustice, and science, enlightenment are the only ways to human progress. According to Akhundov, the essence of the world is material and the different substances and processes of nature are the manifestation of a single, infinite and eternal material substance.⁹¹ Since it is the reason of itself, it does not need any supernatural power to exist. As for cognition, Akhundov was a materialist sensualist and considered the role of sensual cognition as an essential. In this regard, for Akhundov literature and art was a tool to express the truth with artistic methods.

Akhundov is also the founder of modern Azerbaijani literary criticism. Akhundov criticized Sufi philosophers, such as Rumi, Jami and Shabustari for manipulating the truth.⁹²

⁸⁸ Suny, Ronald “Transcaucasia, nationalism and social change” 212

⁸⁹ *Mirzə Fətəli Axundzadə – 200: bibliografik göstərici*, 201

⁹⁰ Hüseynov, *Mirzə Fətəli Axundzadə: İctimai və fəlsəfi fikri*, [Mirza Fatali Akhundzade: Political and Philosophical Thoughts], 213.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 37

⁹² *Mirzə Fətəli Axundzadə – 200: bibliografik göstərici*, 321

Akhundov also criticized thinkers of his time. He was writing letters to the intellectuals such as Zardabi, calling them to be brave to criticize Islam as a main obstacle on the way to progress.

He also had some works on the developments of science and philosophy where he gave historical backgrounds of the both Western and Eastern societies. In these works, he expressed his interesting conceptions on historical events and he also introduced his own periodicals of historical events.

Akhundov expresses his philosophical ideas in his philosophical work “The Kamaliddovle Letters”, which he finished in 1866. In this work he was comparing religion with science and trying to show that religion could not compete with science in revealing the truth. According to him, religion is the main barrier on the way to progress. He was writing: “From the time Islam emerged till now, no one could tell the reason of the stagnation in science in East, the reason of the emergence of dreadful despotism and the reason of the backwardness of the uncivilized East. Only Ferdowsi was an exceptional thinker who could realize that the reason of the tragedies and backwardness of the East was Arabs and their repellent religion that is incompatible with human nature.”⁹³

In his scholarship Akhundov gave huge emphasis on social issues. He was criticizing feudal rules, despotic state and was demanding rebuilding the society according to rules of justice. It is very interesting that in his works of the 1850s he was hoping for a fair King, but in 1860s he started to support the idea of concurrent powers shared by political bodies.⁹⁴ His political views show that he was in favor of constitutional monarchy. Akhundov also strongly believed that freedom is a natural right and necessity for human development. According to him, every human being should have the right to express themselves freely, to promote their

⁹³ Köçərli, M. F. Axundzadənin ictimai-siyasi və fəlsəfi görüşləri, [*Political and Philosophical Thoughts of Akhundzade:*], 17.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 56

ideas and to live without any fear. He deeply supported the idea that any society which fails to protect human freedom and violates rights cannot avoid destroying itself.

During the years of 1850 – 1855 Akhundov wrote following novels which are considered the first exsamples of Azeri dramaturgy: “Hekayəti-Molla İbrahim Xəlil kimyagər” (“The story of Molla Ibrahim Khalil, the chemist”), “Hekayəti-Musyo Jordan həkimi-nəbatat və dərviş Məstəli şah cadukuni-məşhur” (“The story of the doctor Monsieur Jordan and Darvish Mastali Shah”), “Sərguzəşti-vəzir-xani-Lənkəran” (The Story of the Vezir of the Khan of Lankaran”), “Hekayəti-xırs quldurbasan” (“The Story of the Thief Raider”), “Sərguzəşti-mərdi-xəsis-Hacı Qara” (“The adventures of Haji Gara”) and “Murafəə vəkillərinin hekayəti” (The Story of the Lawyers”).⁹⁵ With the help of Zarfdabi, Vazirov and Gorani, Akhundov’s “Haji Gara” was staged on theater in 1873 and became the first Azeri play.⁹⁶ In his comedies, there are two main characters opposing each other – a corrupt mullah on the one hand and a young educator promoting progressive ideas on the other. Akhundov was not only comparing two opposite members of society, he was also comparing backward Muslim society with developed western societies.

