


A SHORT REVIEW OF GEOPOLITICS OF THE AZERBAIJANI MULTICULTURALISM ¹

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ABSTRACT

Today states, societies and individuals are in transition to a new order at global, regional, national and local levels, gaining new experiences. The issues in multiculturalism with dimensions that have never practiced before are also important for everyone. The Republic of Azerbaijan, located on the border of Europe and Asia, was established at the crossroads of different civilizations. The region's favorable geographical location and rich nature have made it one of the large ancient settlement areas. Azerbaijani society's understanding of tolerance has developed and has reached a high level of awareness in parallel with its historical, political, economic, social and cultural evolution. These processes sometimes proceeded naturally, sometimes inevitably. The aim of this research is to investigate the basic geographical, historical, political and economic dynamics of Azerbaijani multiculturalism and to draw the geopolitical framework of it. The study claims that in addition to historical and political processes, geographical location and rich fossil energy resources play a major role in the formation of Azerbaijani multiculturalism. While geographical location enables the development of transportation networks, trade and interaction between societies, a strong economic structure based on energy resources has paved the way for the settlement of different identities in this country.

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Introduction

The end of the Cold War accelerated globalization, providing more opportunities than ever for societies to get to know each other. However, the number of identity-based conflicts, which were seen as relatively weak in a world divided into two camps by the bipolar system, has also increased during this process. Conflicts based on identity - religion, language, race, ethnicity and nationality - threaten societies in every corner of the world, regardless of their level of development. The increasing number of the contacts, cooperation and similarities that globalization has resulted in on the one hand, the separations and differentiations based on identity on the other hand have created a paradox that extends into the 21st century. The phenomenon of globalization makes a network of intertwined relationships inevitable. The current outlook of the world highlights the concepts of “international society” or “global society”. The global society and global political understanding require to decrease the levels of conflicts. Otherwise, the intervention of the global society is inevitable for the positive progress of global relations. Therefore, it is seen that global networks shaped by global economic relations have turned different cultural groups into “business partners”: While multinational companies and consortiums unite many different social and political structures for the same goal, the fact has emerged that old clichés cannot produce solutions and conflicts block processes. The understanding of multiculturalism and tolerance of societies has vital importance in order to build a secure future for future generations in this sense.

The South Caucasus is one of the conflicted regions in the world. The aim of this study is to investigate the geopolitical dynamics of multiculturalism in Azerbaijan, which is the main regional actor in the South Caucasus. In this study, a literature review was used as a research method. Literature review can generally be defined as the basic systematic way of collecting and synthesizing previous studies. Academic studies, press and media materials, reports and statistical data, published by official institutions have used in the study. The vast majority of previous studies conducted in this field have addressed the issue in terms of the coexistence of different cultures. However, this study focuses on research question of how different cultures come together in the territory of Azerbaijan. Therefore, it is aimed to contribute to the literature by addressing Azerbaijani multiculturalism from a geopolitical perspective.

It is considered that it will be useful to draw more comprehensive framework from the perspective of the origins of the Azerbaijani multiculturalism for the future studies.

