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HAMLET ISAKHANLI

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Wavering Azerbaijani Literati Views of America: From the Russian Tsarist through the Modern Periods

HAMLET ISAKHANLI

The historical thoughts and opinions of one nation regarding another are useful both for the purpose of analyzing global events and for understanding both nations. Until modern times, the Azerbaijani people did not have contact with the USA or widespread knowledge of American people, but throughout the past two centuries elite Azerbaijani thinkers and scholars have expressed interest in America from various viewpoints, including the political, scientific, and educational fields. The article reviews statements about the USA as they are documented in the publications by Azerbaijani historians, journalists, creative writers, educators, and politicians from the 1830s through to contemporary times. Using these documents, and poetry of Soviet times, the article analyzes Azerbaijani perspectives on America, which over time have wavered, both upwards and downwards, but often reflected the prevailing political ideology towards the USA, particularly during the Soviet period.

INTRODUCTION

Since first contact, exploration, and settlement by nonnative peoples, views of America in all its colors held by other nations have gradually taken shape. Beginning from the shock of 11 September 2001 in New York, perceptions of America, including anti-Americanism and its motivations, became a topic of heated discussion both in the USA and in other countries. Recently, other nations' opinions of America have given rise to grave anxiety in academic circles and in centers engaged in political analysis.¹

Board of Directors and Trustees, Khazar University. Email: hamlet@khazar.org. I would like to express appreciation to the reviewers of this article; their insightful criticism and recommendations to introduce new elements have made it better rounded in both content and form. I am also indebted to Martha Lawry, Alison Mandaville, and Audrey Altstadt, who have given their invaluable support and assistance in reading the article and in polishing translations of original works into English.

¹ Peter J. Katzenstein and Robert O. Kohane, eds., *Anti-Americanisms in World Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007); Brendon O'Connor, "A Brief History of Anti-Americanism: From Cultural Criticism to Terrorism," *Australian Journal of American Studies*, 23 (July 2004), 77–92.

It is a matter of great political and humane importance for each nation to be aware of how it is viewed by the rest of the world and among other nations. This subject is valuable from the standpoint of understanding global events, analyzing the complex nature of relations between great powers and small states, comprehending national movements and ethnic clashes, perceiving various trends such as globalization or terrorism, and attempting to evaluate the flow of current events. In addition, though it may be a roundabout method, information may be obtained concerning a nation's own ideals, identity, aspirations of its politicians and intellectuals, and world outlook through its views of other nations.

This article explores the general, academic and artistic knowledge about America (which, in most of the historical context of this research, will mean mainly the USA) held by a people living far from the USA and having no close contacts until modern times with the USA or with Americans: namely the Azerbaijani (or Azeri, which is not a correct term for historical reasons, but is in use, particularly in the West) people. This issue has not been a subject of special investigation either in Azerbaijan or in America; the present study is one of the first initiatives in this area with the exception of one brief article.² That is why some chronological observation of the subject is required. While understanding and evaluation of America by Azerbaijanis has steadily increased over time, it has also shifted over time across a spectrum of interests, from simple curiosity; to treating America as a model for Azerbaijan; to severe, typically ideological, criticism.

The article includes seven sections focussed on specific time periods in historical chronological order, each with its own peculiar features. The introduction surveys the subject, including remarks on the sources and time frames of research, as well as some specific usage of terminology and transliteration. The sections covered include: the nineteenth century (focussing on Bakikhanov and Akhundov); the late nineteenth century (emphasizing Zardabi); the early twentieth century (featuring the works of Sabir, Hajibeyov and Sahhat); World War I (and the diplomacy of Topchubashov); the image of America made in the Soviet Union; the Soviet Period (including general propaganda and the specific views of the poets Vurghun, Rahim, and Rza); and modern Azerbaijani views of America. Finally, the article offers conclusions.

This study aims to determine how the Azerbaijani people have historically viewed America over the course of over a century and a half, from 1828 until the end of the Soviet period, and including a brief sketch of modern times.

² Hamlet Isaxanli and Anar Ahmadov, "Azerbaijan," in David Levinson and Karen Christensen, eds., *Global Perspectives on the United States: A Nation by Nation Survey*, Volume I (Great Barrington: Berkshire Publishing Group, 2007), 29–33.

It uses only the primary sources of original writers, historians, philosophers, linguists, educators, journalists, and so on, without relying on secondary theoretical works or reviews (simply due to a lack of them). The first Azerbaijani observations of America within the nineteenth century related to the American continent in general and to the USA in particular. These early observations were accompanied largely by positive feelings, occasionally taking America as a model. Then attention shifted entirely to the US; in Soviet times the USA was a focal point from the outset due to ideology. This view was certainly not friendly in general, and the USA came under harsh criticism during the Cold War.

Before introducing the methodology of this research, it is necessary to clarify the article's usage of the terms "Azerbaijan" and "Azerbaijani." The expression "Azerbaijan" is the main component of two lands, accordingly two countries and two people: the Republic of Azerbaijan, the largest nationality in the Caucasus both by population and by territory covered, and Iranian Azerbaijan, including Azerbaijani provinces in northwest Iran. People of both countries, including more than 90 percent of the population of the Republic of Azerbaijan, speak Azeri (also called Azerbaijani or the Azerbaijani Turkic language). The term "Azeri (Azerbaijani) people" refers (albeit retroactively) to historical people who spoke this language as well as to those who still speak it. All sources point to the fact that Azerbaijan-related terminology was in use in Arab and Mongol times. For example, "The post-Mongol period brought the first flourishing of Azeri Turkish as a literary language that was far beyond Azerbaijan."³ Azerbaijan, particularly Soviet Azerbaijan, was home to minorities, including, first of all, Russians and Armenians, as well as other groups. The intention here, however, is not to investigate Russians' or other immigrant, ethnic or linguistic minorities' views of America; that is a separate subject.

How have the Azerbaijani people historically recognized the New World, America – especially the USA? What was the quality of the information they had about America? How did the knowledge and thoughts of the Azerbaijanis about America and Americans change, oscillate between the two extremes of typically positive and generally negative? What trends and dynamics can be observed in their thinking?

I attempt to show a broad spectrum of Azerbaijanis' perceptions of America, touching on areas including commerce, agriculture and environment, education and culture, politics, and ideology. This historical survey includes a more or less complete screening of available and existent Azerbaijani literature,

³ T. Swietochowski and B. C. Collins, *Historical Dictionary of Azerbaijan: A Borderland in Transition* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1999).

philosophy, and newspapers from the nineteenth century and almost all essential Azerbaijani written works of the tsarist period. In order to evaluate Azerbaijanis' attitudes towards and knowledge of America, I have used materials of scientific, educational, and historical nature from the period of Russian tsardom (also "tzardom" or "czardom"), as well as poetry from the Soviet period.

In the first period, the best illustrations of Azerbaijanis' attitudes are found in academic, media, and literary sources; for cultural and political reasons, in the second era it is precisely poetry that provides the most revealing examples. Why did Azerbaijani intellectuals and writers look for and study the Western world, particularly the United States? Before the Soviet period, the dominant tendency in the Azerbaijani intellectual movement was a philosophy of enlightenment and modernism. In contact with Russia and the Western world through Russia, and to a lesser degree through the Ottomans from the beginning of the nineteenth century, Azerbaijanis became aware of differences between the cultures and politics of East and West. Their understanding of their own culture was incomplete until it was seen in a global perspective, including the interdependence of human existence and the unity of human culture. Azerbaijani intellectuals were in search of a model for the modernization of Azerbaijani society, screening first of all the Western world. During the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, they were adept in this area, bypassing Russia by concentrating on Western Europe and North America in a search for exemplar countries.

The first writings in Azerbaijan about America concern the discovery of America, its geography, and general information; then later writings begin to include descriptions of standards of living, agriculture, environment, commerce, religion, and a certain amount of politics and education. During this period Azerbaijanis looked upon America with favor, taking examples from it and making comparisons with it (albeit on a general level), and at one time seeking help and recognition from the USA during attempts to establish independence from Russia (1918–20). Then, in Soviet Azerbaijan, until the end of World War II, America did not especially hold the center of attention; it was not sharply criticized, nor was it the object of fascination. However, with the beginning of the Cold War, the USA (and Great Britain along with it) became the pinnacle of injustice in the eyes of the Soviets and particularly the Azerbaijani press (which had no choice but follow Moscow's policy). This is also clearly shown in literature and especially in poetry. Writers fired criticism at violations of human rights, particularly infringements of the rights of black Americans, and aggressive foreign policy. Propagandists made use of every moment and opportunity, whether relevant or not, in order to attack the USA and Britain. So-called scholarly Soviet works on these "enemy" countries were totally politicized, with only negative stances, and no

balanced perspective. Here Russian, Georgian, or Azerbaijani views were principally the same. However, each Soviet nation's poetry was to a certain degree a different playing field. Poets wrote not only their personal views, but also the thoughts of their protagonists, which included Americans in particular. Poets' approaches were specific and different from each other even within one country, and they sometimes appeared more reasonable and nuanced than other forms of Soviet writing.

Before beginning the historical review, two clarifications are necessary. First, in the study of history, positive results will not be obtained by trying to learn the thoughts of the common Azerbaijani people. They had very little to no information about America. Only the most educated among them may have had knowledge of America at all, and that was through what they had heard from their distinguished contemporaries. In other words, while glancing at the past, it is possible to learn the thoughts of Azerbaijanis about America only by investigating the opinions of creative thinkers who lived and worked at that time, i.e. in the collective mind of the intellectual elite.

