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Forging the Azerbaijani National Identity: The Role of Periodical Literature during the Colonial Period

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Abstract

This study aims to articulate the historical background of nation building in Azerbaijan that laid the foundation for the subsequent formation of national identity at the turn of XIX-XX centuries, and its outreach through literary and publicist texts. The Azerbaijan periodicals played a vital role in unraveling the essence of the Azerbaijan Turkic identity, stimulating the development of self-awareness both of the individuals, and the ethnic community as a whole through a modus of national identity. I argue that the colonial expansion of the Russian Empire in the region in the early 19th century interrupted the processes of political unification of the country and the processes of ethnic consolidation of the Azerbaijani Turks preceding their formation as a distinctive nation. To address these concerns, the research embarks on a comprehensive examination of the periodical literature having enrolled in the enlightenment of the people, revealing the realities of political, social and cultural character in the country and abroad. My basic claim is that the producer and driving force of nation building and forging national identity was the European-educated Azerbaijani intelligentsia, developed by the Russian government itself for the needs of colonial administration of the region. The study will encompass a hard mission of the Azerbaijani intellectuals in shaping public discourse, establishing early periodicals serving as platforms to express intentional and subconscious manifestations of the authors' creativity, and respond to the internal and external challenges.

In the paper, varieties of narratives, intertwined into cultural and political texts, are proposed. Essays, short stories, critical and satiric articles, theater reviews have been structured around the issues of the establishment of a common language, high culture, administration and education, as well as a national identity, capable of suppressing regional differences or, in extreme cases, tolerate them in a subordinate status.

Keywords: cultural; language; national; periodicals; self-awareness

1. Introduction

This study aims to investigate the processes of nation-building, and subsequently, evaluate the role of the Azerbaijan periodical literature in shaping and actualizing the national identity at the turn of the XIX century. The research embarks on examination of the historical context of Azerbaijan during the colonial period, and provides insights into the struggles faced by the Azerbaijani people under colonial rule in the early 19th century.

The text emphasizes the significant contributions of the Azerbaijani intellectuals and writers in the development of national language and literature, national theater, and periodical literature, which paved the way and opened the possibilities for editors, writer, and progressive people to enlighten people, to call them to education, science, and cultural development in the whole. It discusses how these intellectuals explored periodicals to advocate for national self-awareness, cultural preservation, and educational rights, despite facing censorship and challenges from the colonial administration. The importance of prominent figures, such as well-known Azerbaijani writer, philosopher, founder of literary criticism, realism, and dramaturgy in Azerbaijan, Mirza Fatali Akhuzadeh (1812-1878); journalist, intellectual, founder of the first national newspaper “Ekinchi” (“The Ploughman”) Hassan bey Zardabi (1842-1907; prominent Azerbaijani public figure, outstanding linguist and publisher Muhammad agha Shahtahtli (1846-1931), and many other representatives of the Azerbaijani Enlightenment, and their multilateral activities have been reflected in this study. The role of the newspapers, such as "Molla Nəsrəddin" (*Molla Nasraddin –eng.*), “Əkinçi” (*Ekinchi –eng.*), Şərqi-Rus” (*Sharghi-Rus –eng.*), and "Kaspi," in shaping public discourse and promoting national self-determination has been underscored. These publications promoted the cultural landscape and fostered a sense of national identity. The research also discusses how these intellectuals explored periodicals to advocate for national self-awareness, cultural preservation, and educational rights, despite facing censorship and challenges from the colonial administration.

The methodology of the research combines historical research, literary analysis, qualitative techniques, and case studies to explore the role of periodical literature in shaping the Azerbaijani national identity during the colonial period.

2. Exploring the Azerbaijani Periodicals of the Colonial Eran through the Historical Background of Azerbaijan

Favorable geographical and geopolitical location, varied natural resources, rich historical tapestry are the cases that always keep Azerbaijan attractive for Europe and Asia. Passion for wealth, and new territories, greedy interests of neighbors many times made the Azerbaijanis live under the yoke of colonial rule. Only in the early XIX century, the Azerbaijani lands in 1813 and 1828 were twice occupied, and divided between Persia and Russia. It happened only towards the beginning of the next century, in 1918, as a logical outcome of the struggle,

that Azerbaijan finally attained state independence. The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, as the first democratic Republic in the East, was established in Baku. Though this independence lasted only two years (1918-1920), that historical experience of the national liberation movement became the path that led the Azerbaijani Turks to the present-day sovereignty. The independence and decolonization of the Azerbaijani lands opened new perspectives and challenges to the Azerbaijani people.