The Outlook of Azerbaijani Multiculturalism

The outlook of the Azerbaijani multiculturalism can be evaluated from two different perspectives: ethnic and religious. As a result of the policies of the Russian Tsardom based on the principle of "divide and rule", the ethnic composition, number and location of the population of the Northern Azerbaijan were purposefully changed, and the number of the settled Turkish-Muslim population of the South Caucasus decreased significantly. After the Russian occupation, the mass settlement of Armenians from different regions to the lands of the Northern Azerbaijan seriously affected the ethno-political situation. In the demographic and statistical sources of the Tsarist government, information about the peoples living in Azerbaijan was deliberately distorted. Despite all this, as in previous historical periods, Azerbaijanis succeeded to remain the main ethnic factor in the Caucasus between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, including the period of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. Alimardan Bey Topchubashov, one of the founders of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, who served as Minister of Foreign Affairs and Speaker of the Parliament in the government, submitted a special memorandum to the representatives of the Allies in Istanbul in November 1918. This document records that 7,667,370 people live on the 237,055.00 km² territory of the South Caucasus, and their ethnic structure was as follows: 3,306,000 (43.1%) Muslims, 1,786,000 (23.3%) Armenians, 1,641,000 (21.4%) Georgians. Accordingly, 2,353,000 people lived on the territory of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, which constituted 30.7% of the population of the South Caucasus. In the documents submitted by the government of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic to the Paris Peace Conference, it was stated that the territories under the actual sovereignty of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic cover 38% of the South Caucasus, and together with the territories under Azerbaijani control, it covers 60.7%. According to the aforementioned documents, the total population of the South Caucasus was 8,081,668 people. Of these, 4,617,671 (57.1%) lived in Azerbaijan. 75.4% (3,481,889 people) of the Azerbaijani population were Azerbaijani Turks, 17.2% (795,312 people) were Armenians, 0.6% (26,585 people) were Georgians, and 6.7% (310,885 people) were of other nationalities (Presidential Library

of Azerbaijan 2024).

The last census in the USSR in 1989 recorded a total of 7,021,000 people in Azerbaijan, representing 112 national and ethnic groups. The majority of them, 5,805,000 people, or 83% of the population, were Azerbaijani Turks. Other large groups were Russians, Armenians and Lezgins. During the same period, more than 87% of the population were recorded as Muslims (Shia and Sunni), 12% as Christians (Orthodox and Gregorian) and 0.5% as Jews (Yunusov 2001).

According to the latest data of the State Statistics Service of the Republic of Azerbaijan, published in 2009, the population of the country is 10,119,000 people (The State Statistics Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan 2009). Approximately 92% of the total population consists of Azerbaijani Turks. Lezgins are the second largest ethnic identity in the country with a share of 2% of the total population. Other ethnic groups are Armenians (1.3%), Russians (1.3%) and Talysh (1.3%), respectively. Apart from these, there are approximately 50,000 Avars (0.6%), 38,000 Meskhetian Turks (0.4%), more than 25,000 Tatars (0.3%), 25,000 Tats (0.3%) and 21,000 thousand (0.3%) Ukrainians. Sahurs, Georgians, Jews and Kurds each constitute 0.1% of the total population. According to 2009 data, Gryzs (0.04%), Udins (0.04%) and Khinalqs (0.02%) are the peoples whose numbers are above a certain percentage in the country. Apart from these, other ethnicities also live in Azerbaijan in small groups, the total number of which was approximately 10,000 in 2009 (The State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan 2021).

Comparing the last census conducted during the USSR period in 1989 and the last census conducted after independence in 2009, significant changes are observed in the number of people living in the country. While the share of people belonging to different ethnic groups in the population in Azerbaijan was 17.3% in 1989, this rate changed to 8.4% in 2009, meaning that the number of people belonging to other nations decreased. This situation can be explained by the economic difficulties that arose with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Nagorno-Karabakh war. As a result of the difficult socio-economic conditions of the period, Russians, Jews and other Slavic peoples in Azerbaijan migrated to countries such as Russia and Israel, where they found more secure in terms of peace, economy and stability. The war in Nagorno-Karabakh also resulted in a decrease in the number of Armenians in the country. Despite this, Armenians still live in the Karabakh region and outside of it (Mikailov 2015). It should also be emphasized that the Tats, Talyshs, Kurds and Mountain Jews, which are included in the Iranian language group of the Indo-European language

family; The Lezgins, Avars, Udings, Sahurs, the people of the "Shahdagh" group, Ingiloy, Assyrians, Rutuls, Gypsies and Azerbaijani Turks, who are the majority population in the country, are the settled ethnic groups included in the North and South Caucasus language groups. Other than these, Russians, Ukrainians, European Jews, Georgian Jews, Molokans, Tatars, Germans, British, Meskhetian Turks are ethnic minorities that settled in the region later for political or economic reasons.