The second point for elucidation is related to the time when Azerbaijanis "discovered" America, which in my opinion coincides with the period of Russia's conquest of the Caucasus, including the Azerbaijani khanates of the Central, Southern and Eastern Caucasus.⁴ I have not come across any information on America in the known works of eminent Azerbaijanis who lived in the sixteenth, seventeenth, or eighteenth centuries. Understandably, Azeris had incommensurably higher awareness of Europe than of America. Even the Ottomans, who were partly in Europe and directly involved in European affairs, were scantily informed on "the establishment of Europeans on the coasts of America" and how the Christians "had won victories in the New World," and their meager information was "based almost entirely on European sources."⁵ Books like *The Muslim Discovery of Europe*, it seems, have not yet been published on the subject of America instead.

Finally, a note on transcription: during the twentieth century, Azerbaijanis changed first their Arabic-Islamic alphabet into a Latin-based alphabet (beginning in 1924), then, under the pressure of Soviet ideology, into a Cyrillic-based alphabet (1939, decreed for 1 January 1940), and lastly, after gaining independence, into a new Latin-based alphabet (beginning in 1991). Transliterations of Azerbaijani proper nouns in this article are given in their original, in the new (Latin-based) Azerbaijani alphabet, with the exception of a

⁴ A. L. Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks: Power and Identity under Russian Rule* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1992), 15–17; and T. Swietochowski, *Russia and Azerbaijan: A Borderland in Transition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 1–7.

⁵ Bernard Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1982), 34, 135, 157.

few changes accepted by various modern writers, such as “kh” instead of “x” (which borrows its phonetics from Cyrillic). For example, Akhundov is given instead of Axundov. The letters “a” or “e” are used instead of “ə” depending on the context; for example, Mirza Fatali instead of Mirzə Fətəli, and “Azerbaijan” instead of “Azərbaycan.” A few exceptions to the two rules mentioned above are also observed in the word “Azerbaijan,” where “c” from the original is replaced with “j.” Azerbaijani words with “i”, “ç” and “ş” are spelled with “ı”, “ch” and “sh” accordingly. In general, transliteration of Azerbaijani is not yet standardized. Notes will be made where there is uncertainty between “q” and “g” or other ambiguities. In general, I am forced to use these conventions and other irregularities (despite my disagreement with some of them) as they are used in modern writing.

TWO THINKERS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: BEGINNING OF AMERICAN STUDIES IN AZERBAIJAN

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Russia, which controlled Georgia, set out to completely incorporate the semi-independent Azerbaijani khanates into the empire. The influence of Russia began to manifest itself little by little in Azerbaijanis’ way of life. This influence was revealed most vividly among the bey–khan families who supported Russia. Khan Mirza Mahammad II, who had been the khan of Baku for nine years until he lost a struggle for the throne, served willingly in the Russian Army together with his six sons. The most famous of these six sons was the polymath, distinguished historian (indeed called the “father of modern Azerbaijani historiography”), linguist, poet (under the pseudonym Gudsı), philosopher, educator and translator⁶ Abbasgulu agha Bakikhanov.⁷

⁶ Hamlet Isakhanli, ed., *While Reading Abbasgulu agha Bakikhanov: Modern Problems of Azerbaijan History* (Baku: Khazar University Press, 2000); and E. M. Ahmedov, ed., “Outstanding Azerbaijani Thinker,” preface to *Abbasgulu agha Bakikhanov: Works, Notes, Letters* (in Azeri) (Baku: Elm Publishing House, 1983), 6–59.

⁷ Bakikhanov was born in 1794, completed his education in accordance with the Muslim and Iranian cultural traditions of the Middle Ages, achieved fluency in the Arabic and Persian languages, and worked as a translator and interpreter in Tbilisi in the office of the Caucasian viceroy. A. Bakikhanov learned Russian as well, and through this language he grew acquainted with Russian and European cultures. He is the author of literary, scientific, and philosophical works written in Persian, Arabic, and Azerbaijani Turkic. He participated as a translator and interpreter in the negotiations of the Turkmanchay Treaty, which was signed in 1828 between Russia and Iran, effectively dividing the Azerbaijani people between two states and defining in advance today’s borders between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Iran. This man of the arts and sciences was not only one of the most educated men of his time, but was also an esteemed nobleman and a devout Muslim. In December 1846 he passed away as a victim of cholera in close proximity to Mecca while returning from hajj.

In 1830 Bakikhanov wrote in Persian his work *Kashf-al-Garaib* (Discovery of Wonders) about the history of America's discovery, political structure, and geographic description, with the goal of informing readers about America for the first time. A substantial portion of *Kashf-al-Garaib* is devoted to Christopher Columbus's life, travels, friends and enemies, conflicts, and diplomatic activities, which he performed in both Old and New Worlds.⁸ Bakikhanov also described a number of other expeditions and discoveries related to America in the work. Sections of the book dedicated to Native Americans, relationships between Natives and people arriving from Europe, religious and political issues, and descriptions of states in North and South America show the author's intention to prepare a small encyclopedic book on America. While writing he used "books of Frank and Rome," but did not specify these sources.⁹

Bakikhanov mentioned that "in America, Europeans import and execute their own civic rules. Alongside them are many tribes still living according to ancient traditions." He explained the "noticeable treachery" of the North American tribes by their "forced subjection to oppression and servitude of the Europeans."

Bakikhanov especially noted the religious freedom, and in general, the freedom and equal rights of the people in the USA, which at that time consisted of sixteen states. "Each person can obtain information about civic affairs and may openly tell his own thoughts about the state's welfare at the Congress." He mentioned the widespread trade, town building, and general development in the USA, remarking that each state had built hospitals and schools, that industrial institutions had been created, that many newspapers were in print, and that large libraries had been opened in each city. He wrote sagaciously, "It seems that the people of this country will soon become the mightiest nation."¹⁰

This book was translated into the Azerbaijani language in 1902, but unfortunately censorship in St. Petersburg did not allow it to be published. In 1983, more than one and a half centuries after it had been written, it was translated into Russian and finally published in Baku.

Bakikhanov's younger contemporary, Mirza Fatali Akhundzade/Akhundov (1812–78) is considered a progenitor of modern Azerbaijani culture.¹¹ Akhundov wrote most of his works in the vernacular Azerbaijani, playing an important role in the development, elevation, and maintenance of the region's primary language. With his six comedies he laid the foundation of dramaturgy in the Muslim East and took decisive steps toward establishing theater. At the

⁸ Abbasgulu aga Bakhikhanov, *Kashf-al-Garaib*, in *Abbasgulu aga Bakhikhanov: Works, Notes, Letters* (in Azeri), compiled by E. M. Ahmedov (Baku: Elm Publishing House, 1983), 196–250. ⁹ *Ibid.* ¹⁰ *Ibid.* ¹¹ Swietochowski, 25–29.

same time, he wrote artistic prose and created a philosophical work radical for its time. Even while taking satirical jabs at society, he was constantly seeking out means for its development. By nature a restless man, Akhundov was a reformist. He strove to prove that the best way to completely educate the people would be to amend the Arabic alphabet or to introduce a new one. He scrutinized Islam itself for the key reasons behind the backwardness of the Muslim world (although this idea of Islamic backwardness was not shared by many other thinkers). In fact, when Azerbaijan was brought into the Russian Empire, its intellectual elite was thrown into a search for its own national identity; it may be said that they underwent an identity crisis as they were torn among multiple ethnic, linguistic, and religious identities.

On the one hand, Azerbaijanis were part of the *Ummat al-Islamiyah* or *Ummat al-mu'minin* (World Muslims, Islamic Nation). On the other hand, they saw (and slowly were attracted to) nationalist movements such as those in Russia and Europe, and, finally, they also considered ethnic identities. In the nineteenth century, as in the previous century, religious identity took precedence over national identity among commoners. The phrase "I am a Muslim" was widely used in Azerbaijan; the phrase "I am a Turk" remained under the surface. M. F. Akhundov actually argued not only against the Arabic alphabet but also against Islam; he approved of Western philosophers' positivist and materialist views. He wanted to see an Islamic analogy of the Western religious movements, citing the necessity of at least a "Protestant reformation" in Islam. In general, he was a staunch critic of the Islamic identity. In his own works, despite the fact that he did a great service to Turkic identity, he did not especially promote ethnic identity. Akhundov's vision was Western-style modernization of the Islamic world. From this perspective, his philosophical views and his desire were related to applying Western-type governance and lifestyles in Islamic countries. He sought out examples from the West.

Akhundov also envisioned that the means of developing society lay in adapting and applying the fruits of European scholarship and philosophy, and he included America in the same group of potential role models. Like his elder counterpart, Bakikhanov, he began to write a book about the discovery of America entitled "The History of Christopher Columbus, Conqueror of the New World,"¹² but for unknown reasons the work was never finished (and the precise dates of its writing are also unknown).¹³

¹² Mirze Fathali Akhundov, *Works* (in Azeri), Volume II (Baku: Elm Publishing House, 1987), 250–58.

¹³ It is possible that after beginning the work he became aware of Bakikhanov's complete work and abandoned his own.

In one of his comedies, “The Story of Botanist Doctor Monsieur Jordan and Famous Magician Dervish Mastali Shah,”¹⁴ Akhundov recalls the name of American botanist John Bartram (1699–1777) as an outstanding botanist in the words of his character, French botanist Monsieur Jordan (for whom Akhundov’s prototype was Alexis Jordan).

In 1867 Akhundov wrote a work in Persian, “A Poem about the New Alphabet,”¹⁵ in which he requested that the ruler of Iran, Nasraddin Shah (1848–1916), release himself from the clutches of his ignorant viziers. The writer also called upon the shah to learn from the heads of Western states, who placed their highest priority on the progress of their countries, specifically mentioning Abraham Lincoln, “who sacrificed his life for his country.”