The interest of the Russian Empire in the Eastern question was motivated primarily by the fact that by the early 19th century the possibilities of spatial expansion in the western, northern and eastern directions by the Russian Empire were practically exhausted. For this reason, the desire to possess Central Asia and the Caucasus became a priority direction in the foreign policy of the Russian Empire. Russia in the context of its Eastern policy sought to maintain and strengthen its positions in Persia, establish hegemony in the Balkans, and in the case of favorable development of events to take possession of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits [Pines, Biran & Rüpke, 2021]

In the early 20th century, Russia experienced significant social upheavals, which hastened the unfolding of political forces within society, engaging all segments of the public in active participation. Denying this reality is no longer tenable. In the imperial peripheries, including Azerbaijan, the movement for freedom and independence was gaining momentum. The czarist regime's repressive policies, fostering conditions of lawlessness, further exacerbated the crisis in Azerbaijan due to its relentless persecution of free thought and national self-determination.

The region of Azerbaijan, which was under the occupation of the Russian Empire, faced the full weight of political, religious, and national oppression. Just like other non-Russian ethnic groups within the empire, the Azerbaijani population was labeled as the "Other", subjected to various restrictions and discriminations. As Muslims and "non-Christians," Azerbaijanis encountered limitations in all aspects of life. The policies of the czarist regime obstructed any manifestation of independence in the social, political, and economic spheres, imposing numerous obstacles [Ganiyev, 2019, p.254, A].

Despite the clearly colonial nature of Russian expansion in the Caucasus and the decisive role of force in the conquest of the region by the Russian Empire, many modern Russian researchers are trying to deny this obvious fact. According to them, "*Russia did not wage colonial wars in the Caucasus and did not suppress the national liberation movement of the peoples of the region*". As for Russia's conquest of the Caucasus, according to such researchers, this was almost a forced measure, since the "barbarous" tribes created a real threat to the state security of the Russian Empire [Shatokhina, 2001, p.45]

Russia applied classical methods of colonial expansion in the Caucasus with all the ensuing consequences. The conquest of the region was accompanied by a radical change of the ethnic map of the Caucasus with mass deportation and "forced-voluntary" migration of thousands of the representatives of the Muslim peoples of the region to neighboring states. According to R.Gozjba, the total number of the representatives of only the North Caucasian

peoples who moved to the Ottoman Empire during the “pacification” of the Caucasus by the Russian Empire ranges from 1.8 million to 3.1 million people [Qojba, 2000, p.142].

Only in the first years of colonization of the North Azerbaijani lands by the Russian Empire in the late 20s - early 30s. of the XIX century, about 100 thousand Muslims – predominantly the Azerbaijani Turks were evicted mainly from Erivan, Nakhchivan, Karabakh, Shurayel, Pambak and Lori, and resettled in neighboring countries [Balayev, 2012, p.147].

In this regard, the Russian government did not keep the Azerbaijanis, but on the contrary, it itself provoked them to resettle, creating unbearable living conditions. Moreover, the tsarist administration in the Caucasus believed that “the Mohammedan population cannot be loyal to the government and politically unreliable” [Зубов, 2000].

The policies of czarism towards the indigenous population of Azerbaijan and its relations with Azerbaijanis were not immediately formed. However, the desire to conquer the region and assimilate it into the empire had long been present. This aspiration was not solely driven by Russia's geographical location or its political interests in the Middle East and the Near East, but mostly by its economic expectations. [Seyid-zade, 2010, p.8]

As early as in the 18th century, Peter the Great initiated the famous "Caspian Expedition" to secure the Caspian Sea shores, to end Iran's dominance in the Caucasus, and prevent the Ottoman Empire from seizing this territory. However, the wars fought over the Caucasus at that time did not yield fruitful results for Russia, and these efforts proved ineffective. Changes in Russia's political strategy occurred in the early 19th century. In 1803, the strategically significant Karabakh region was incorporated into the empire after the subjugation of the Karabakh khanate. In 1804, the resistance of Ganja defenders was broken, and in 1805, ancient Azerbaijani lands like Karabakh and Zangezur were occupied [Ganiyev, 2019, p.264, B]. These events led to wars between Russia and Iran, as well as Russia and Turkey over the Caucasus. As a result, the northern part of Azerbaijan became part of the Russian Empire through the Gulistan Treaty in 1813, and the Turkmanchay Treaty in 1828.

Czarism's colonial policy and the economic and political restrictions faced by Azerbaijan fostered a strengthening of opposition sentiments and united the intellectuals with the hardworking masses of the nation. Azerbaijani entrepreneurs and their ideologists aimed to achieve their demands through the promised reforms of the czarist regime [Seyidzadeh, 1998].