The characteristics of Azerbaijan's historical development, geographical location, and ethnic structure of the population have created a suitable environment for the existence of different religions in these lands. At different times, idolatry, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and many other religious movements have spread to different degrees in the country's territory. There are various religious beliefs in the Republic of Azerbaijan, but the predominant religion is Islam. Islam, which emerged in the Arabian Peninsula in the early 7th century, quickly spread in the lands of Azerbaijan.

The Soviet rule banned all kinds of religious activities throughout the country. After the collapse of the USSR, hundreds of new Muslim religious communities began to operate in Azerbaijan, and the Caucasian Muslim Administration was established on the basis of the Transcaucasian Muslim Spiritual Administration. Muslim religious communities operating in the Republic of Azerbaijan are united in this historical religious center and are subordinate to it in organizational matters. The history of Christianity in Azerbaijan practically begins with the emergence of the Albanian Church. In general, the Albanian Church has a special place in the history of Christianity. The Caucasian Albanian lands are considered one of the places of origin of the first Christian communities. The existence of the Alban-Udi Christian religious community is an important event in terms of its history, character, content, religious and political value.

In Azerbaijan, Christianity is represented by Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Protestantism, as well as various sectarian communities. Orthodoxy began to spread in Azerbaijan in the early 19th century due to the "resettlement policy" pursued by Tsarist Russia in this region. Lutheranism was the first Protestant sect to become widespread in Azerbaijan. The emergence of Lutheranism in Azerbaijan is associated with the settlement of Germans and Poles in the South Caucasus in the first half of the 19th century (Presidential Library of Azerbaijan 2024a). Currently, Orthodoxy in Azerbaijan is represented by the Russian and Georgian Orthodox churches. The

Russian Orthodox churches in the country were united in the Baku and Khazar Diocese, established in 2000. The largest Christian denomination in Azerbaijan is the Russian Orthodox Church. There are also 11 Malakan communities in Azerbaijan, which belong to the old Orthodox religion. Catholics are represented by the Roman Catholic Community in Baku. After Azerbaijan gained independence, conditions were created for the revival of Catholicism in the country, and full state support was provided to the Catholic Community against the background of close diplomatic relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Vatican. Protestantism in Azerbaijan is represented by various movements, and there are several Protestant religious communities officially registered with the state.

Today, there are three different Jewish communities in Azerbaijan: Mountain Jews, European (Ashkinazi) Jews, and Georgian Jews. Historically, Judaism is represented in Azerbaijan by Mountain Jews. There is information that Jews have settled in Azerbaijan for more than 2,500 years. Although 96% of the population living in Azerbaijan is Muslim and 4% is non-Muslim, the state treats representatives of all religions equally (Gurbanli 2021). The process of official re-registration of religious institutions in the country has been initiated since January 1, 2009. As of December 2021, a total of 970 religious institutions have been officially registered with the state. 933 of them are Islamic, 26 Christian, 8 Jewish, 2 Bahai, and 1 Krishna faith. There are 2253 mosques, 16 churches, and 7 synagogues operating in the country. At the same time, 10 religious educational institutions (colleges) have been registered (The State Committee on Affairs with Religious Associations of the Republic of Azerbaijan 2021). The climate of religious tolerance in the country serves to ensure solidarity and peaceful coexistence among different nations and sects. Here, the ideology of Azerbaijanism stands out as a system of ideological views that promotes national-religious identity, tolerance and civil solidarity.