In the work “Letters of Kamal-al-Dovle,”¹⁶ the author made it his goal to research the reasons why Iran¹⁷ lagged behind the world, or, more specifically, to introduce his own theory about this.¹⁸ By opening up Islam and Eastern governing styles as targets for sharp criticism, Akhundov took his character Kamal-al-Dovle on a “visit to the land of Iran after his travels to England, France, and the New World” and repeatedly held up the “New World” (*Yengi-Dünya*) as an example of a successful part of Western civilization. Referring to Henry Thomas Buckle (1821–62) he wrote,

The nationalities of Spain and Sweden and the Romans who submit to the Pope are facing a daily decline in arts and sciences because they have become too attached to religious beliefs and they listen to the talk of priests and tale-spinners. But other nations, especially the French, the English, and the New World, make progress in science and industry day by day, hour by hour, because they are free from the constraints of religion and they rely on intellect and philosophy.

Akhundov presented the development of science in a broad sense, including the humanities and social studies, as the main reason for the decreasing influence of religion in the Western world: “In most countries of Europe and the New World, the spread of science frees the people from having to live up to moral and ethical values and from the two main conditions of every religion, beliefs and worship.”¹⁹

¹⁴ Mirze Fathali Akhundov, *Works* (in Azerbaijani), Volume I (Baku: Elm Publishing House, 1962), 52–77.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 253–56.

¹⁶ This is an abbreviated title accepted in Akhundov studies. The full title is “Three Letters of the Indian Prince Kamal-al-Dovle to His Friend the Iranian Prince Jalal-al-Dovle and Jalal-al-Dovle’s Reply.”

¹⁷ It must be noted here that, according to the terminology accepted in the Middle Ages, “Iran” was general name which included both Persian Iran and Azerbaijan, as well as Persian-speaking and Turkic Azerbaijani-speaking people.

¹⁸ Mirze Fathali Akhundov, *Works* (in Azerbaijani), Volume II, 35–164.

¹⁹ Although my concern is the Azerbaijani view of America, not awareness of some specific American society on Azerbaijanis, it is interesting to know that M. F. Akhundov’s contemporary and a prominent Azerbaijani/Russian scholar in the nineteenth century,

ZARDABI: PERCEPTION THROUGH ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT

Bakikhanov and Akhundov were both educated according to Islamic traditions, and it was their talent and self-cultivation that brought them into creative writing, philosophy, social sciences, the humanities, and appreciation of the Western world. The former lived and wrote as a devout believer and the latter as a militant atheist. Another Azerbaijani intellectual who followed them, Hasan bey Melikov Zardabi (1842–1907),²⁰ differed from them in his education, areas of interest, and actions, as well as in his perception of America.

Zardabi studied at the gymnasium in Tbilisi, then upon graduation in 1861 he enrolled in Moscow State University, from which he graduated with a Magister²¹ of Science degree in 1865 from the Natural Sciences Division of the Department of Physics and Mathematics. He understood the necessity of establishing philanthropic societies, and in this way he attempted to stimulate an educational movement. In 1873 he made headway toward establishing a national theater in Azerbaijan together with his student Najaf bey Vazirov, who would later become a nationally recognized playwright. Zardabi also began pushing for changes in the field of education, successfully taking the first steps toward establishing Muslim girls' secular education in schools. The greatest service rendered by Zardabi to Azerbaijani culture and society was to publish the first legitimate newspaper in the Azerbaijani language, entitled

Alexander (Mirza) Kazim Bey (1802–70), who is considered to be “the father of Oriental studies in Russia,” was highly appraised and he became a member of some of the world's most prestigious scientific societies. Among them were the American Oriental Society (Boston), to which Mirza Kazim Bey was elected as an associate member in 1851, and the American Philosophical Society, long considered the most influential scholarly society in the United States, to which he was elected as a member on 17 January 1862. See A. K. Rzayev, *Muhammad Ali M Kazim Bey* (in Russian) (Moscow: Nauka Publishing House, 1989), 109–10; see also Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society held at Philadelphia for Promoting Useful Knowledge, available at www.archive.org/stream/proceedingsofamerio9amer/proceedingsofamerio9amer_djvu.txt. See “MIRZA Alexander Kasim Beg,” heading the list of 19 newly elected foreign members. Kazim Bey succeeded in learning flawless Persian and Arabic in addition to the native Azerbaijani Turkic of his childhood. Through the influence of Scottish missionaries he accepted Christianity in 1821, learned excellent English, and then managed to obtain a European education without attending any university thanks to his innate talent and the efforts of the missionaries. After a short time Mirza Kazim Bey (as he is known in scholarly circles) had mastered Russian and French, and aside from his work as a teacher he also displayed a great interest in scholarly research. He was subsequently appointed dean of the schools of Oriental Studies in Kazan and St. Petersburg Universities.

²⁰ Zardabi is a nickname which means “from Zardab,” which is a region of Azerbaijan.

²¹ Used in the Russian academic system at that time.

Akinchi (Plowman), in 1875–77.²² Even after censors forced the newspaper to discontinue operations, Zardabi did not give up his activity as a journalist and a writer on science and culture. Zardabi's interest in America was mainly in accord with his own inquisitiveness in the areas of human–nature interactions, agriculture, trade, education, economics, and environmental issues; he was not concerned with politics in earnest but rather more in the existing and the potential effects of global economic and cultural connections on local Azerbaijani populations.

In 1877, in the thirteenth issue of *Akinchi*, Zardabi touched on the topic of oil in Baku and the purchase and sale of land where oil was expected to be found. He explained that the fluctuation of oil prices was a result of American oil's entry into the Russian market, remarking that at first the price of oil in Baku dramatically decreased as America began to sell "oil extracts" to Russia at low rates, but then when "oil owners' cries for help were heeded, an extra fifty-cent customs fee was placed on American oil, so the oil owners' business improved again."²³ In the nineteenth issue of the newspaper he claimed that the same "customs fee" was helpful for the holders of plants and factories, but for the villagers, especially for those involved in agriculture, this tax was very damaging. To support his point, he cited calculations made by "one of the agricultural digests printed in the North American Republic."²⁴

While discussing agricultural and food products, Zardabi did not fail to mention where those products came from, the comparison of market prices, and how they could be used as raw materials. He wrote (in 1877) about American maize, tobacco, melons, sugar, and meat.²⁵

In 1892 and 1893, Zardabi wrote in the *Kaspiy* (Caspian) and *Kafkaz* (Caucasus) newspapers about a licorice root (*Glucorrhiza glabia*) that grew in different regions of Azerbaijan, including its usage in various fields and the role it played in the agricultural activities of the local cattle-breeding population. He offered his opinions about economic issues.²⁶ He wrote that a business by the name of Civilized Sailors²⁷ sent thousands of rubles each year to villages that had been all but forgotten by the world in order to purchase licorice root.

²² Up until that point, the leaflets or newspapers that were printed in Azerbaijani were episodic and insignificant.

²³ *Hasan bey Zardabi: Selected Works* (in Russian), compiled by Z. B. Goyushov (Baku: Azerbaijan State Publishing House, 1960), 120.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 204. ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 195–96, 199, 201, 205–6.

²⁶ It should be noted that most of Hasan bey's writings beginning in this period were printed in Russian-language publications for the simple reason that Azerbaijani publications were nonexistent at the time. Censorship did not allow any newspaper or magazine in Azeri to start up for over eleven years, from November 1891 to March 1903, in spite of many attempts made by Azerbaijani thinkers and journalists.

²⁷ *Prosveshennyye moreplavatel'i*, in Russian.

Zardabi shared that the government officials failed to pay attention to this issue. In order to prove his theories, he cited examples and made minor calculations. He wrote about the activities of an American businessman named Urquhart who built a factory in the Ujar region in 1888–89, about the attempts of a large company named Blis to establish a monopoly, and about the importance of carefully researching the licorice root situation from an economic perspective.²⁸ Zardabi demonstrated that competition among companies would be beneficial to the population and also noted that companies' practice of intentionally delaying the beginning of their products' harvest caused prices to drop. Incidentally, some eighty-four metric tons of licorice root was exported to the USA during a period of five years from 1890–1895.²⁹

"It might be asked what there is in common between our remote, backwards country and America, which is experiencing a silver crisis; nevertheless, this crisis is ready to raise a storm here after passing through our centers,"³⁰ the author wrote, explaining that the population had grown accustomed to selling licorice root and had become lazy. He noted that in recent years 97 percent of the licorice crop had been exported to America, noting his concern about what would become of the rural population if the Americans affected by the crisis did not buy the previous year's crop or bought only a small fraction of it.³¹ This was a comparative economic, market, and commercial study, taking into account Azerbaijani agriculture, and was a forecast of the end results of the crisis in the USA.

Zardabi enlightened his readers about new discoveries in the areas of natural sciences, ecological balance, agriculture, biology and microbiology, astronomy, education, linguistics, and everyday life. In 1900, in a written discussion about the characteristics of human and animal respiratory processes, Zardabi wrote that the era of humans ruthlessly destroying plant life had come to an end in civilized countries and, on the contrary, people had begun to cultivate plants that would clean the air. For example, ever-practical American teachers had adapted a children's holiday that was celebrated for the purpose of planting flowers and trees and had implemented it on a national scale, taking students out on trips to plant trees. He wrote,

Due to the vast number of schools in America, the tree-planting holiday quickly turned into a generally recognized people's holiday. The positive consequences of this practice were soon revealed: schools, large and small villages, graveyards and all open

²⁸ *Hasan bey Zardabi: Selected Articles and Letters* (in Russian), compiled by Z. B. Goyushov (Baku: Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences, 1962), 170–71, 179–84.

²⁹ *Kavkazskiy Calendar for 1899* (Tiflis, 1898).

³⁰ See Marshall Gramm, "The Free Silver Movement in America: A Reinterpretation," *Journal of Economic History*, 64 (Dec. 2004), 1108–29.

³¹ *Hasan bey Zardabi: Selected Articles and Letters*, 184–85.

spaces were covered in green, and because of this holiday the number of trees in the United States increased by 400 million.