The mass leaving of indigenous people eased the problem of resettlement of migrants from Christian peoples, and primarily the Armenians, in the region. It should be noted, that the settlement of recently conquered lands by the representatives of Christian peoples in the state policy of the Russian Empire was traditionally considered one of the main ways to strengthen and consolidate the Russian power there. As a rule, the new settlers on new lands were used as a live barrier and a protective layer on the external borders of the empire, who served as a support for the tsarist administration in the matter of “pacifying” the local population. Moreover, among the dominant ruling circles of Russia such an opinion was running up that

the occupation was considered completed after “the first grain of the conqueror fell down the conquered land” [Kaufman, 1905, p.11].

At the turn of the XIX-XX centuries, the process of nation - building started in Azerbaijan. The most active participants in the formation of the Azerbaijani nation were representatives of the intellectual elite - writers, poets, journalists, etc. According to M. Hroch’s definition, the national movement is the desire of a certain ethnic community to be constituted into a full-fledged nation through the development of a national culture based on local language, as well as the acquisition of civil rights and political self-government - first in the form of autonomy, and ultimately, of independence [Khrokh, 2002, p.125].

Thus, the essence of the initial stage of nation-building involves the establishment of a common language, high culture, administration and education, as well as a national identity, capable of suppressing regional differences or, in extreme cases, tolerate them in a subordinate status. Based on this, the initial stage of nation building is called cultural and linguistic. At this stage, there is a process of collecting information about the history, language and culture of the non-dominant ethnic group. In other words, there is a process of “discovery” by intellectuals of ethnic group and laying the foundations for the subsequent formation of “national identity”. This period covers Azerbaijan approximately of the second half of the 19th - the first years of the 20th centuries. Under these conditions, the ideas of a common language and culture were much more accessible to understanding of the masses than abstruse concepts about political freedoms. In this sense, linguistic and cultural appeals acted as replacement of clearly expressed political demands [Khrokh, 2002, p.137]

Characterizing the state of national movements in the South Caucasus in this period, Z. Avalov notes that they have not yet “*developed into a political formula and gravitate only towards the creation of a cultural environment in the term- of a given nationality and crave legal conditions favorable for such a creation*” [Avalov, 1911, p.87].

The process of formation of national identity among the Azerbaijani Turks stayed complicated also by the significant influence of the Persian culture and language in the Azerbaijani society. Thus, in the Middle Ages, the Persian language actually turned into “the official language of the Turks” and until the middle of the 19th century, a significant part of the works of Azerbaijani literature was created in this language [Расулзаде, 1990, p.48].

The basis of the emerging new system of national culture was formed by the Enlightenment ideas. Originally, the Azerbaijani Enlighteners borrowed these ideas from the Russian and European works. But no matter how significant Russian and Western influence was, the Azerbaijani Enlightenment arose as a specifically national phenomenon, reflecting the urgent needs of social development of Azerbaijan itself.

The ideas of Russian and Western European enlightenment, refracted through the prism of the Azerbaijani reality, acquired their own specificity here, were melted in accordance with the material and spiritual needs of the local society, and were organically woven into the ideological life of the Azerbaijani people [Balayev, 2012, p.138]. The goals and aspirations of the early representatives of the Azerbaijan Enlightenment are reflected in the works of

Mirza Fatali Akhundzadeh, who is frequently called Voltaire, and sometimes the Molière of the East [Shissler,2005, p.161]. The ideas of secularism ran like a red thread through all his philosophical and artistic works. Thanks to M.F. Akhundzadeh and his followers, the Azerbaijani Turks became the pioneers of the secularist movement in the Islamic world [Shaffer, 2002, p.26].

According to M.F. Akhundzadeh, the Muslim peoples can overcome the significant lag behind Europe and “achieve complete happiness” only if they “free themselves from their age-old imprisonment” [Akhundov, 1986, p.151]. He believed that to awaken the Islamic world from the “*sleep of ignorance*” it is necessary to introduce Muslim peoples to the achievements of the European science and technology. Moreover, M.F. Akhundzadeh believed that without the perception of the European views and values, as well as the implementation of fundamental social reforms, the mere application of scientific and technological achievements of the West would not give the desired effect in terms of modernization of Muslim society [Shissler, 2005, p.163].

The rise of periodical literature expanded the reach of artistic expression, enhancing the dissemination of literary works. This brought about a new dimension of artistic publicism, attracting talented and renowned writers who sought to share their thoughts and ideas within the institution of society and public thought that the periodicals represented. As a result, the landscape of literature and public attention towards it continuously evolved with the growing circulation possibilities of periodicals [Rustamli, 2016, p.12 A].