Factors Shaping the Azerbaijani Multiculturalism

The factors that shape the current multicultural structure of Azerbaijan can be explained by geographical, historical, political and economic reasons. In this sense, the geographical location of the country can be considered as the most fundamental factor. The Caucasus is a small region as a piece of land, but it is located at the intersection of continents, right in the middle of the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, which host different civilizations. If to evaluate separately, both the European and Asian

continents and the Black Sea-Caspian basin address a vast geography that hosts many cultures within itself. In short, the geographical borders of Europe extend from the Urals to the Caucasus, from the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea, to the Mediterranean, to the shores of the Atlantic Ocean, and to the Norwegian Sea in the north. When we look at Asia, we see the world's largest continent, spreading from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean, from the Urals to the Red Sea. In such a geography, Azerbaijan has a maritime climate in one part and a continental climate in the other. The climate of Azerbaijan provides suitable conditions for the cultivation of various plant species in the country. Its natural environment and favorable location have been an important reason for this place to become one of the permanent civilization centers. Geographical formations such as rivers, plains, mountains, lakes, and seas have made Azerbaijani lands attractive in terms of the survival of ancient tribes in terms of both nutrition and military defense. Geographically, Azerbaijan is located not only on the borders of the continents - Europe and Asia, but also on the borders of religions and cultures. The country is the end of the Islamic world and culture in the north, and the beginning of the Christian world and European - Western culture (Ismayilov 2014).

From a historical perspective, it is known that the first political formations in the region emerged in ancient times. The material culture remains discovered as a result of archaeological excavations in the Azykh cave indicate that the Azerbaijani lands were included in the area of formation of ancient people. The fact that the materials found were used by primitive people 1.5 million years ago proves that these lands have been a settlement area for centuries. The Gobustan rock art collection is an important monument of art and culture of the Mesolithic, Neolithic and later periods. The settlements in the Azerbaijani lands dating back to the middle of the 6th millennium BC provide a definite picture of the economic, cultural and social relations of the inhabitants who were in close contact with neighboring environments. In the process of formation of the ethnic structure of Azerbaijan, it is necessary to emphasize the role of the migrations of the Turkic tribes, which started from the end of antiquity and continued until the beginning of the Middle Ages, originating from the foothills of the ancestral homeland of Central Asia, the Tien Shan Mountain, and moving to the south, west and southwest.

Inter-empire conflicts over the Azerbaijani lands at different periods of history are one of the most important factors in the formation of its ethnic structure. The Azerbaijani people have their own history of formation and development. Research shows that this history combines two important periods: 1) differentiation and 2) integration. The differentiation period is the period when the process of separation of

the Turkish ethnic identity into different peoples, also Azerbaijani Turks or Azerbaijani peoples, intensified. Integration, on the other hand, belongs to the later periods of the ethnic history of the Azerbaijani society and includes the process of unification of a number of Turkish and non-Turkish ethnic groups and the emergence of a unified nation. The main socio-political events that took place during the formation of the people and language in Azerbaijan and the surrounding regions directly affected the process of formation of ethnic identities (Ceferov 2005). What is meant here is the achievements of Azerbaijan in the context of multiculturalism as an area where numerous interstate wars, internal political conflicts, socio-political, religious and ideological movements, natural migration processes, settlement policies followed by various heads of state and similar historical events took place. Due to its geographical location, "multiculturalism" in Azerbaijan has developed simultaneously with historical consciousness. If we consider that every person and every social life style is shaped in the orbit of time and in line with the course of history, in other words, if the past is associated with the present, the permanent effects of all the above briefly mentioned on the multicultural appearance of Azerbaijan are clear and understandable. The flow of time together with life in this geography has built the texture of Azerbaijani multiculturalism.

When evaluating Azerbaijani multiculturalism, it is understood how deep the impact of political processes on this formation is. In the context of the ethnic identity map, it is possible to consider these political effects in two periods at a two-dimensional level. The first of these covers the period from ancient times to the Middle Ages, when settled ethnic identities – indigenous peoples were formed in Azerbaijani territory. The second is the new period starting from the 18th century and ending in the early years of the 20th century, which includes ethnic groups that settled in Azerbaijani lands later.