The author added that he wished the same type of holiday were celebrated in Transcaucasia, especially in Baku schools.³²

Only a few days later, another of Zardabi's articles was published describing a system to unify mental development with manual labor in schools. After outlining the importance and brief history of this concept, the article moves to its main theme, which is a detailed discussion of the new American school reforms such as those carried out and written about by Charles Hanford Henderson.³³ In these schools the application of manual labor was quite different from the idea of vocational schools; rather, it was used only for the purpose of moral and character development. The author described five types of school applying this model, giving information about their curriculum. He expressed his absolute assurance that the schools would be successful, mainly based upon Henderson's personal supervision of them. The central philosophy of the schools was to develop the "whole" person in each child, harmonizing their intellectual, spiritual, and physical development.³⁴

Zardabi often referred to subjects such as cholera, malaria, communicable diseases and their carriers, nutrition, and hygiene (which were of the essence for Azerbaijan), writing about the vital importance of taking preventative measures. He recalled the difficulty and expense of draining wide swampy areas in North America and methods used by prominent American entomologist Leland Ossian Howard³⁵ to combat mosquitoes, including pouring small amounts of kerosene into stagnant water to kill larvae and eggs. Two years later, on 30 July 1902, Zardabi returned to the same topic, giving an interesting summary of French, Italian, and English scientists' theories about mosquito infestation. He wrote, "Recently much ground has been won in the struggle against mosquitoes. Let's begin from the States of North America." He went on to discuss the latest fascinating developments, including the successes of a sanitation group led by Dr. Alvah H. Doty on Staten Island in the bay of New York, noting that booklets had been distributed among the population regarding malaria, and recommended prophylactic measures.³⁶ He also wrote that "the energy and determination characteristic of Americans

³² *Ibid.*, 287–89.

³³ Henderson (1861–1941) was the director of the Pratt Institute High School in New York City and director of Chestnut Hill Academy, and he was known not only for his practical work but also for the fictional and educational works he authored, including *Education and the Larger Life* (1902) and *What Is It to Be Educated?* (1914).

³⁴ *Hasan bey Zardabi: Selected Articles and Letters*, 287–89.

³⁵ Chief of the Bureau of Entomology in the US Department of Agriculture, 1894–1927.

³⁶ Compare with the title of an article published in the *New York Times*, 3 Aug. 1901: "War on Mosquitoes Begins: Dr. Doty Starts His Crusade against Those of Staten Island."

delivered great results in their mass struggle against mosquitoes” in Havana as well. In the same piece, Zardabi cited the 15 June 1901 issue of the magazine *Scientific American* on the topic of the successful battle of American military units against mosquitoes carrying yellow fever and malaria.³⁷

Another of Zardabi’s works entitled “Earth, Water, and Air” printed in the *Hayat* (Life) newspaper in 1905 was devoted to the popular interpretation of selected issues in ecology and geography, which, from time to time, included US cases as good models, particularly on the topic of coal formation.³⁸

After Zardabi passed away, Azerbaijanis studying in Kiev (Yusif Vazirov, a future writer nicknamed Chamanzaminli, and others) translated into Russian his published work “Keeping the Body Healthy Should Be Life’s Formula” and published it under the title “Hygiene.” This work, which shed light on a very important subject for its time, introduced choice topics in simple language, had the impact of a small textbook, and is still read today with interest. For example, he writes on nutrition, “There are few people in America but much open space. That is why they raise many cattle there and meat is cheap.” Zardabi reminded readers that meat had been shipped in large quantities from America to Europe in refrigerated ships, adding the new piece of interesting information (considering the past technology) that “in the present one new business has been formed just to import and sell gravy.”

In discussing what the population drinks, the author shared information about “how much coffee, tea, and cocoa are consumed in the world” and stated that “cocoa is a grass seed that comes from America” (here “America” refers to the continent). From a comparison of the average amount of coffee, tea, and cocoa that one person would drink per year in England, France, Germany, Austria, and America, it is evident that America took first place for drinking the most coffee and Germany came in second; for tea, England took first place and America the second; and for cocoa, France took first place and America the second.³⁹ He disseminated information on everyday drinks apparently simply to increase awareness among Azerbaijani readers about drinks, their sources, and their use in various countries, including the USA.

Discussing international trade, particularly with the USA, Zardabi was cautious about rivalry, wanting to protect Azerbaijan’s interests. But in various ecological and educational issues, particularly in the struggle with malaria, which at that time was pertinent to Azerbaijan, he looked for ways to obtain the same or similar progress in Azerbaijan. He was well aware of developments in the USA and Canada in ecology, agriculture, and related areas, staying current with international publications in these areas.

³⁷ *Hasan bey Zardabi: Selected Articles and Letters*, 310–13, 419–24.

³⁸ *Hasan bey Zardabi: Selected Works*, 260.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 434–35.

THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: “AMERICAN METHOD” IN APPLICATION

One distinctive trait of the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth was the rise of political activity in the Russian Empire, the development of a multiparty system, and an enlivening of national awareness. In Muslim-populated provinces, commoners' adversaries were first of all their own modernists, who challenged orthodox life and introduced alien ideas of reform into education; who developed newspapers, magazines, and theaters of new types; and who initiated unusual lifestyles. According to one poetic expression of that time, the number of reformists, or “Russian-minded” people (*urusbaşdılar*), increased day by day (in the words of M. A. Sabir – see below). No special anti-Western feelings are observed among the Azerbaijani general public in that period, but poetry and fiction reveal that Russians were cultivating national modernists (Westerners were seen as outsiders, but Russians were commanding insiders). National intellectuals and politicians first looked toward Russia in their search for new models of cultural autonomy and the right to representation in governance, but then, on the eve of World War I and in the immediate postwar period, for the majority of them the search became a struggle for national independence.

Mirza Alakbar Sabir (1862–1911), remembered as the satiric poet of Azerbaijan, was successful in his attempts to describe in humorous poetic form the backwardness, problems, and ignorance of the society and government in which he lived, as well as those of Iran and the Ottomans.⁴⁰ In a small poem that he wrote in the last year of his life and published in the *Yeni Haqiqat* (New Reality) newspaper, he imagined a meeting between American scientist John William Draper (1811–82) and Turkish writer Ahmad Midhat (1845–1912) in which Sabir demonstrated their different attitudes toward religion.⁴¹ Sabir illustrated in his poetic language that Midhat viewed atheism as a disaster and therefore France, which was considered a cradle of

⁴⁰ His poems, published mainly in the popular, finely illustrated *Molla Nasraddin* satiric magazine, made the magazine famous and made Sabir himself popular at the same time.

⁴¹ Draper is the author of *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe*, *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science*, and *Life of Franklin*. The second work, written in 1874, was translated into several languages. It is possible that Sabir saw the translation in Russian or Turkish, or became acquainted with Draper's thoughts in French through his very knowledgeable poet and doctor friend, Abbas Sahhat. Ahmed Midhat was an Ottoman writer, journalist, and translator. While highly appraising of Western science, art, and business, he simultaneously defended the preservation of moral values of Ottoman society, including religious affiliation (he was against religious devaluation). In order to disambiguate himself from renowned politician Ahmed Midhat Pasha, he went by the name of Ahmed Midhat Efendi.

culture, as a “terrible desert of the wilderness”; however, Draper claimed that it was religion, not science, that led to ignorance, and pointed out that the church had been separated from the state in Europe.⁴² Thus Sabir informed his readers about the secular nature of European and American society and the diversity of attitudes toward religion among Western countries.

Uzeyir bey Hajibeyov (1885–1948), a composer who is considered the father of the professional music school of modern Azerbaijan, was a prominent music theorist, organizer of music education, writer, journalist, politician, statesman, and pedagogue. His writings display a notably positive view of American scholarship. For example, his article “Russian Language Education in Our National Schools,” published in the *Taraqqi* (Progress) newspaper in 1909, dealt with foreign-language education, in this case the Russian language, drawing a comparison between the teaching methods known as the “translation method” and the “natural method” (i.e. by means of what is now called a communicative approach).⁴³ He claimed that “languages . . . should be taught by the ‘natural method’; otherwise, if we rely on the ‘translation method,’ the very language cannot be taught or learned.” Hajibeyov explained this clash of methods from an academic and pedagogical perspective. Nor did he neglect the history of the method he espoused, saying, “The ‘natural method,’ like many other useful things, came from America.”⁴⁴ “Children of immigrants to America” learned the language quickly by playing with and speaking to American children. He also showed that “the easiest way to learn any foreign language is to teach the child using that very language.” That method was in fact called the “American method” before acquiring the label “natural method.” Hajibeyov published several more pieces to defend and explain this “American method” and its applications.⁴⁵

In stating that his (Azerbaijani) people were deprived of many blessings enjoyed in other nations and were living far below a socially acceptable standard of welfare because of their lack of education, he wrote that “not to study, not to invest in academics, is a great and dangerous error.” He presented the idea that “educated and cultured peoples trample on peoples deprived of culture everywhere,” acquire their property, and destroy the people themselves. By example, he pointed out that the native population of “America, which is half of the world,” was made up of uncultured tribes, and for this reason they were helpless against the “educated Europeans.”⁴⁶

Hajibeyov also claimed that should his people remain uneducated and uncultured, “we are digging a deep hole for ourselves,” and consequently “they

⁴² Mirza Alakbar Sabir, *Hophopname* (in Azeri) (Baku: Yazichi Publishing House, 1980), 300.