The advent of newly established periodicals in Europe and the consequent emergence of innovative information dissemination methods piqued the interest of the Azerbaijani intelligentsia in journalism, its techniques, and the tools for immediate news delivery. This led to the rise of a new generation of the Azerbaijani journalists, including notable figures like Hassab Zardabi, Jalil Mammadquluzadeh, Omer F. Nemanzadeh, Uzeyir Hajibeyli, Mammad Amin Rasulzadeh, Akber Aghaoglu, Yusif Vezir Chemenzeminli, and numerous others. Their collective efforts played a crucial role in shaping the landscape of the Azerbaijani mass media, transforming it into an effective means of enlightenment, promoting national self-determination, and influencing public perspectives.

Taking into account the demands of the colonial era, the first printed media outlets established in Baku were in the Russian language. During the colonial period, as influenced by the prevailing circumstances and the dynamics of the time, the initial newspapers published in Baku were in the Russian language. This choice of language can be understood in the context of the socio-political landscape, where Russian was the dominant language of the ruling imperial power. The establishment of Russian-language media in Baku was a reflection of the colonial administration's efforts to maintain control over the region and propagate their policies and ideologies [Rzayeva, 1992].

Additionally, selecting the Russian language for these early newspapers also served to reach a broader audience, including both the local Russian-speaking population and the officials of the colonial administration. It was a strategic decision to ensure that the

information and ideas disseminated through these newspapers would have a wider reach and influence on various segments of society, including the ruling elite and the local intelligentsia.

Moreover, the introduction of Russian-language newspapers in Baku can be seen as part of a broader policy of Russification pursued by the colonial authorities to consolidate their grip on the region and subdue any potential nationalist or independence movements. By promoting the use of Russian in the media and various public spheres, the colonial administration sought to foster a sense of allegiance to the imperial power and undermine the development of distinct national identities among the local population [Rustamli, 2016, p.12 B].

It is important to note that the emergence of Russian-language newspapers in Baku was not only a reflection of the colonial administration's policies but also a pragmatic choice made by some local intellectuals and entrepreneurs. Given the limited opportunities for the Azerbaijani-language publications and the advantages of reaching a broader readership in Russian, these early publishers opted for the Russian language as a means to circulate their ideas and engage with a wider audience.

In summary, the presence of the Russian-language newspapers in Baku during the colonial period was a multifaceted phenomenon. It can be attributed to the policies of the colonial administration, the pragmatism of local publishers, and the broader socio-political context of the time. These newspapers played a significant role in shaping public discourse and disseminating information, contributing to the socio-cultural landscape of Baku during the era of colonial rule.

The first Russian newspaper published in Azerbaijan is considered to be the "Bakinski listok" ("Baku paper"), the editor of which was Cristian Sink, a teacher at Baku Real Gymnasium. The newspaper's inaugural issue was released on March 19, 1871, and was discontinued in June of the same year. The publication resumed in January of 1872 and continued until June 3 of that year. In 1876, a second Russian newspaper, the "Bakinskiye izvestiya" ("Baku news") began publication in Baku. As the official organ of the governorate, its publication was initiated by D.S. Staroselski, the Russian General-Governor. The purpose of the "Bakinskiye izvestiya" was to present extensive information on the Baku governorate. Before the newspaper's launch, D.S. Staroselski had already established a printing press and invited printers. After 1888, the newspaper was published under the name "Bakinski torqovo-promyshlenni listok" ("Baku trade-industrial paper") [Maharramli, 2020, p.7].

During the latter part of the 19th century, Azerbaijan's economic and social progress necessitated the establishment of a domestic press. Acknowledging this imperative, the renowned educator Hasan bey Zardabi approached the government, seeking permission to publish a newspaper, despite encountering various obstacles. Zardabi had to import special Arabic typefaces from Istanbul to enable the newspaper's publication in the native Azerbaijan language. Eventually, after persistent efforts the inaugural issue of the newspaper named "Əkinçi" (The Sower) was published at the Governor's press in Baku on July 22, 1875. The

Russian General-Governor. D.S.Staroselski had also assisted in the publication of the "Əkinçi" in 1875. This newspaper served as the bedrock for the development of Azerbaijan's national press. Over the period from July 22, 1875, to September 29, 1877, "Əkinçi" released a total of 56 issues, with a circulation of 300-400 copies being printed twice a month.

The first national media organ, the newspaper "Əkinçi (Ekinchi)," is celebrated in the republic of Azerbaijan until now as the "Press Day" on 22 July, the day it saw the light.