During the Soviet rule in Azerbaijan there was a relatively growing interest in Akhundov and his works because of his atheist views. As Swietochowski puts in his book “Historians were busily discovering anti-Islam and atheistic elements in the heritage of the Azeri thinkers of the past, and in this context there began what amounted to a virtual cult of Akhunnade.”⁹⁷ His thoughts on religion was were very unusual for his time and he faced severe criticism even from his colleagues. About the existence of divine power, he was saying: “If we say that any living object can not emerge by itself and is created by someone, then we have to admit that,

⁹⁵ *Azərbaycan tarixi. Yeddi cildə. IV cild (XIX əsr)*, [History of Azerbaijan. In Seven Volumes. IV Volume. XIX century], 296.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 118.

that someone who created everything should also be created by another creator. [...] The idea which *mullahs* (clergymen) supports, that after the death the soul leaves the body and goes to somewhere is totally irrational and can not stand against any critique.”⁹⁸

Akhundov’s ideas on women and their role in society were also very unique and unprecedented. In his comedies he created the first Azerbaijani women characters in fiction. In “Hajı Qara” we see strong women characters such as Tukez and Sona.⁹⁹ The last novel of Akhundzade, “Mürafə və-killərinin hekayəti” (1855) has also women characters, who are portrayed as ambitious and intelligent women.¹⁰⁰

When Akhundov decided to stage his plays in the theater religious leaders gathered in front of the theater to protest against intellectuals, who in the eyes of religious leaders, were destroying national values.¹⁰¹ However, Akhundov and fellow intellectuals managed to start the activities to create the first national theater. Akhundov faced the same attacks and hatred by the clergymen when he was promoting education for women. He argued that the only reason of women’s desperate situation was the backward traditions and the religion. Unfortunately, Akhundov’s radical criticism of the religion could not find strong support among the people who were mainly Muslims.

Akhundzade’s works had been translated into several languages such as Persian, Georgian, Armenian, Russian, German, French. Articles about his literary works, as well as his biography were published in several Russian and European scientific journals. During 1851-1852 his novels were staged in Tbilisi and St. Petersburg theaters.¹⁰² In 1873 Akhundov’s novel

98 Hüseynov, *Mirzə Fətəli Axundzadə: İctimai və fəlsəfi fikri*, [Mirza Fatali Akhundzade: Political and Philosophical Thoughts], 43.

99 Ibid., 44.

100 Ibid., 44.

101 *Mirzə Fətəli Axundzadə – 200: bibliografik göstərici*, 345.

102 Ibid., 347

“Haji Qara” became the first play staged in Azerbaijan. In other words, the date of Azerbaijani national theater begins with Ahundzade ‘s dramaturgy.

I want to conclude with his own words on Truth: “In order to build public consciousness writers, especially historians have a duty to tell the truth without any fear from the government.”¹⁰³

A Life Devoted to Education- Hasan bey Zardabi

When talking about the Enlightenment Movement in Azerbaijan, Hasan Bey Zardabi, who was the founder of the first Azerbaijani newspaper deserves particular notice. Education has always had incomparable importance to further the development of society. By looking at the activities of Zardabi as an intellectual, I will try to show why education was important at that time, especially for women. Focusing on Zardabi’s restless struggle for education, I will also try to emphasize the relations between intellectuals and religious clergy during the late 19th century. Intellectuals such as publicist Hasan Bey Zardabi were only a few amongst many Azerbaijanis who did not demand to reform and modernize Islam, but went so far as to warn of the danger of backward traditions. Moreover, I will focus on the activities of Zardabi as an editor of “Akinchi”, which was the first newspaper in Azerbaijani language. I will also try to examine his ideas on modernity, women's rights, democracy, and the role of religion.