⁴³ Uzeyir Hajibeyov, *Selected Works* (in Azeri) (Baku: Yazichi Publishing House, 1985), 102–6.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 121–30.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 124.

will trample us just like the savages of America and Australia.”⁴⁷ From another perspective, he discussed the decisive role that societal conditions can play in the development and discovery of talent, writing,

if Edison were born and lived among us today, he would say that the extraordinary machines he discovered were devilry. Maybe those among us who say ‘devilry’ to Edison’s invention, if they were born and raised in Europe, could have also offered services to humanity as did Edison.⁴⁸

Therefore Hajibeyov praised American and European societies, which established fruitful conditions for discovering the gifts and motivating the creative works of citizens, contrary to Azerbaijani society at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In the first two decades of the twentieth century in Azerbaijani society, interest in learning from Western knowledge, arts, and skills increased. Abbas Sahhat (1874–1918), a prominent participant in Azerbaijani Romanticism and considered to be the founder of the Azerbaijani professional school of poetic translation, wrote in 1912, “Europeans have translated famous Arab and Persian writers’ works into their own languages completely. In that case, why shouldn’t we translate Europeans’ works into our language? Why not learn what we don’t know?”⁴⁹ The poet–translator hoped that his translations of poetry would play a great role in raising up new forms of poetry with a new spirit; in a word, to create a “new poem:” “I wish our poets who do not speak foreign languages would write *nezires* and create new fine works, and in this way I want our literature to be enriched and to progress.”⁵⁰

WORLD WAR I AND AFTERWARDS: FACE TO FACE WITH AMERICANS

After World War I and the Russian Revolution of 1917, the independent Azerbaijani Democratic Republic (First Azerbaijani Republic)⁵¹ of

⁴⁷ Uzeyir Hajibeyov, “We Don’t Know Our Own Value” (in Azeri), *Hagigat* newspaper, 1 Jan. 1910.

⁴⁸ Uzeyir Hajibeyov, *Selected Works*, 143.

⁴⁹ Abbas Sahhat, *Maghrib Guneshleri* (Western Suns), Introduction; see Kamal Talibzade, *Selected Works in Two Volumes*, Volume I (Baku: Azerbaijan Dovlet Neshriyyati, 1991).

⁵⁰ Poets of the Islamic Middle Ages traditionally wrote many poems and sketches which were taken from previous famous poets, such as Ferdowsi, Nizami, etc.; these were accordingly called *nezires* to Ferdowsi, Nizami, etc. See Kamal Talibzade, 348.

⁵¹ Incidentally, the First Azerbaijani Republic was the first democratic republic in the Muslim world. The Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic, 1920–90, was the Second Azerbaijani Republic (the period between First Republic and the time of signing a formal Soviet Union agreement among Sovietized republics, including Azerbaijan, at the end of 1922, can be regarded as part of the Second Azerbaijani Republic because of its Bolshevik nature); the third Republic is the new independent Republic of Azerbaijan beginning from 1991.

28 May 1918 to 28 April 1920 was established.⁵² During this period of national, political, and social awareness, and of turmoil, the leaders of Azerbaijan concentrated their efforts on recognition of the new republic by Western allies, particularly by the United States. Establishment of relations with the USA and its help in political and other spheres was vital for the Azerbaijani government, specifically the delegation attending the Paris Peace Conference, led by the chairman of Azerbaijan's parliament, Alimardan bey Topchubashov (1862–1934).⁵³ Topchubashov worked very hard for national independence and international recognition and managed to obtain an audience with President Woodrow Wilson to discuss these issues.

Azerbaijani participants were well aware of US President Wilson's view of a postwar world, his Fourteen Points (8 January 1918), and his intention to resolve territorial disputes and create new nations out of obsolete empires. The Azerbaijani delegation was especially anxious about Wilson's Armenian interests and his failed efforts to have the USA accept a mandate from the League of Nations to take over Armenia.

On the morning of 28 May 1919, former US ambassador to the Ottoman Empire Henry Morgenthau met with Topchubashov. In the afternoon on the same day, Wilson hosted the Azerbaijani delegation. In conversation with the US President, Topchubashov emphasized several key points: that information the world was receiving about Azerbaijan was distorted; that the Azerbaijan Republic had everything it needed to live independently; and, finally, that he agreed that it would be possible to found a Caucasus Confederation (the latter idea was proposed not by Caucasians but by the USA and its allies). A memorandum with introductory information on Azerbaijan was presented to Wilson. The memorandum balanced the request to be "recognized by the USA and receive USA military support" with the promise that "if we are accepted, we will pay back our portion of Russia's debts to Western governments."⁵⁴

Wilson responded cautiously in the meeting, saying that the problem of Russia must be solved first, and then that of Azerbaijan, and that it was more

⁵² Swietochowski, *Russia and Azerbaijan*, 56–103; Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, 74–107.

⁵³ Topchubashov (or Topchubashi) graduated from St. Petersburg University's School of Law, was the editor of *Kaspi* newspaper in Baku, and was actively involved in political activity on the eve of the First Russian Revolution of 1905, soon becoming the leader of the whole Muslim population of the Russian Empire, particularly as the head of the Muslim faction of the Russian State Duma. Elected the head of Parliament of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan (*in absentia*), he also became head of the Azerbaijani delegation at the Paris Peace Conference. After the Bolsheviks gained power in Azerbaijan, he remained in Paris, was politically active within émigré circles, and died in Paris.

⁵⁴ "Memoire adressé par le Delegation à la Conférence de la paix de République de l'Azerbaïdjan du Caucase A. M. Topchibacheff le Président Wilson. Paris, Le 28 mai 1919." *Bulletin d'information de l'Azerbaïdjan*, 1 (1 Sept. 1919), 6–7.

natural for the Caucasus to be a federation than to be made up of small countries.⁵⁵ The Azerbaijani delegation seems to have been confused by President Wilson's conflicting views and actions.⁵⁶

After this meeting the Azerbaijani government made a decision to begin lobbying activities in the USA, "upon the advice of our American Jewish acquaintances."⁵⁷ They signed an agreement with the former (and future) US representative from New York, Walter M. Chandler, on 11 January 1920 (jointly with some other new states). A contract was also signed with an experienced adviser on economic and financial affairs.⁵⁸ Topchubashov believed that "it is necessary to have someone on our side in America."⁵⁹ It appears that the Azerbaijani government had much more information on the American government and society of that time than the American government and media had on Azerbaijan. The *Christian Science Monitor* published numerous articles during this time on the situation in the Caucasus and "had little idea on actual events in Trans-Caucasia or Eastern Anatolia. Its editor thought that Tartars⁶⁰ and Azerbaijanis were distinct peoples."⁶¹

The Harbord Mission (the American Military Mission to Armenia) was sent to study the situation of the Near East, specifically that of Armenians, in the summer of 1919. "Only one Turk, the prime minister of Azerbaijan, was mentioned as a possible source of information."⁶² As a matter of fact, the person mentioned was not a prime minister, but the chairman of the Azerbaijani parliament. Topchubashov met with US Colonel William Haskell (Allied High Commissioner for Armenia) in Paris and discussed issues of mutual interest with him in November 1919.

Despite the American President's cold reception of the Azerbaijani delegation, the Allied Supreme Council recognized the de facto independence of Azerbaijan, together with Georgia and Armenia, on 20 January 1920, as Bolshevik aggression strengthened. Frankly speaking, this gesture was more an anti-Bolshevik measure than real support for these new independent states.

⁵⁵ Topchubashov, "Письма из Парижа" (Letter from Paris) (Baku, 1998), 38.

⁵⁶ Hamlet Isaxanli and Anar Ahmadov, "Azerbaijan," in Levinson and Christensen, *Global Perspectives*, 29–33. ⁵⁷ Topchubashov, "Letter from Paris," 50–51.

⁵⁸ J. Hasanli, "Azerbaijani–American Relations from 1918–1920: A Page in Their History," *Caspian Crossroads*, 2, 1 (Spring–Summer 1996), 1–9, 7.

⁵⁹ Topchubashov, "Letter from Paris," 72.

⁶⁰ In the Russian period, Azerbaijanis living in the Caucasus were also called "Tatars" or "Azerbaijani Tatars."

⁶¹ Justin McCarthy, *The Turk in America* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2010), 450. ⁶² *Ibid.*, 277.

IMAGES OF THE WEST CREATED BY SOVIET IDEOLOGY

During the Soviet period, knowledge about America among Azerbaijanis had already spread beyond the monopoly of a few elite people. The abolition of illiteracy and development of secondary and higher education meant that ordinary citizens were increasingly informed about world issues and particularly about Europe, America and the Third World. Even during a period in which Soviet ideology was very convincing, there were independent and unique views taken up by educated and aware people in Azerbaijan who tried to see the world through their own eyes, difficult as that task might have been. They had, however, no opportunity to publish their own works or to see those of others beyond the state, since nothing was printed in literary or media sources that fell outside the principles of Soviet ideology.

This was especially true after the end of World War II, when the world split into two camps that were mutual enemies. The Cold War became the main ideological determinant, and the “written attitude” of the Soviet Union toward the United States and the capitalist world in general was consistent: that “people act like wolves toward one another” there, exploit each other, morality has been destroyed, and human rights are trampled, especially those of the blacks. Azerbaijani writers and publicists also aimed sharp criticism at America for the same reasons; the possibility that there could be anything good about America was almost never discussed. At this point we must note that the Azerbaijani people’s identity and their government ideology went in two different directions as a divided nation. We are discussing here only the Soviet Azerbaijani case. Iranian Azerbaijan (or Southern Azerbaijan) had its own agenda (see, for instance, Swietochowski and Shaffer⁶³).