In the "Əkinçi" newspaper, articles and publicist writings from the Azerbaijani authors from various cities of Russian imperia had been published, including those of Najaf bey Vezirov and Asgher agha Gorani from Moscow city, Seyid Azim Shirvani and Mahammadtaghi Alizadeh Shirvani from Shamakhi, Heyari from Derbend, and Mirza Fatali Akhundov from Tiflis (Tbilisi).

Amid the Russian-Turkish War, in 1877-1878, the Russian government, apprehensive about having a newspaper in the "Turkic-Tatar" language in the rear front, formally ceased the publication of "Əkinçi" on September 29, 1877.

The well-known Azerbaijani educator, A.M. Topchubashov, stated in 1905, *"The majority of our knowledgeable Muslims still remember "Əkinçi" as a newspaper with a sense of elevation. It is well-remembered by many how, in a short period, the stagnation of the Caucasian Muslims transformed into movement, and the vibrant voice of the newspaper in the native language inspired and motivated them"*[Topchubashov, 1905].

During that historical period, the press in the region was subject to stringent censorship by the Caucasian Press Committee. The committee's censors made every effort to hinder the dissemination of newspapers in the Azerbaijani language, often labeling them with the stigma of "Pan-Islamism."

The negative attitude of the Russian authorities sometimes resulted in harassment, making many prominent members of Azerbaijani society hesitant to provide financial support to the press. They were afraid of facing repercussions and were not always forthcoming in defending educational and charitable initiatives.

Despite these challenges, the impact of "Əkinçi" and other native-language publications in Azerbaijan was significant. They played a vital role in fostering awareness, encouraging intellectual growth, and promoting a sense of unity among the people. The steadfastness of Azerbaijani intellectuals and educators in their pursuit of enlightening the society in their native language is a testament to their dedication and resilience in the face of adversity. Their efforts ultimately contributed to the revival of the Azerbaijani national identity and cultural heritage during a crucial period in the region's history.

Despite all of these challenges, immediately after the closure of "Əkinçi," "Ziya" and "Kəşkül" ("Keshkoul") newspapers emerged. "Kəşkül" held a middle ground between "Əkinçi" and "Ziya," but the inclination towards "Əkinçi" was more pronounced. The awakening of the idea of "Azerbaijanism", and self-consciousness as the "Azerbaijani nation" began to emerge on the pages of the "Kəşkül"; the concepts of "religion» and "nation" were separated in this period. The "Kəşkül" newspaper made efforts to clarify these issues on its

pages and contributed to the development of public and political consciousness. Moreover, it published articles that played a constructive role in the advancement of the Azerbaijani nation and the enhancement of amicable relationships with other countries. These articles were notable for their content, ideas, language, and style, and were characterized by a passionate fervor.

In the early 20th century, Azerbaijan's creative intellectuals exhibited a strong inclination towards journalism, especially in disseminating their own ideas to the public, which led to the emergence of influential newspapers like "Sharqi-Rus" and "Heyat," as well as journals like "Füyuzat" (Fiyuzat- eng.) and "Molla Nəsrəddin" (Molla Nasraddin- eng.).

The newspaper known as "Şərqi-rus" (Shargi-Rus- eng.) as named by M. Şahmurov, made its debut on March 30, 1903. Initially published three times a week, from June 8, 1904, it became a daily newspaper. This newspaper holds the distinction of being the first Azerbaijani newspaper of the 20th century and the first daily publication in Azerbaijan.

Another significant and enduring milestone in Azerbaijani media history is the renowned journal "Molla Nəsrəddin" (Molla Nasraddin) which focused on ideas of national determination and their practical realization. Mirza Jalil, the journal's editor, envisioned his nation attaining a contemporary status on the global stage. "Molla Nasraddin" emerged in the result of the struggle for these ideals. Its inaugural issue was released on April 7, 1906, and the journal's articles humorously portrayed the struggles, hardships, and injustices faced by the entire nation.

The journal "Molla Nasraddin," as a hub of progressive ideas, fearlessly employed satire to criticize autocracy, backwardness, and conventional thinking, while simultaneously advocating for the purity of the Azerbaijani language. It actively reflected important political events of its time and contributed to the national awakening process.

Publications of this nature attracted the most active publicists around them. Certainly, in the early 20th century, Azerbaijani writers still valued literary expression and artistic creativity. However, Jalil Mammadquluzadeh and the "Molla Nəsrəddin"'s followers quickly recognized the power of journalism, and paid special attention to it.