Although the first state bodies or ethno-political associations were formed in this geography, which has been dynamic since ancient times, in the late 4th - early 3rd millennium BC, it has always been difficult to establish long-term socio-political alliances. The contemporary ethno-cultural landscape of the region shows that various ethnic groups, languages, religions, worldviews and cultures, which have been sharply different from each other throughout history, have been in constant motion. The Sassanids and Arabs prevented the Greeks, who had gained strength especially with the spread of Christianity and conquered all of Anatolia, from expanding further eastward through military-political interventions. These military-political initiatives first pushed ethnic groups of Caucasian origin and then of Iranian origin to the

mountains, which were not very suitable for settlement, and to the semi-deserts on the Caspian coast. The Kipchak Turks from the Huns settled in the mountain ranges or steppes, completely in accordance with Turkish life technologies. The ethnic landscape of contemporary Azerbaijan also reflects this (Ceferov et al. 2016). The ethno-geographical position of the Kipchak Turks, who settled in Azerbaijan from the 1st century AD, was strengthened by the increasingly intense Oghuz-Seljuk campaigns in the 9th-11th centuries. These marches, which started in Central Asia and continued in stages towards Anatolia by passing south of the Caspian Sea, were more of a military-political nature, unlike the nomadic Hun-Kipchak movements. Indeed, while the culture of the Kipchaks was based more on oral creativity and a nomadic lifestyle, the culture of the Oghuz was dominated by writing and settled city life (Ceferov et al. 2016). The completion of the formation process of settled ethnic groups in Azerbaijan coincides with the periods of the establishment of the Shirvanshahs, Atabegs, Karakoyunlu, Akkoyunlu and especially the Safavid states. Here, it is necessary to emphasize the effects of the Mongol invasion.

The invasion of Azerbaijan by the Mongol-Tatars in the mid-13th century, especially the destruction of palaces and cultural centers, had a great impact on the active ethnic processes in the country and in the border regions. The arrival of various Turkic tribes in Azerbaijan during the Mongol-Tatar march increased the density of Turkic ethnicity in Azerbaijan.

As mentioned above, the events that took place in the context of the formation of ethnic groups settled in Azerbaijan from ancient times to the beginning of the 18th century can be explained as the objective reasons for contemporary Azerbaijani multiculturalism; the events that followed this period and will be discussed below can be explained as the subjective reasons.

In the second half of the 18th century, Azerbaijan was divided into small states - khanates. The country entered a period of military and political decline. Taking advantage of this, the Shah of Iran and the Russian Tsardom, which had been continuously occupying the Azerbaijani lands since 1803, divided Azerbaijan into two. As a result, a period of Russification began in the north of Azerbaijan and a period of Persianization began in the south. In this sense, Russia's political influence on the formation of the current multicultural structure of today's independent Republic of Azerbaijan is very strong. The mass settlement of Armenians in Azerbaijani lands in the first quarter of the 19th century is noteworthy as the third important change in the ethnic map of the region in the context of the identities that came here later. The end

of the Russian-Iranian and Russian-Ottoman wars coincides with the mass influx of Armenians to Azerbaijan. The process of changing the ethnic map of Azerbaijan through political moves continued in the 20th century. In the 1960s, with the decision of the USSR State Defense Committee dated 17 November 1944, the Meskhetian Turks who had been exiled to Central Asia and Kazakhstan were acquitted and the process of settling them in Azerbaijan began. When the Georgian government did not allow the Meskhetian Turks to return to their own lands, the first group of people of the same ethnic origin and religious belief came to Azerbaijan in September 1958. As is known, with the Edirne Treaty of 1829, the historical Turkish population of the Meskhetian region of Georgia was deported to Turkiye, and Armenians from Erzurum and Kars were settled in their place. As a result of the bloody conflicts between Meskhetian Turks and Uzbeks in various regions of Uzbekistan, the second phase of the settlement of Meskhetian Turks in Azerbaijan took place in 1989 (Cavadov 2000).

Economic conditions in the country have encouraged migration to Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan has been one of the important trade and transportation centers since ancient times due to its geostrategic location. The empires that dominated the region established suitable transportation routes to ensure their security and facilitate their administration, and they attached importance to wealth and therefore trade in order to maintain their power. This in turn created mutual interaction. While the favorable conditions of the region for trade and transportation increased human mobility, this mobility also encouraged economic activities. The Silk Road in particular enabled the region to become a trade center. During the periods when the Silk Road was active, Azerbaijani lands constituted one of the most important transportation axes of trade between the East and the West, and this commercial mobility also played a major role in the discovery of the region's own commercial potential and the creation of its own economic activity areas. As Azerbaijan's economic activity capacity increased, the number of foreign labor coming from neighboring countries also increased, and over time, they settled here permanently. The industrialization process of oil production in Azerbaijan, which has the rich oil and natural gas resources of the Caspian basin, has proceeded in parallel with the formation and development of capitalist relations. The number of workers employed in Russia's oil industry increased from 7,000 in 1894 to 27,000 in 1904, 24,500 of whom were in Azerbaijan (Mirbabayev 2007). In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, thanks to the oil industry, Baku became a multicultural city. With the development of the oil industry in the 1970s, Jewish immigration to Azerbaijan from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Poland increased.

Conclusion

With its ancient historical background, Azerbaijan is a country with many identities today due to objective and subjective reasons. Therefore, the ethnic and religious structure of the country includes some sensitivities brought about by diversity. However, the different identities living in these lands preserved their own characteristics, integrated into a single society over time, became an inseparable part of the Azerbaijani people, and made this place their homeland. On the other hand, like many painful experiences in its history, the Azerbaijani people paid a heavy price for this sensitivity in our more recent past, 20% of its lands were subjected to Armenian occupation for more than 30 years, and the world public opinion did not react to this injustice in accordance with international law.

Azerbaijan, which has carried its relations with many states, especially the Republic of Türkiye, to important strategic cooperation after the 2000s, ended 30 years of injustice by liberating its lands in Karabakh as a result of the Second Karabakh War that ended on November 10, 2020. Aware of being faced with such a problem, Azerbaijan has preferred to direct itself towards a future where multiculturalism, interfaith and intercivilizational communication is strong, harmony and tolerance prevail, and ethnic diversity is experienced together. Today, multiculturalism attracts attention as one of the state policies that is given priority in Azerbaijan. Similarly, Azerbaijani citizens also embrace this policy put forward by the government with the understanding of tolerance and the habit of living together that has been passed down from generation to generation throughout history. As President İlham Aliyev, who supports the understanding of tolerance that the society has developed for centuries and has carried to the present day as an official state policy and is the architect of this process, said, multiculturalism in Azerbaijan has been accepted as a “lifestyle” at the level of the government, civil society or the people. In particular, in recent years, very important steps have been taken in public-private, society-public cooperation to adapt Azerbaijani multiculturalism to every area of life, from politics to economy, from education to employment, from social media to communication, and in short, the work carried out has been carried out in a way that will leave peace, friendship, tolerance and understanding as a legacy to future generations. It should be emphasized that Azerbaijani multiculturalism policy is designed to prevent different identities living in the country, including Armenian minorities, from finding themselves in a conflict like the Karabakh issue again. In this context, defining the

Karabakh War between Azerbaijan and Armenia as a solution to a fundamental problem from the previous millennium, instead of defining it as a new area of conflict, will allow the region to look forward within the framework of new world conditions. Azerbaijan continues its work in this direction, considering that conflict and war harm everyone, regardless of ethnic or religious identity. Thus, the Azerbaijani multiculturalism model is a unique model that needs to be learned, examined and developed in today's world, where identity-based conflicts are increasing, in terms of encouraging coexistence without ostracizing different identities by drawing lessons from the past, based on historical experiences, and taking into account past experiences.

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