It is generally known that during those times, in the whole world, including America, leftist movements were gaining favor in academic and artistic circles. According to a well-established Soviet view which was, based on loss of life and property, not far from the truth, the Soviet Union had carried the heavier portion of the weight of World War II on its shoulders and had been a decisive factor in producing the Allies’ victory in that war. In addition, the Soviet Union had achieved incomparable successes in many fields, such as education, health, employment, and social security. In that context, a majority of Soviet people, certain circles in the West, and many in the Third World believed that socialism was, in fact, superior to the system of capitalism led by

⁶³ Swietochowski, *Russia and Azerbaijan*; B. Shaffer, *Borders and Brethren: Iran and the Challenge of Azerbaijani Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

the USA and believed that this superiority would gradually lead to increased Soviet success.⁶⁴

Soviet-era Marxism continued to beckon to poor and oppressed people across the world with its philosophy of revolution and liberation for all. From this perspective, America was seen as an exploiter of Third World countries who chose the path of capitalism. If in the eyes of Azerbaijani intelligentsia at the beginning of the twentieth century Russia was a colonizer but at the same time a modernizing power, with the establishment of the Soviet Union this phenomenon became clearly ideological: Westerners were now viewed as the long-time colonizers. In other words, attitudes toward America were largely fueled and shaped by general Soviet pressures, not by Azerbaijan's internally developed views. The Soviet government centrally controlled and directed writings devoted to the history and culture of Muslims and others, as well as the history and politics of the Western capitalist world. Azerbaijani writers and social scientists in Soviet times, especially in the Cold War period, lacked information concerning America or the UK, and they had political difficulty in screening information from unofficial sources.

In the competition between the USA and the Soviet Union, after news spread within the Soviet Union about the developing lifestyle on the other side of the ocean, and after the lies of the Soviet propaganda had been revealed, confidence in socialism began to fade and even ordinary people became aware that America was not as bad as it had been depicted. Slogans like "*dognat' i peregnat' Ameriku*" – Russian for "catch up to America and overtake it" – later resulted in the creation of anecdotes among the people that would appear, of course, only in spoken language.

Soviet sources confirm that anti-American and anti-British Soviet propaganda was carried out weakly abroad, but quite strongly within the Soviet Union. Among the main reasons for this discrepancy of power in internal versus external propaganda are the fact that Soviet propaganda and criticism abroad were not carried out efficiently due to a complete lack of talented propagandists and critics, the weakness of polemic methodologies used, and the fact that they not only limited themselves to defense but also carried out this defense poorly.⁶⁵ Often the Soviet anti-propagandists who were meant to fire criticism at America and Great Britain were not given sufficient opportunity to completely absorb or understand the Western written materials they were instructed to criticize. Well-known Soviet writer and literary critic Korney Chukovski's words on this topic

⁶⁴ Hamlet Isakhanli, "Political Leaders and Social-Political Ideals: Mammad Amin Rasulzade," *Khazar View* (now *Khazar Review*), 174 (2004), 8–13, 175 (2004), 6–11, at 175, 8–9.

⁶⁵ Vladimir Pechatnov, *Stalin, Roosevelt, Truman: Soviet Union and the US during the 1940s* (in Russian) (Moscow: Terra-Knijnyi Klub, 2006), 464–81.

are very revealing: “We want to inform them [Western readers], but it is necessary to inform us as well . . . they [our officials] speak about the genre that is most appropriate for their [Western readers’] spirits. But we don’t know their spirits.”⁶⁶

AZERBAIJANI SOVIET POETS’ SENSITIVITIES TO AMERICA

Seemingly in line with standard propaganda, Samad Vurghun (1906–56), a leader in Azerbaijani–Soviet poetry and a well-known figure of Soviet literature, wrote many works in praise of communism in addition to his philosophical, patriotic, and love poetry. In these works he also brought out some generally undeniable shortcomings of capitalism. Yet, by analyzing the theme of America in his writings, it is possible to gain some insight into the general attitude of the Azerbaijani literary and media community towards the USA. As the most famous Azerbaijani poet, even during his own time, Vurghun’s poems reached a wider audience, at the same time giving a slightly different picture of America than did the official propaganda.

While he agreed with some elements of the official party line (for example, critique of racism in the USA), Vurghun displayed his talent by remaining professional and balanced when writing about the USA in the face of the general Soviet tendency to smother it in harsh criticism. He worked, first of all, to create a readable political and poetic picture that would also stick close to reality. In 1948 he wrote “The Dreams of the Negro” upon his return from, and still under the influence of, the International Congress of Cultural Workers Defending Peace (World Congress of Intellectuals, in American sources) held in Wrocław, Poland. The protagonist of the poem is an African American painter who speaks from a podium about his desire for all blacks to be equal American citizens. He also repeatedly praises America for its natural beauty, speaking of his warm love for his motherland.

This praise of America, in a poem in which the main subject was critique of the nation, demonstrates Vurghun’s desire to give Soviet readers a fair description of both the country and its racial problem, refusing to turn a blind eye to the issues of injustice there, even while he was constrained by ideological directives.

The Negro painter begins his speech by describing his homeland:

America – the New World is my motherland,
My ancestor’s bones decayed under this soil . . .
The sea is mine, the air is mine; the soil and sky are mine!

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 482.

My dreams have nested on every branch, on every leaf.
I love my homeland with a sacred love.
My artist's heart is enamored with every single evening and morning,
The paintings I have created hold the beauty of the dawn and twilight.⁶⁷

The black painter continues,

As I have declaimed, America – the New World is my home,
I so love my motherland's rivers, ever-flowing
Its snowy winters and spring months
The black soil from which I was born is a mine of gold and silver.

But, according to Vurghun, what is the Negro painter's life like in the land of his birth, which he loves with all his heart? Does he have the right to move and live as he wishes? Vurghun goes on in the artist's voice:

On a day of travel, if I grow hungry or thirsty,
If I ask passers-by about a diner,
I only read the words "You are black . . ." in their expressions,
Tell me; how can I tolerate this sorrow all my life?
...
Yes! – Said the Negro – my homeland is foreign to me,
And such a separation, such a burden, ages me before my time!

The proud and thoughtful artist who loves his land and its natural environment cannot bear the injustice he experiences and cries out,

Do I have the right to live here?
Can one live as human without a home?⁶⁸

So what does Vurghun's main character want and hope for? How does he want to see America change?

Let both the white and the black
Breathe happily!
In the pictures I have painted
May human love be victorious
For its effort and bravery.⁶⁹

Certainly, given an ideology of equality and shared power, the Soviet poet cannot be indifferent to the situation of this American man of art and, indeed, to the situation of all his countrymen; he calls for uprising and vengeance. In this poem, Vurghun now tries to put himself in the place of this American and

⁶⁷ The translations of this and all the poems to follow are philological/literal, not poetic. These and all other translations in this article are by the present author, written exclusively for this article.

⁶⁸ *Samad Vurghun: Works* (in Azeri), Volume III, *Long Poems* (Baku: Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences, 1961), 360. ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 362.

imagine what might have crossed the artist's mind. He stops the black man's speech to catch his breath, saying,

America: each decision and each decree is given by time,
Know that the vengeance of the slave world is terrible.⁷⁰

As the poem continues, the poet finds himself lost in thought. He sees the awakening of the ancient East, he greets the warring Chinese people, he rejoices at seeing Europe shaken and the golden banners of communism waving in Rome and Paris. It is noteworthy that the poet, sympathizing with the American black's situation and bringing it to his readers' attention, did not allude to the issue of whether banners of communism would wave in America.⁷¹ Why this omission? I propose that the primary reason is Vurghun's intention not to distort objective reality. There was not a strong socialist movement in the United States as there was in France and Italy.

A certain anti-Americanism does appear in his official account of the International Congress.⁷² He quoted the words of French representative Marcel Prenam: "The most dangerous country for academics and culture for my motherland France is America." In this article the new target of Soviet ideology – "English and American imperialism" – was already the focus of attention:

Sir Taylor, a reactionary and hypocritical politician who came from England, said the following for the purpose of defending America's current aggressive plans: "Likening American democracy to fascism must not be allowed." He presented the Marshall Plan as if it were America's aid to the countries damaged by fascism.⁷³

As an aside, thoughts on the comparison of American politics with the politics of Hitler's Germany were first delivered in a speech by Albert E. Kahn from the USA.⁷⁴

Even in reports written in prose on the Congress mentioned above, Vurghun was much softer in his language towards the USA than was Alexander Fadeyev (Soviet writer, head of the Soviet delegation to the Congress), who directed very harsh criticism toward writers loyal to capitalism, using such severe words as "jackals" or "hyenas" in his plenary speech at the Congress.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 366.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 366–68.

⁷² *Samad Vurghun: Works* (in Azeri), Volume VI, *Articles, Lectures, Speeches, Congratulations and Essays* (Baku: Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences, 1972), 115–32.

⁷³ *Samad Vurghun: Works* (in Azeri), Volume III, 126, 129–30.

⁷⁴ See section "World Congress of Intellectuals, Aug. 25–28, 1948," in "Report on the Communist 'Peace' Offensive: A Campaign to Disarm and Defeat the United States." (Washington, DC, 1 Apr. 1951), prepared and released by the Committee on Un-American Activities, US House of Representatives, 8–10.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Who is the African American painter who is the model for the protagonist of the poem “The Dreams of the Negro”? Vurghun does not name him either in this work or in his written report about the Wrocław Congress at which he met the artist. The poet introduces him only as a Negro American painter. However, in the same report he does list the names of speakers who visited the congress from various countries, along with information about their presentations. Unfortunately, searches I have made in both the West and the East have not yet been successful in clarifying the identity of this painter.

In the same poem, Vurghun creates an image of another character, beginning with the line “Who is that, sir? – He is Taylor.” In contrast to the Negro painter, this character, Taylor, angers Vurghun; he is a “devil in a hat.” Taylor’s identity is easily discovered. Oxford don Alan John Percivale Taylor (1906–90) was actually close to Vurghun in his political views. The famous British historian and public intellectual Taylor was a socialist, anti-imperialist, and anti-Americanist who openly approved of the Soviet Union and its foreign policy, loved Lenin, and called on Britain to be an ally not of the USA but of the Soviet Union.