Although the intelligentsia’s role in nation building in Azerbaijan is not well researched both in Azerbaijan and abroad, there are a few works on the life of Zardabi and his newspaper “Akinchi”. Especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union many, books were published on pre-soviet Azerbaijan. These books are diverse in terms of methodology and approaches. I will mainly use the books in Azerbaijani, since in English there are only few works. Recently both

¹⁰³ Fərhadoglu, *Mirzə Fətəli Axundzadənin fəlsəfi görüşləri*, [Philosophical Thoughts of Mirza Fatali Akhundzade], 142.

in Azerbaijan and abroad several works have been published on the history of Azerbaijan during the late 19th century and early 20th century. They are not particularly about Zardabi and his activities, but there are some useful and interesting facts about him in these books.

Hasan bey Selim bey oglu Melikov was born in Zardab, a small village in the center of Azerbaijan. Although his date of birth is not exactly known, according to most historians he was born in 1837.¹⁰⁴ After studying in Tbilisi, he later became one of the first Muslims in the Russian Empire to graduate from Moscow University, in 1865. Despite the fact that, he held different positions as an administrator at a government office, member of Baku City Duma, teacher at the gymnasium, he is best known as a secularist publicist and the founder of the Azerbaijani press. He devoted his life to education among the Muslims in the Caucasus and cultural enlightenment at a time which was one of the most problematic and crucial years in the history of Baku. One of the surprising facts about Zardabi's life is how he met his wife, Henife. Hasanli's book "*Tarixi Şəxsiyyətin tarixi*" ("*The history of historical person*") reveals says that Zardabi, who was the founder of Azerbaijani newspaper and many other innovations, was the first person to find his marriage partner through a newspaper. In 1872, "Kafkaz" newspaper published a list of girls who graduated from Tbilisi Gymnasium. After reading this list, he went to Tbilisi to meet Henife Abayeva- a Muslim student who was living alone in Tbilisi. After she agreed, they married in Tbilisi at the same Gymnasium. If we look at the newly emerged tradition of marriages after meeting through the internet, we can consider Zardabi as the first person who found his marriage partner by using the media."¹⁰⁵ Zardabi's

¹⁰⁴ Ağazadə, Həsən bəy Məlikov Zərdabinin Tərcümeyi-Hal, [*Bibliography of Hasan bey Zardabi*], 6.

¹⁰⁵ Hasanli, *Tarixi şəxsiyyətin tarixi: Əlimərdan bəy Topçubaşov*, [*The history of the Historical Personality: Alimerdanbey Topchubashov*], 43.

daughter Garib-Soltan Malikova adopted a boy who later became a national artist of the USSR and minister of culture of Azerbaijan.¹⁰⁶

Zardabi was active in public life not only as an educator and publicist, but also as a member of the Baku City Duma, where he defended the rights of residents in poor settlements of Baku. He became a member of the Baku City Duma after the elections of 1897.¹⁰⁷ For the helpless, poor Muslim population of the city, Zardabi was an advocate. If Zardabi and few other members of Duma were not there for these people, they would have lost their properties and would have been deprived of their rights by non-azeri authorities who, unfortunately had a contemptuous view of Muslims living in the poor neighborhoods.

Zardabi's life was also filled with difficulties and challenges throughout his active years as a publicist. Zardabi's family members also faced government repression. His son Safvat Melikov's stipend was terminated in 1922 by the Azerbaijani Council of People's Commissars when he was studying abroad. Despite all his mother's complaints he didn't receive his stipend again. The reason behind this decision was also due to the fact that Zardabis were relatives of Alimerdan bey Topchubashov, who was the Speaker of the Azerbaijani Parliament which was overthrown by the Soviets. Zardabi's older daughter was married to Alimerdan bey Topchubashov.¹⁰⁸

The late 19th century was a time when the national cultural revival movement, which started with the founder of Azerbaijani literature, Akhundov, and the father of Turkish newspaper Zardabi, entered its political stage. It was a time of passionate search for a national

¹⁰⁶ Ağazadə, *Həsən bəy Məlikov Zərdabinin Tərcümeyi-Halı*, [Bibliography of Hasan bey Zardabi], 36.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 27

¹⁰⁸ Hasanli, *Tarixi şəxsiyyətin tarixi: Əlimərdan bəy Topçubaşov* [The history of the Historical Personality: Alimerdanbey Topchubashov], 545.

ideology both in public thought and cultural life. The leaders of this movement were Akhundov to whom first part of the third chapter is devoted and Zardabi, whose progressive thoughts gave the cultural movement new characteristics- nationalist content and political significance. The feature of this movement was that its leaders did something unprecedented – a shift from *ummah* (Muslim community) to a nationhood (Azerbaijani people).¹⁰⁹ It was probably the influence of nationalism which was a popular ideology in the 19th century in Europe. This was the ideological base of the whole movement. For the members of the intellectual movement, the salvation for the whole nation was to replace the traditional madrasas with new *usuli-jadid* (new method) schools.¹¹⁰

There are various opinions on how the first *usuli-jadid* schools emerged in the Russian Empire. According to the most accepted views, as result of socio-economic changes and new cultural trends prevalent among the Muslim population in the Russia Empire new type of schools – usuli -jadids started to appear since the end of 1880s. It was first initiated by the Crimean Tatar intellectual and reformist Ismail Gasprinski and later the movement spread to all the Muslim territories of the Russian Empire. One of the most basic principles of this new method of teaching was the transition to phonetic method - a more efficient method. In addition to this, the radical change that new type schools brought was teaching student mathematics, history, geography for the first time in the mother tongue. Members of *usuli-jadid* movement criticized the memorization of religious texts and insisted on explaining of the subjects to the students. Beside this, they were also against using physical punishment as a method of discipline. Unlike the rest of the old fashioned madrasas and *mektebs*, *usuli-jadid* schools were equipped with new teaching supplies and items.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ *Azərbaycan tarixi. Yeddi cildə. IV cild (XIX əsr), [History of Azerbaijan. In Seven Volumes. IV Volume. XIX century]*, 272.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 273.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 272.

In Azerbaijan decades before *usuli-jadid* schools, there were several new type of schools such as Russian-Tatar schools which were more efficient in terms of providing secular education unlike the existing madrasas. One of the first new type of schools was the one that opened by prominent Azerbaijani poet Seyid Azim Shirvani in 1869, in Shamakhi.¹¹² In educating the population living in Azerbaijan, more precisely in the cities the Russian-Tatar schools (in Tsarist Russia Azerbaijanis sometimes called Tatars) played a significant role. These schools came to existence at the insistence of the progressive intellectuals' demand for education in the mother language. The National intelligentsia considered education in mother language as the most important basis for any kind of education and training. The first such school was established in Baku in 1887 by the two young educators - Sultan Majid Ganizade and Habib bey Mahmudbeyov, immediately after they graduated from Alexander Teachers Institute in Tbilisi.¹¹³ The school did not have a specific charter and operated as a private school offering three-year education. Later the school became a two-class Russian-Tatar school and developed a charter which stated the importance of education in mother tongue. Unlike other Russian schools, in accordance with its charter of 1881, in the first year of education Azerbaijani language should be taught and it was regarded as a mandatory course for all the participants at the school.¹¹⁴

While talking about the situation of education in Azerbaijan in the late 19th century there few other issues that also must be mentioned. At that time some higher educational institutions did not admit the Azerbaijanis. Those who wanted to pursue technical studies were facing even more challenges. In a sense, it was explained that the representatives of the Azerbaijani entrepreneurs were not represented in the Council of the Committee on oil industry and they

¹¹² Ibid., 274

¹¹³ Ibid., 275

¹¹⁴ *Azərbaycan tarixi. Yeddi cildə. IV cild (XIX əsr) [History of Azerbaijan. In Seven Volumes. IV Volume. XIX century]*, 273

were very poorly represented in the stock market committee.¹¹⁵ According to some historians, Azerbaijani students did not have the right to receive state scholarship. After successfully graduating from high schools They were deprived of the opportunity to occupy higher positions in those institutions. One such young Azerbaijanis was Alimardanbey Topchubashov, who later became the speaker of the Azeri Parliament. After graduating from the law school of Petersburg University with distinction, he could not hold the position of professor that was offered to him.¹¹⁶

The late 19th century was a time of unprecedented industrial development in the history of Baku. At the beginning of the 20th century more than half of the world's oil was produced in Baku. Zardabi wrote about the oil boom: "The Oil industry in Baku was developing not day by day, but hour by hour. Ships on the Caspian Sea were not enough to carry all the oil that Baku was producing. Therefore, Transcaucasian (Caucasus) railway was constructed to connect Baku with Tbilisi and Batumi. Baku, which before was formerly a place of exile, now became unrecognizable after constant changes in a short period of time. As a waving flood coming beneath the sands, oil gushes in Baku gave existence to many millionaires. It was attracting thousands of people from Russia and other countries."¹¹⁷

Despite Zardabi's fight for education there was a desperate atmosphere in the country. If we look at the literature of that time we can not see any positive characters in the novels. The lack of heroes was so common that even for writers it was hard to create one in their mind. It was the first time that tragedy as a literary genre was introduced by the novelist Najaf bey Vazirov. His novel "Musibat-i Fakhraddin ("Fakhraddin's Tragedy", 1896) is about a young teacher who studied abroad and came back to his home country to launch new type of school and to educate

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 275

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 275

¹¹⁷ Əkinçi, 1875, June 22.

young people. However, he faced strong opposition by the backward clergies and soon lost his fight against ignorance. Even his own family didn't support him and the novel ends with Fakhraddin's tragic death. Like Vazirov's main character Fakhraddin the rest of the characters of other novels and stories of that time are hopeless victims of the backwardness of the society.

In this newspaper, he gives exact directions on the way to build a national identity. In 1876 in one of his articles, he expressed his opinion on nation building with these words: "Brothers who care about this nation must know that on the day of judgement the prophet we will call his ummah. However, in these times of our ignorance, foreign nations call for their nations and work for their own nation and what we are doing is to make our nation blind by going against our intellectuals, hurting them instead of supporting our national causes. Before it is too late we have to bring academic books (from abroad), build schools, and study in our native language in order to be of help. [...] It gets more difficult to remove a nail as it gets stronger. You-young people who study! True, it is difficult to get along with our countrymen since they don't understand any of what you are saying. They consider your actions in discordance with sharia and they will even hurt you, calling you infidel. You will get more appreciation from other nations."¹¹⁸ Then he continues: "However, don't chose temporary satisfaction over the salvation of your nation. By leaving this country you will let the nation be blind and disabled. Invite your countrymen to your own path. Let *mullahs* curse you, the bigots stone you, you are fighting for this nation and when this nation wakes up, future generations will call you martyrs for your sacrifices."¹¹⁹

Zardabi warned his countrymen about the changes that occurs: "Other nations of our time are improving their science. In order to survive we also have to study. We will not win in this

¹¹⁸ Əkinçi, 1876, June, 11

¹¹⁹ Ibid.,

competition, but at least we will be at the same level with them. Otherwise we will lose in this fight for future and will perish.”¹²⁰ According to Zardabi, the only way out of this situation was to have education and publications in the native language. He argued: “Reading newspapers and journals keeps us informed about the world, teaches us our language and improves our lives. For this reason, other nations publish newspapers, journals in order not to fail.”¹²¹ Zardabi’s ideas on freedom and independence are worth mentioning. He insisted that there was a direct connection between freedom and prosperity. In one of his articles he wrote: “in fact, we became slaves by our own consent: peasants are slaves to the king, wife to husband, servant to master, student to teacher. Aren’t they all slaves? Yes, we are all slaves and the reason for this is our backward traditions. Unlike in Europe in our geography there is no freedom and we will not and we can’t improve ourselves unless we become free”.¹²² According to Zardabi, the Muslim world failed to create its own versions of art and culture. For this reason, shortly before his death he asked Uzeyir Hajibeyov to compose an opera. Hajibeyov after less than a year of Zardabi’s death became the first Muslim to compose an opera - “Leyli and Majnun” in 1907.¹²³ This opera was written on the motives of the Fuzuli’s famous poem of the same name. Hajibeyov is also the composer of Azerbaijani national anthem.

Although “Akinchi” was first started with the aim of reaching the ordinary people, later it became the tribune of the intelligentsia. Conservative religious people didn’t want to accept “Akinchi”’s revolutionary and critical views of religion. On the other hand, Imperial Government also was not happy with the newspaper, suspecting Zardabi as a nationalist and

¹²⁰ Əkinçi, 1876, november

¹²¹ Ibid.,

¹²² Ibid.,

¹²³ Fərhad Ağazadə. Həsən bəy Məlikov “Zərdabi”nin Tərcümeyi-Halı, [*Bibliography of Hasan bey Zardabi*], 52.

sympathizer of the Ottomans. During the Russian-Ottoman Wars “Akinchi” was closed down on September 29, 1877.

Although “Akinchi” had a short life of two years it had a huge impact on later development of press. After the shutdown of “Akinchi” several newspapers such as “Ziya”, “Ziyayi-Kafkasiyye”, “Kashkul” and “Sherqi-Rus” appeared. However, there were important differences between these periodicals and “Akinchi”. First of all, as I mentioned above, Zardabi deliberately used vernacular language, avoiding using Arabic and Persian words in order to make the newspaper understood by everyone. The language of the later periodicals was more influenced by the Ottoman language. On the other hand, “Akinchi” and its successors were different in terms of their content. Zardabi was accused of having nationalistic (*narodnik*) views and of being sympathetic towards the Ottomans, which led to the closing of his newspaper.¹²⁴ By having this example in front of them, later newspapers were very careful in not to intervening into politics and tried to be non-populist which made them less interesting in the eyes of the people. In other words, unlike their predecessor later newspapers were not able to express the concerns of the people and failed to portray the realities. According to Alimerdan bey Topchubashov, “Akinchi” was the “symbol of New Azerbaijan, its culture, language, and literature.”¹²⁵

Zardabi, who saw education as the only salvation, sent his oldest daughter, Peri, to Tbilisi Gymnasium to study, which was a quite a revolutionary act considering conservative Muslim society of that time.¹²⁶ Zardabi’s son Midhet was also studying in Tbilisi. Interestingly Zardabi met his wife Henife khanim in Tbilisi where she was studying. Unlike most of her

¹²⁴ Ağazadə, *Həsən bəy Məlikov “Zərdabi”nin Tərcümeyi-Halı*, [Bibliography of hasan bey Zardabi], 74.

¹²⁵ Əkinçi, 1875-1877 (Tam mətni), [Akinchi; All the numbers], 205

¹²⁶ Hasanli, *Tarixi şəxsiyyətin tarixi: Əlimərdan bəy Topçubaşov*, [The history of the Historical Personality: Alimerdanbey Topchubashov], 43.

countrywomen Henife graduated from Tbilisi Saint Nino girl's school in 1872 and on that year she married Zardabi.¹²⁷

One of Zardabi's contributions to education was opening a school for girls. Haji Zeynalabdin Tagiyev, who was a philanthropist oil baron and sponsor of cultural projects in Baku, suggested that the charter of the new school should be prepared by Zardabi for obvious reasons. In fact, cooperation between Tagiyev and Zardabi was particularly fruitful.¹²⁸ In 1906 they together founded a philanthropic society which played significant role in establishing language schools. According to the charter of Baku Girls school, the head of the school should be an educated Muslim woman, which had never happened before till this time. In September of 1901, admission to the Baku Girls school began. In the press this girl's school was called "Tagiyev school."¹²⁹ Zardabi's wife Henife was elected as the director of the school. Without exaggeration she was the only woman to qualify for this position. There are several other women who also held positions as deputy of director and teachers. However, in generally women's participation was a problem since traditional Muslim families were against the idea of independent women. Therefore, the women who were active in the community were daughters, sisters and wives of wealthy men who were notable public figures.

In 1901 Baku was one of the only places in the Caucasus for all Muslim girls who wanted to study. One of the contributions to girls' education by Zardabi was that he opened his own home for the girls coming from different cities to Baku to stay till the dorm was ready.¹³⁰ After a couple of weeks, the first Russian-Muslim school for girls was opened in Baku. It was housed in a very beautiful building located in the center of the city.

¹²⁷ Ağazadə, *Həsən bəy Məlikov "Zərdabi"nin Tərcümeyi-Halı*, [Bibliography of Hasan bey Zardabi], 81.

¹²⁸ Mostashari, *On the Religious Frontier*, 131.

¹²⁹ Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Bourgeoisie and the cultural enlightenment in Baku. Transcaucasia, Nationalism and Social Change*, 206.

¹³⁰ Cabbarov, *Taghiyevin qız məktəbinin tarixindən*, [The history of Taghiyev's Girls School], 16.

Zardabi can also be considered as the first Azerbaijani who not only fought for women's right to education, but also political rights and independence for women. One of the interesting facts about Zardabi's view on women's rights is related to an incident that happened in the center of Baku in the late 1870s. According to biographers of Zardabi, once he was walking arm in arm with his wife Henife in the streets of Baku while she was not wearing any hair cover, and dressed in a modern style, traditionalists, especially religious people were so outraged that they attempted to stone them.¹³¹ The same incident happened when the first school for girls opened, and the first plays were staged in the theater. However, Zardabi didn't give up and continued his fight for education and cultural awakening. Interestingly, it was that government led by Topchubashov who was the son-in-law of Zardabi that gave the right to vote for women in 1918.

Zardabi was the first person who initiated the establishment of new method of Russian-Tatar schools in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries. The first Russian-Tatar school was opened in Baku in 1887, after Zardabi's petition to Baku City Authorities.¹³² Before Zardabi moved to Baku there were only three of these kinds of schools. In 1906 the number of these schools rose to sixteen. Most importantly approximately over 300 of a total 2250 students at these schools were girls.¹³³ According to Zardabi, in education the main focus should be given to those who were coming from less advantaged backgrounds, who had poor access to education and who were living in least developed parts of the city. Despite the funding cuts that were imposed by the financial committee of the Duma, Zardabi managed to keep these schools alive.

¹³¹ <http://www.azadliq.org/content/article/27143747.html>

¹³² Ağazadə, Həsən bəy Məlikov "Zərdabi"nin Tərcüme-yi-Halı, [Bibliography of Hasan bey Zardabi], 32.

¹³³ Ibid., 33.

On November 28 in 1907, Hasan bey Zardabi died. Public figures like Ahmed bey Agayev, Ali bey Husyenzade, Memmed Emin Resulzade were among the many notable intellectuals who participated at the funeral of Zardabi. His colleagues from different newspapers such as “Nijat”, “Nashri-Maarif”, “Irshad”, “Kaspi” expressed their grief in their articles.¹³⁴ Although in his last will Zardabi expressed his wish for a modest funeral, it turned out to be impossible due to the huge attendance. Zardabi’s funeral was the first massive funeral in Baku with the participation of hundreds of people coming from diverse ethnic backgrounds. A few days later a “Kaspi” journalist wrote an article devoted to the memory of Zardabi. In this article titled “In front of a new grave” Zardabi was remembered with these words: “Through all the years of his life he was thinking of others and working for others while spending a little of time for himself. He was in a cold solitude at the end of his life.”¹³⁵

After shutting down of “Akinchi” Zardabi went into exile and was then allowed to live only in a rural village of the country. At that time there was no school, newspaper or intellectual platform in native language that could express social concerns.

I want to conclude this chapter with a general evaluation of Zardabi as a leading figure of intellectual movement of the late 19th century and the early 20th century. In the road to creating a national identity he gave huge significance to education. What made Zardabi successful in addressing the people and being accepted by the people was his brilliant talent in understanding the needs of the people and assembling young minds under the umbrella of his ideology which consisted of reformist, nationalist and progressive European thought. This circle of young people included great thinkers and public figures of that time. Zardabi’s activities as a publicist and educator in 1870s was so uncommon that after the closing of “Akinchi” there was long silence in the intellectual life of Baku. Topchubashov expressed his admiration toward Zardabi

¹³⁴ Ağazadə, *Həsən bəy Məlikov “Zərdabi”nin Tərcümeyi-Halı*, [Bibliography of Hasan bey Zardabi], 81.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 89.

with these words: “By establishing a newspaper in vernacular language Zardabi gave an incomparable example of serving to the nation. He was not only the founder of a national press, but also initiated many other cultural trends. His activities are compared to the sole existence of a lighthouse showing the way through the darkness. With his intelligence he was lighting up the darkness for his nation.”¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Elimerdanbey Topçubaşov, *Azərbaycanın yol göstərəni, [Guiding leader of Azerbaijan]*, (Baku, Avrasiya, 2009), 35.

CONCLUSION

The rapid cultural developments in Baku, which was also coincided with the intellectual revival was direct consequences of the oil boom that happened in the late 1870s. The late decades of the nineteenth century saw the radical changes in almost every field in Baku. The growing importance of oil had a huge impact in the history of Baku that changed whole course of events in Azerbaijan. The constant social changes in Baku and its growing central role as the stage for the emerging intelligentsia lead to a disparate chains of events. In the late nineteenth century, despite all the obstacles, the intelligentsia in Azerbaijan managed to raise awareness on secularism, democracy and women rights. In this fight for democracy, they were supported by the national oil barons who funded educational and cultural projects. In other words, the development of the oil industry in Baku played a crucial role in intellectual and cultural revival.

During the early years of the twentieth century, the enlightenment movement of the previous decades paved the way to the emergence of the first political parties, thus opened the doors for the later developments in Azerbaijan. It was the cultural and intellectual movement that gave rise to the national political movement which resulted in proclamation of first Democratic Republic in the Muslim geography in 1918. The most significant characteristic of this period of time was that women issues for the first time came to public discussions and eventually women got the right to vote. Unlike many Muslim societies of that time, the certain group of Azerbaijani intelligentsia and politicians were brave enough to demand political rights for women, despite of the confrontation with traditionalist religious groups. As we saw in the first chapter, the end of the nineteenth century was the beginning the revolutionary processes and marked with many initiatives such as the first theatre, the first schools for women and many more which played an important role for later developments. In the first chapter, I also tried to

create the image of Baku through the eyes of both local and foreign journalists. Thus, one of the main purposes of this thesis was to study the perceptions about Azerbaijan through examining the American newspapers of the 19th and 20th centuries. To me it was very interesting to see the analysis and conclusions of the journalists about the events in this region that have a resemblance with the current situations.

As I tried to show in the second chapter, the investigation of the Azerbaijani press at the end of the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th century, provides very informative insights to the intellectual atmosphere and the main ideological inclinations. Meanwhile, these primary sources are also significant source of information in order to grasp the social dynamics of the Azerbaijani society of that time. The life and the activities of the two main figures of enlightenment movement- Mirza Fatali Akhundov and Hasan Bey Zardabi constitute the last chapter of this work, which provided intellectual outlook

Throughout the thesis I tried to answer the questions that were raised in the beginning of this work. I hope I was able to demonstrate that the unprecedented development of Baku oil industry and its economic consequences were instrumental in cultural reshaping of Baku and brining life to the intellectual environment in Azerbaijan. Supported by the philanthropist oil barons like Taghiyev, the national intelligentsia created new platforms of expressing and spreading progressive ideas. Through establishing new forms of information, founding the national press, the intellectuals changed the information flow in the country. It was one the major products of the enlightenment movement that, that the first national newspaper “Akinchi” was published in 1875. Although the intellectuals could not manage to reach to all the members of the society, they set the foundations of later intellectual and academic discourses. What was significant about their struggle was their attitude towards the harmful remnants of the past, such as useless traditions and religious backwardness.

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