In Azerbaijan, just like in the socio-political and economic spheres, the entire realm of national culture, including the press, faced severe restrictions. In 1906, Azerbaijani deputy Ismayil Khan Ziyadkhanov stated in the Russian State Duma (Parliament): *"They say that Muslims are a backward people, but this is not true; they have been forced to remain dormant and lag behind. Let me give you an example. When the censorship regulations were particularly strict, they would not allow us to publish newspapers. But after the censorship was relaxed last year, we had 30 Muslim publications in our country"* [Ziyadkhanov, 1906].

The impact of the press on shaping the national consciousness of the Azerbaijani people was a matter of great concern for the imperial administration. Despite the numerous pretexts the czarist censorship attempted to employ in closing down numerous publications, they could not quell the persistent dissemination of national and spiritual values, nor could they silence the influential voices of Azerbaijani intellectuals.

2.2. Analyzing the Contents of Baku's Russian-Language Periodical Literature

Azerbaijani writers and intellectuals played an active and influential role in the advancement and widespread dissemination of the Russian-language media in the Caucasus region. Notable figures like Mahammadagha Shaxtaxtinski, Alimardanbey Topchubashov, Ahmadbey Aghayev (Aghaoglu), Firidunbey Kocharli, Houseyn Minasazov, Rahimbey Melikov, Garabey Qarabeyov, Nariman Narimanov, as well as the Hajibeyli brothers, Uzeyir and Jeyhun, and the Hajinski brothers, Jamo and Mekhdi, were among the courageous voices that fearlessly tackled various societal issues through their writings in Russian-language publications.

The origin of Russian-language Azerbaijani journalism can be traced back to the mid-19th century, with Tiflis (Tbilisi) emerging as a crucial hub for its development. Scholars emphasize that the literary and social environment of Tiflis played a significant role in nurturing and fostering the initial growth of Russian-language Azerbaijani journalism. As A.Mishiyev points, "As these talented individuals ardently contributed to the intellectual discourse of their time, their impactful writings left a profound mark on the literary landscape of the era "[Mishiyev, 1987].

As an example, A. Bakikhanov's collaboration with the "Tiflisskiye vedomosti" newspaper («Tiflis papers»), and M. F. Axundov's "Kavkaz" newspaper can be cited. This legacy was continued by Isa Soultan Shaxtakhtinski, the editor of the Russian-language "Kars" newspaper, along with writers and journalists like Eynali bey Soultanov, Mammadagha Shahtakhtinski, Hasanbey Zardabi, and other intellectuals. Moreover, it is known that E. Soultanov wrote both journalistic articles [Maksudov, 1966], and also stories and the novel "Tatarka" («The Azerbaijani girl») in the Russian language [Mirakhmedov, 1983]. This list can be expanded to include names like S. Velibeyov, S. M. Qanizadeh, R. Efendiyev, M. Sh. Mirzayev, and others.

Thus, Russian-language literature and writing traditions became an integral part of the 20th-century's historical heritage. In the early 20th century, Baku's Russian-language media published diverse articles, including problem-focused pieces, opinions, theater reviews, memoirs, travel notes, obituaries, and more. For instance, the "Baku" newspaper regularly featured articles on the theater performances, providing reviews of the Azerbaijani, Russian, and international drama performances. Many authors contributed to the "Baku" newspaper, among them, Mehdibey Hajinski ((under the pen names "Aesthete," "Tartar – theater-lover, and etc.), Mammad Sadig Akhundov under the pen name "Akhundov"), and others.

In the December 2, 1909, issue of the "Baku" newspaper, the author (M.S. Akhundov) appreciating the premiere of Uzeyir Hajibeyov's second opera wrote about the composer: "Hajibeyov is a pioneer in the world of opera composition among Muslims. He has taken a

significant step in the Oriental art. Muslim opera has not existed not only in Russia but even in Turkey, the most cultured country in the Muslim world" [Mammadli, 1984, p.70, A]. In his short article, M.S. Akhundov draws attention to the fact that this talented composer did not receive a formal education in music, and utilizing his literary skill, he describes the composer's stage presence as follows: "As Hajibeyov took his position on the conductor's podium and led the performance with a hesitant and slightly unpolished style, the enthusiasm among the Muslim audience was overwhelming" [Mammadli, 1984, s.72, B].

Amidst the discussions, it is worth noting that Uzeyir Hajibeyov himself delved into the realm of Russian-language press, presenting compelling articles. During 1905-1906, he made his presence felt in the "Kaspi" newspaper under the pseudonym "U," offering insightful pieces shedding light on the events unfolding in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. In 1919, the pages of the "Azərbaycan" newspaper hosted his series titled "Iran Letters," delving into the subject of the national liberation movement.

In the early 20th century, the landscape of Russian-language press witnessed the dynamic endeavors of the Hacinski brothers, Mehdi and Jamo, who stood out as exemplary figures. Of notable intrigue, Mehdi Bey Hacinski displayed versatility, contributing to both Azerbaijani-language, and Russian-language press while concurrently engaging in philanthropic pursuits and theatrical ventures. At the core of the "Kaspi" newspaper, his prolific portfolio featured a plethora of articles, theatrical compositions, and reviews. Mehdi Hacinski's noteworthy contributions encompassed introducing the literary world to the captivating theme of Sheikh Sanan . Thus, he portrayed the story of Sheikh Sanan in the form of a tale. This work was first published in the "Kaspi" newspaper in 1909, and later separately printed as a book in 1912. Indeed, M. Hacinski emphasized in one of his articles [Hajinski, 1909] that he regarded it as a "folk tale," making it one of the first narratives to be accepted in Russian-language Azerbaijani publications.

Jamo Hajinski is one of the prominent Russian-language publicists of the early 20th century. Under the pseudonyms "Кубинец" ("Kubinec" and "Dj") J. Hajinski made significant contributions to the "Kaspi" newspaper. As a graduate of St. Petersburg University, J. Hacinski possessed profound knowledge of literature and fine arts, even delivering lectures on arts in the "Türk yurdu" ("Turkic lands") society, founded in Baku in the early 20th century. Notably, his articles in the Russian press featured valuable critical observations on theater performances, music, acting, directing, and more.

Jeyhoun Hajibeyli, the brother of Uzeyir Hajibeyov, had numerous fascinating and diverse articles published in the Caucasian Russian press between 1910 and 1920. Remarkably, even after immigrating to Europe in 1920, he continued to contribute to the Russian emigrant press with many articles and writings [Hajibeyli, 1993, p.107, A].

In his articles, Jeyhun Hajibeyli touched upon a wide spectrum of issues, ranging from economic problems to cultural matters. Having a profound understanding of cultural subjects, Jeyhun Hacibeyli wrote publicistic articles on Azerbaijani literature, music, and theater topics. For instance, as early as in 1911, he investigated the role of the Azerbaijani women in

literary history and demonstrated his extensive knowledge in this field. In an article titled "Azərbaycan gülləri" (Azerbaijani Flowers), the author specifically highlighted the significant contributions of creative women such as Khoureshoudbanu Natavan, Fatmakhanım Kemine, Sekine Akhundzadeh, and others.

Jeyhun Hajibeyli's memoirs written in Russian shed light on the intricacies of the creation and staging of the first Azerbaijani opera [Hajibeyli, 1993, p. 120-125, B]. From these memoirs, we learn about his significant role in the opera's staging. J. Hajibeyli successfully outlines the character traits of some contemporaries, especially the first performers of the opera. For example, he portrays the actor Mirzah Moukhtar, who played the role of Mejnun's father, as an extremely talented individual whose appearance brought laughter and joy to people [Hajibeyli, p.124, C].

A prominent scholar, literary historian, and educator, Firidunbey Kocharli, has a significant portion of his literary, scientific, and journalistic legacy in the Russian language. Even before the end of the 19th century, he actively contributed to the Russian-language publications. His articles such as "Azərbaycan komediyaları" (*Azerbaijani comedies*) in "Novoye obozreniye" («Новое обозрение») newspaper in Tiflis, and "Ərəb əlifbası və onun nöqsanları" (Arabic alphabet and its deficiencies) in "Kavkaz" newspaper, among others, emerged in the late 19th century Russian press. In the early 20th century, F. Kocharli published articles about Hassan bey Zardabi's "Vətən dili" (*Language of the Homeland*) course in the "Zakavkazye" newspaper. Additionally, his writings about Georgian writers and educators, Y.S. Qodebaşvili, N.O. Lomouri, and others, appeared in the "Kaspi" newspaper. F. Kocharli had an extensive correspondence with his contemporaries in the Russian language [Kocharli, 1963].

Hüseyn Minasazov, a prominent intellectual, literary historian, and educator, made a significant contribution to the Russian-language press in the early 20th century. Serving as a catalyst for the illumination of Azerbaijan's national consciousness, he left a remarkable legacy in the realm of journalistic literature. Through his insightful and thought-provoking writings, Minasazov offered an intellectual discourse that transcended geographical boundaries and resonated with readers across the South Caucasus. Subsequently, H.Minasazov's presence expanded, finding an esteemed platform in reputable newspapers and journals such as "Kaspi," "Baku," "Oqni" (Lights), "Zakavkazye," "Kavkazskoye slovo" (Caucasian Word), and "Tifliski listok" (Tiflis Sheet). His rich literary arsenal encompassed a wide array of subjects, ranging from the socioeconomic condition of the masses to the intricacies of culture and education.

H. Minasazov held the esteemed "Molla Nəsrəddin" journal in high regard, recognizing its significant contribution to cultural and social discourse. He demonstrated a steadfast focus on theater-related matters, providing regular insights and analysis into the world of performing arts. Furthermore, he penned fervent praises and dedicated fervent articles to acclaimed figures such as Fatma Mukhtarova, Shovket Mammadova, and Housseyn Arablinski, lauding their artistic endeavors and achievements [Minasazov, 1982].

Professor Shamil Gurbanov, in his writings about Housseyn Minasazov, reveres the intellectual as a trailblazer in Azerbaijani cultural history: “Minasazov's pioneering efforts in establishing a free and democratic press in the Russian language stand as a testament to his unwavering dedication to progressive ideals and cultural expression” [Gurbanov, 1991, p.106]. As one of the first luminaries of his time to venture into creating a Russian-language platform for open communication and intellectual dialogue, H.Minasazov left an indelible mark on Azerbaijan's cultural landscape.

It is worth noting that unwavering commitment to the national-cultural history and values, and multifaceted contributions of the early Azerbaijani publicists to Azerbaijani intellectual life continue to be revered and celebrated. Their pivotal role in developing progressive ideas, advocating for the democratization of the press and cultural enlightenment, solidifies their place in the annals of the Azerbaijani cultural history. Their profound impact on Azerbaijani journalism and literature remains a testament to their unwavering dedication to advancing intellectual thought and fostering a strong national identity in the tumultuous era of the early 20th century. Their contributions as a literary luminary and cultural advocate continue to resonate with future generations, perpetuating a rich legacy of enlightenment and inspiration.

3. Conclusion

This study delves into the historical significance of the Azerbaijani periodicals during the colonial era, which spanned from the early 19th century until the early 20th century when the Azerbaijani people finally achieved state independence establishing Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in 1918. Throughout this period, the Russian Empire imposed oppressive colonial policies that restricted the Azerbaijanis in terms of language, culture, and education.

In the face of these challenges, the Azerbaijani intellectuals and writers played a crucial role in the development of the Russian-language periodicals, using these platforms as means to advocate for national self-awareness, cultural preservation, and educational rights. However, they encountered formidable obstacles as the colonial administration subjected the national press to strict censorship and control.

Among the prominent figures who contributed to Russian-language publications were Mahammadagha Shaxtaxtinski, Alimardanbey Topchubashov, Ahmadbey Aghayev (Aghaoglu), Firidunbey Kocharli, Houseyn Minasazov, Rahimbey Melikov, Garabey Qarabeyov, Nariman Narimanov, as well as the Hajibeyli brothers, Uzeyir and Jeyhun, and the Hajinski brothers, Jamo and Mekhdi, who offered critical articles, theater reviews, and cultural insights to the periodicals. Notable newspapers like "Molla Nəsrəddin", "Kaspi", "Baku," "Oqni", "Zakavkazye," "Kavkazskoye slovo", “Shargi-Rus”, etc. emerged as influential players, shaping public discourse and promoting the notion of national self-determination.

Despite the oppressive restrictions, the Azerbaijani intellectuals persisted in their contributions to the Russian-language periodicals, tackling diverse subjects and leaving a

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lasting impact on the cultural landscape. Their unwavering dedication to intellectual thought and preserving the Azerbaijani national identity continues to be celebrated and revered in the annals of the Azerbaijani cultural history.

The study's central focus lies in exploring the role of the periodical literature during this transformative period in shaping and actualizing the Azerbaijani national identity. It highlights how these periodicals provided authors with a platform to express their responses to both internal and external events, while simultaneously reflecting the essence of the Azerbaijani identity. By amalgamating artistic expression with societal reflection, the periodicals became powerful instruments for comprehending and unraveling the complexities of national identity.

The research study primarily concentrates on analyzing publicist articles within the periodicals, meticulously examining their theoretical underpinnings and functional significance. It introduces the concept of the "modus of national identity," a process by which individuals align their personal identities with that of their nation through the incorporation of specific aesthetic elements in literary works. These elements include motives, artistic imagery, lyrical characters as vessels for the authors' reflections, archetypes, symbols, and place names, all of which collectively contribute to the profound exploration and representation of the Azerbaijani national identity.

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