The reason for Vurghun’s sharp judgment and exposure of Taylor can undoubtedly be explained by Taylor’s anti-Stalinism and sabotage of Stalinist plans at the Wrocław Congress (Vurghun may also not have been completely aware of the characteristics making Taylor similar to him). On the day after Fadeyev, Vurghun’s colleague and friend, made a Stalinist speech, Taylor’s speech proclaiming tolerance and defending the right to think differently from the highest powers won favor in the Congress, refuting Fadeyev and in a certain sense ruining the Congress’s Stalinist plans.⁷⁶

In his poem “Lenin’s Book” written two years later, Vurghun attacked Washington more openly and more vigorously:

Let us pour our poems from lead
Let each word weigh a ton
Let our poems speak like heavy artillery
On the nest of sedition, Washington!⁷⁷

This is a graphic example of how words were sometimes used more aggressively than weapons during the Cold War. This type of thought reflects how the general attitude of the poet towards America had become aggravated. Now not only Europe, but also America, which had so recently during World War II

⁷⁶ Alan John Percivale Taylor, *A Personal History* (London: H. Hamilton, 1983); Kathleen Burk, *Troublemaker: The Life and History of A. J. P. Taylor* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

⁷⁷ “Lenin’s Book,” *Samad Vurghun: Works* (in Azeri), Volume III, 438.

been the Soviets' allied power, was its rival. In his poem "My Oath," the poet wrote,

We founded cities in deserts, where grass never grew
Just to make Europe and America jealous!⁷⁸

In the poem "Eduard Maze" (1950) concerning the French working-class movement, he hinted at the French–American confrontation:

France will not be a slave to Washington
Voltaire's motherland cannot be enslaved!⁷⁹

In another poem, "The Sun Rises to the Old East" (1950), the poet spoke about the Soviet army, victorious over fascism, and about the new enemy of the Soviet Union and other nations. The poet's voice dripped with hate for Harry Truman and for the Vatican – "to that killer, to that executioner . . . the one who gives blessings, who tries to wear the garb of God on the ground" – Vurghun aligns religion with the West and bitterly tells how Americans punished the Korean people during the Korean War:

Truman also loves God;
His voice is heard from the churches
He prays in the mornings
While planes coming from Washington
Pour bombs into the cities of Korea.

But the victory is with us, "And China, and India, and the people of Brazil, and the fields of Asia" join in reply to our voice, and

Truman also listens to the voice of the soil.
Even that executioner listens,
Trembling begins in his soul
When he thinks about the future.⁸⁰

Vurghun addressed the Iranian–American connection under the Shah Pahlavi regime in his article "Glory to the Heroes" (1949), dedicated to the Azerbaijanis' recent struggle for freedom in Iran.⁸¹

The modern Iranian political system and the whole Iranian reaction, which are selling the honor and self-esteem of the Iranian people for American dollars and filling a

⁷⁸ "My Oath," *Samad Vurghun: Works* (in Azeri), Volume II, *Poems* (Baku: Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences, 1960), 246.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 250.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 252–56.

⁸¹ The Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan was established at the end of 1945 in Iranian Azerbaijan under the shadow of Soviet intervention in northern Iran (and Great Britain's intervention in southern Iran) in the summer of 1941. It soon collapsed after evacuation of the Soviet Army from Iran in May of 1946. See Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War: The Soviet–American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941–1946* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006).

“faithful servant” role for American imperialists, are being met with the endless detestation and imprecation of the civilized world . . . Now American imperialism also is passing into its own final, sunset season!⁸²

The poet’s article “The Sun of Russian Poetry,” written for the 150th anniversary of A. S. Pushkin’s birth, not only reveals the sentiments of Vurghun, but also shows the distinctive style of Soviet propaganda of the 1940s and 1950s, which never missed any opportunity, whatever the topic or the political situation, to lash out against America and England. He writes, “The sense of humanism in his [Pushkin’s] affective poetry still helps all Soviet nations in the struggle against the enemies of liberty and independence, against American and English imperialists, and against each and every kind of despot.”⁸³

The articles that Vurghun wrote in 1950 and 1951, “We are Flag-Bearers of Peace” and “Peace Is a Wish of all Soviet People,” which compared the two socioeconomic systems, describe his thoughts about the “wars of aggression which are carried out by modern American and English imperialists,” how “America is not able to escape from the economic crisis” but “spills the blood of Korean people,” prepares “an attack on China” and desires to “capture the Soviet countries, plundering and carrying the beautiful blessings of our native land to Washington and London.” In his article “We Are Building Communism” (1952) he asks, “what is the explanation for the situation in which 80 percent of the American budget is spent on armament”? The poet concluded that the result of such expenditure was starvation, misery, and deprivation in the USA.⁸⁴ In his carefully prepared plenary lecture for the second Soviet All-Union Congress (1954), About Soviet Poetry, he made an anti-imperialist comment only once when, in praising the poem “Indian Ballad” by Uzbek poet M. Tursunzade, he said that “all of these happenings awaken the rage of the reader against the tyranny of English/American imperialism.”⁸⁵ Thus Vurghun’s work on the USA reflects both balanced views and ideological rhetoric (although the latter occurs more in his articles and speeches than in poetry).

Towards the end of his poetic/literary activity from 1951 to 1956, Vurghun became cautious in his views on America and on the West in general; his poetry showed more philosophical and patriotic sentiments than political. He did not touch on America in his poetic writings, only expressing critical thoughts occasionally in some notes and a few speeches. He corrected some of his previous poems’ harsh criticism of the West and Western statesmen in further editions of his publications. Revising the first publication of

⁸² *Samad Vurghun: Works* (in Azeri), Volume VI, 136.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 199, 227–28, 237.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 358.

“The Dreams of the Negro,” one section of twenty-six lines sharply criticizing Truman and Churchill was cut.⁸⁶ In addition, four lines that he wrote in 1950 in his poem “Lenin’s Book” criticizing Churchill were also cut from the second edition.⁸⁷ In his last long and enthusiastically written poem dedicated to the history of the communist movement, “Standard Bearer of the Age” (1953), he focusses on Europe and Russia, but in contrast to his lengthier remarks on France, Italy, and others, he deems it sufficient to make only one mention of America, reminding readers of “the voice of Robeson, lover of freedom,” and mentioning his songs, which grew popular worldwide.⁸⁸

Vurghun’s contemporaries, the comparatively long-lived Azerbaijani Soviet poets Mammad Rahim (1907–77) and Rasul Rza (1910–81), also cultivated attitudes of distaste toward America. Writing on the internal politics of the USA, they mainly touched on the violations of African Americans’ rights. In his poem “Letter to Paul Robeson” (1950),⁸⁹ Rahim talked about getting acquainted with this famous singer, actor, and civil rights activist in Moscow, the restrictions the USA had placed on him, his persecution, and how the American secret police had followed his every step. Rahim praised him as the “steadfast soldier of peace.” Similarly, Rza wrote about the unbearable conditions of black children in the USA in his 1961 and 1963 poems “Two Worlds” and “The Ballad of Willie the Negro Boy.” The son of a poor white laborer writes to his peer, a black boy named Tom who is not allowed to enter school, “I would like to be friends with you, but my teacher doesn’t let me,” and

White-shrouded Ku Klux Klan members
Spilled Willie’s blood
On the way to school.”

But that is not all. He connects these localized injustices to broader social movements, saying, “tomorrow millions will have the last word.”⁹⁰ Likewise, in a poem entitled “Monument of Freedom” (1963), Rza wrote that “they called this a monument built to death”; now there is no freedom, “but it will come.”⁹¹

Rza, with his characteristic irony and sarcasm, in “The Sound of Truth” (1950), posed the rhetorical question to America, which had begun the Korean War: “Tell me, which Korean threw a rock at New York?”⁹² He also introduced “Voice of America” radio, funded by the US government, in his

⁸⁶ *Samad Vurghun: Works* (in Azeri), Volume III (Baku: Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences, 1961), 578. ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 580. ⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 545.

⁸⁹ M. Rahim, *Selected Works* (in Azeri), Volume I (Baku: Azarnashr, 1967), 400–1.

⁹⁰ Rasul Rza, *Selected Works* (in Azeri), Volume III (Baku: Yazichi, 1981), 164–67 and 113–16.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 36–37.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 66–67.

poem by the same name (1974), by using such contrasts as “cold sun,” “white blackness,” and “freedom.”⁹³

In the “Enemies” and “Intervention” chapters of his long poem “Lenin,” the publication of which coincides with the beginning and escalation of the Cold War, Rza blamed President Wilson and especially David R. Francis – who was the ambassador of the USA to Russia for two years and a witness of the February Revolution, October Revolution, and Civil War – for promoting the policy that “there are two worlds: Bolshevism and democracy.”⁹⁴

Rahim criticized America’s foreign policy from a different perspective, on the ground that neighboring countries Turkey and Iran had fallen under America’s influence. Accordingly, in his 1950, 1952, and 1961 poems “Is Nazim Hikmet Free or Not?,”⁹⁵ “An Answer to Traitors,” and “Dardanelles,” he brought up two issues which particularly concerned him: the free passage of American ships in the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, and Nazim Hikmet’s attempt at freedom.⁹⁶

The theme of Iran associated closely with the USA in Rahim’s poems is even more interesting. The “Person Visiting the Blue Mosque” in Tabriz (written between 1948 and 1950) is an American with “innocence on his face and a white flower in his hand” who “gives me a respectful greeting and smiles,” and even “lights a candle,” but “I am foreign to him, I hate him,” because “he is an instigator,” “a devil on the inside with an angel’s face.” Likewise, the children of the “Buttermilk Seller” (1951) in Tehran are hungry, but he tells the “American officer . . . no, I won’t sell it,” and “pours out the buttermilk on the ground.” The state is a traitor; “the master in Iran is America.”⁹⁷

Finally, let us look at one example of the particular way in which the Cold War entered into literary criticism. In 1944, Azerbaijani literary critic and poet Mikayil Rafli wrote

America, George Washington’s fatherland
...
Resound from the ocean
...
Let bloody Hitler’s bloody adventure end once and for all

⁹³ Rasul Rza, *Selected Works* (in Azeri), Volume II (Baku: Yazichi, 1980), 124.

⁹⁴ Rasul Rza, *Selected Works* (in Azeri), Volume V (Baku: Yazichi, 1983), 144–45.

⁹⁵ Nazim Hikmet (1902–63), Turkish poet, was imprisoned in Turkey for a long period of time for his leftist activities and communist propaganda. Later, he escaped to the Soviet Union and spent the rest of his life in Moscow.

⁹⁶ M. Rahim, *Selected Works* (in Azeri), Volume II (Baku: Azarnashr, 1967), 42–43, 50–51.

⁹⁷ M. Rahim, *Selected Works* (in Azeri), Volume I (Baku: Azarnashr, 1967), 344–45, 363–66.

in a poetic entreaty to America, which was at that time an ally of the USSR. In 1952, those words were criticized by another Azerbaijani literary critic, Jafar Khandan, as “a sign of Americanism” and as a struggle for the “Americanization of the entire creative culture.”⁹⁸

While the work of these Azerbaijani thinkers, authors and poets during the Soviet period does not reflect a noticeable distortion of history, their explanations of historical events and facts in the writings about America were adapted to fit within the frame of Soviet ideology.

AZERBAIJANI VIEWS OF AMERICA IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES

The period of the Third Republic of Azerbaijan (since 1991) is a special case within political and other US–Azerbaijani relations: diplomatic relations have been established; partnerships have been formed in education, economy, and energy, and Azerbaijan has supported the US-led struggle against global terrorism. These issues, as well as the continuing Azerbaijan–Armenia conflict over the Nagorny-Karabagh region of the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan have been accompanied by broader research and diplomatic activities among Azerbaijan, the USA, and other countries, much more than there were in the less investigated “historical” era from 1828 to 1990. Also, discussion of recent and present-day concerns has more a political than a historical visage, but this article is devoted mainly to the history of Azerbaijani perceptions of America. For these two reasons I will not delve into details here. Instead I will give only a sketch of current attitudes and motives.

At this time, Azerbaijanis’ general perceptions of America are mostly favorable, with the exception of displeasure and anxiety about “American double standards” in foreign policy.⁹⁹ There are some external forces that try to shape the sensitivities of the Azerbaijani people and the Azerbaijani government about “others,” especially about countries such as the USA, and are not very sympathetic to these pressing powers. But these external forces seem to have no real influence on the Azerbaijani people’s internally formed awareness of “others.” Today, through international media, the Internet, analyses of independent experts, and direct dealings with the USA, Azerbaijani people have a great deal of knowledge about the economy, technology, education, democracy, lobbying, and foreign and internal policies of the USA. In contrast to Soviet times, people today have the opportunity to weigh pros and cons and form their own views on the USA independently from external or internal pressure groups.

⁹⁸ Teyyub Qurban, *A Person Stronger Than His Enemies* (in Azeri), Volume II (Shirvannashr, 2011), 430.

⁹⁹ For a brief discussion see Isaxanli and Ahmadov, “Azerbaijan.”

There are essential reasons for the differing perceptions of America in Soviet times and in the new period of independence. In Soviet times, Azeri people were citizens of the Soviet Union with strong ideological frames created by the Cold War. In modern times, they are citizens of Azerbaijan, and external pressure is fed not by the Cold War, but by the softer “Cool War.”

Located between Russia and Iran, Azerbaijan seeks partners from the West, and Azerbaijani people today have an aspiration to not simply look for models in the USA, as in the time of Bakikhanov and Akhundov, but to be friends with the USA. They do think Azerbaijan is a close ally of the USA in energy policy and in the struggle with terrorism, but related support from the USA is too little. They do not believe real support is yet on the table, at least in order to solve the Azerbaijan–Armenia Nagorny-Karabagh conflict. However, the general impression of the USA among Azerbaijani people today is quite positive.

CONCLUSION

As the world grows smaller, the need for various cultures to understand and to live peacefully with one another becomes visibly more important. This is even more of a vital problem for small nations than for superpowers. Azerbaijani people’s perceptions of other nations and powers are unique and vibrant. Azerbaijanis in other times have seen other people in different, altered, and sometimes even polar opposite ways. This article has summarized the history of Azerbaijani views on America over a period of a century and a half through a survey of Azerbaijani literature, philosophy, and newspapers from the nineteenth century; almost all essential Azerbaijani written works of the tsarist period; and poetry from Soviet times. I have taken into account the kinds of factor that played into the formulation of the Azerbaijani view of other nations, including educational background and beliefs of thinkers, powers of expression, and degree of open-mindedness, as well as the dominant ideologies.

Awareness of America in Azerbaijan began at the beginning of the Russian period. Early mentions of America in Azerbaijani sources were all encouraging, reflecting the hopeful view at that time of the “New World” being discovered, and they related mainly to the history of America’s exploration, environment, and early achievements, and the USA’s democratic, economic, welfare, educational, and scientific development (from time to time comparing them with the situation in Azerbaijan in favor of the USA). As time passed, the entirely affirmative and admiring views began to include a measure of caution, for example an analysis of the necessity of defending the interests of the local economy in Azerbaijan against Western meddling.

Changes in a nation’s perceptions of others are closely connected to political and social changes and to the development of its national identity

throughout history. Politicians, historians, writers, philosophers, and other thinkers play a role as makers of national identity. Bakikhanov, a polymath of the first part of the nineteenth century, was a believer, Islamic thinker, and educator, and his goal was to tell the story of America to satisfy his curiosity. He regarded as noteworthy the freedom of religion and expression in the USA. Akhundov, another Azerbaijani thinker of the twentieth century, had a complicated idea about national identity (his own analyses and his famous comedies presented two different perspectives). He distinguished himself for his anti-Arabism and anti-Islamism. His view on America and the West in general was formulated particularly in the form of social theses, for example that the new development of the West is due to its secularism; that the Muslim East should learn a lesson from the West; and that Islam needs radical reform, or “protestantization.” For Zardabi, the religious factor was not worth mentioning; he was interested in whether Azerbaijan would try to apply American achievements in economy, education, and ecology and to form policies defending national interests in trade against the West.

With the strengthening of a struggle for parliamentarianism and national awareness in the Russian and Ottoman Empires, and then in Iran, leading intellectuals were in search of ideas for progress, looking for both national and international values. Azerbaijani writer, journalist, artist, professor of medicine, and politician Ali Bey Huseynzade (1864–1940), with his illustrious slogan “Turkify, Islamicize, Europeanize” (*türkläşmək, islamlaşmaq, avropallaşmaq*) emphasized the importance of ethnic identity and religious affiliation, as well as westernization, as means of technological progress and governance. It was a sign of the new spirit of the times when ethnicity was seriously emphasized side by side with religion, and at the same time westernization was grouped together with national culture.¹⁰⁰

Huseynzade’s slogan is an appropriate tool through which to analyze the political and social developments in Azerbaijan of the first two decades of the twentieth century, particularly for understanding of Azerbaijani writers’ and politicians’ insights on the USA. This catchphrase became a leading concept for progress of the Ottoman Empire as well. The First Azerbaijan Republic of 1918–20 and its heir the modern Azerbaijan Republic (the Third Republic) shared a three-colored flag,¹⁰¹ which was also explained in triplicate by the same slogan and by the desire to be free from the influences of Iran and Russia.¹⁰² The important point here is that this triple identity – based on Turkic ethnicity, Islamic faith, and modernization associated with the

¹⁰⁰ Yusuf Akçura, *History of Turkic Nationalism* (Istanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 1998), 144.

¹⁰¹ Blue symbolized the Turkish identity; red, modernization; and green, Islam.

¹⁰² Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905–1920: The Shaping of National Identity In a Muslim Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 59.

West – was an indication of the Azerbaijani desire to unify both Eastern and Western values in itself. This “trinity” set it apart from Russia and Iran, which forged their own paths as an alternative to, if not outright against, those of the West.

Writers and public figures such as Sabir, Sahhat, and Hajibeyov who did not emphasize religious issues (often criticizing religious figures, but not religion itself) revealed interest in both Azerbaijani culture and American and Western secularism, literature, education, invention, and minority policy. They compared the West and Azerbaijan in these areas and called for their people to learn from the West.

The period of turmoil during World War I and its direct consequences, particularly the state-building attempts of the Russian Empire’s borderland nations, including Azerbaijanis, created a relatively new geopolitical situation. Representatives of these nations viewed Western powers, especially the United States, as a counterbalance to Russia, looking toward them with hope and asking for help and recognition of newly established states.

Azerbaijan of the Soviet period before World War II exhibited views partly indifferent, and partly competitive, toward the capitalist world, beginning to aim criticism at the West. A fundamental shift in attitudes from an unbiased optimism to pure condemnation and criticism are observed after World War II, mainly as a result of the Cold War. While analyzing the Soviet period, in an attempt to find a clear Azerbaijani view on America from amongst the propaganda, I have explored well-known and nationally popular Azerbaijani Soviet poets’ views of America. It is clear that, even though some of their views are more sympathetic and balanced than the overall Soviet perspective might have been, they held primarily negative and critical views of America. The objective here was not to determine whether Azerbaijani writers were right or wrong about America; it was to explore what those views were. In general, Azerbaijani perceptions of the Western world, including the USA, were more respectful and balanced before and after Soviet times than they were during the Soviet period due to Soviet-specific ideological pressures.

Modern-day Azerbaijani views on America are, without a doubt, positive and encouraging, but with some anxiety about the foreign policy of America, particularly with regard to the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict.