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Research Article

**POST-CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION IN AZERBAIJAN:
RETHINKING THE POLITICS OF NATIONALISM AND
REWRITING HISTORY**

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the dynamics of the politics of nationalism and historiography in Azerbaijan after the Second Karabakh War, focusing on the evolution of the history of nationalism in Azerbaijan by tracing its transformation over the past two centuries. The research specifically examines the impact of the colonial policy of Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union on the writing of history and the formation of identity in Azerbaijan. The study suggests that the Victory in the Second Karabakh War required consideration of rewriting the history of the politics of nationalism. In this sense, the decolonizing of the historiography is important. To protect its sovereignty and independence from the neocolonial tendencies, Azerbaijan should escape from the colonial way of historiography and the colonial definition of national identity. In this context, rethinking nationalism implies redefining Azerbaijan's identity into a new form, which is embracing Turkishness as a constituent part while reflecting its multicultural pattern.

Keywords: Nationalism, National identity, ADR, Karabakh, Azerbaijani Historiography

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INTRODUCTION

Nationalism is still considered the foremost contributor to global politics (Greenfeld, 2021; Khandy & Şengül, 2022; Tamir, 2019, 2020), which is under threat due to uncertainty (Brown, 2021a, 2021b, 2022). However, the tools/methods of understanding the world have changed dramatically in recent decades. In this respect, nationalism has become a multicultural phenomenon (Modood, 2019). Furthermore, the concept of “new nationalism” (Acemoglu, 2022) has also been digitalized (Mihelj & Jiménez-Martínez, 2021). In its modern sense, classical nationalism was associated with the right of nations to self-determination. In contrast, “new nationalism” emerged in a different context, where security and safety became the priority for states. The Chinese model of the “despotic leviathan” has already become a trend in the states. Thus, states have preferred Thomas Hobbes’s security concerns over John Locke’s freedom (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2020). In this respect, it is justified that the Eurocentric approach/interpretation of nationalism has weathered (Khandy & Şengül, 2022). In addition to that, white supremacy is restoring itself within the United States (USA) political system (Kaufmann 2004, 2020). According to Acemoglu (2020), the rise of white nationalism in the USA in this context could be explained. Parallel to that, nationalism has already gained a central role in global politics (Acemoglu, 2022).

Therefore, it could be argued that nationalism remains privileged; history is one of the powerful tools used to construct nationalist narratives. The modern world is divided between nation-states. Moreover, nations have become the central principle of modern political organization. On the other hand, to build a national system, historiography needs nationalism, and nationalism needs a “victory” narrative. However, over the last two centuries (except for the brief period of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR), Azerbaijan was under the control of colonial powers – Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union. Colonial subjection and the absence of statehood were the primary obstacles to developing an independent national history that prioritized Turkishness.

Over the centuries, Azerbaijanis have been subjected to various identifications stemming from their religious affiliation, for example, Muslims, and then broader ethnic identities such as Tatars or Turks, which ultimately led them to a consolidated Azerbaijani identity during the Soviet period.

As a cross point of different cultures, Azerbaijan has generated considerable scholarly interest in its nation-building process, leading to extensive research by scholars seeking to unravel its intricacies (Kamrava, 2001; Tokluoglu, 2005; Valiyev, 2023). This phenomenon was not solely confined to the population of the Republic of Azerbaijan but also involved the contribution of Iranian Azerbaijanis (South Azerbaijan) (Filou, 2020). According to Valiyev (2023), individuals associated with the enlightenment movement in Tsarist Russian Azerbaijan, such as M.F. Akhundzade, along with the publication of the first Azerbaijani-language journal “Əkinçi” (Plougher), nurtured the seeds of awakening among intellectuals in Azerbaijan. These intellectuals later played crucial roles in the formation of the ADR. Çağla (2019) pointed out that the Russian reforms in education and administration, accompanied by the oil boom in the country, led to the sponsorship of students abroad by oil magnates like Haji Zeynalabidin Tagiyev. These intellectuals played a pivotal role in laying the groundwork for

nation-building. Moreover, the early 20th-century revolutions and wars were instrumental in stirring self-actualization within the national intelligentsia.

As part of the Soviet Union, the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) had Marxist-Leninism as its official state ideology, which was hostile to nationalism and relegated national identity to the background. However, Soviet passports acknowledged different nationalities by marking them with the corresponding identities. Throughout its existence, the term “Azərbaycanlı” [trans. From Azerbaijan/Azerbaijani] was used to denote Azerbaijan Turks. On the other hand, Soviet Azerbaijani nation-building overlooked the Turkic/Turk component of the Azerbaijani national identity. In this regard, Soviet Azerbaijani historiography was designed to suppress the Turkic heritage.

With the dawn of the restoration of independence, a new nation-building process commenced, marked by the “National Revival Day.” Since then, political power has been consolidated under the leadership of Abulfaz Elchibey and his Popular Front of Azerbaijan (PFA). Ergun (2022) argued that three essential perceptions of nationhood guided the PFA’s nation-building agenda: reflecting on historical roots, safeguarding territorial unity, and expanding relations beyond borders. This included nurturing ties with fellow Turkic communities within the Soviet Union, especially in Central Asia and Türkiye. Moreover, it prioritized engagement with Azerbaijani populations residing abroad, particularly in Iran. However, this process was not solely designed as an intensive nation-building endeavor to deepen national unity within Azerbaijan’s sovereign borders. Instead, it extended beyond borders and evolved into an extensive ideological campaign. As Elchibey famously stated, “Our struggle is a struggle of democracy and national unity. The movement for democracy overlaps with the national independence movement. That is why we are suffering now, falling to the left and then to the right” (Ergun, 2022: 818). It showed the complexity of their agenda, which has been criticized in various countries, including Iran and China.

After Heydar Aliyev came to power, a new phase of the nation-building process began. One significant event was the resolution of long-standing debates in parliament regarding the nation’s name and the name of its language. In 1995, Aliyev spearheaded the formation of a national constitution, which officially defined the name of the nation as “Azerbaijani” (Azərbaycanlı) and the name of the language as “Azerbaijan language” (Azərbaycan dili), as stipulated in Article 21 (Ergun, 2022: 821).

Numerous geopolitical challenges emerged as the nation-building process progressed from ideology to practical implementation, particularly in rebuilding a post-Soviet republic marked by war into a modern state (Akbari, 2023). The leadership adeptly managed the utilization of abundant hydrocarbon resources, securing benefits without adversely affecting neighboring countries or global powers. This achievement was marked by signing “The Contract of the Century” in 1994. The government’s agenda aimed to “leverage oil capital to foster human capital development”. Another sector that received attention was the initiative to send students abroad for education, expecting that they would return and contribute to their country (Ismayilov et al., 2009), echoing the strategy employed by the First Republic in 1918.

Furthermore, Broers and Mahmudlu (2023) examined the influence of religion, language, personality, and minority groups on the nation-building process. They

argued that the ideology of “Azərbaycançılıq” (Azerbaijanism) has served as the official state doctrine for decades within Azerbaijan’s multi-dimensional society, encompassing all ethnic and religious groups under one banner.

The academic literature has predominantly focused on factors such as collective memory (Garagozov, 2016), ethnicity (Smith et al., 1998), and religion (Swietochowski, 2004) to elucidate the nation-building process and identity construction. Additionally, scholarly investigations have examined the nation-building process during the Soviet era (Garagozov, 2012) and after independence (Ergun, 2021). However, there is a noticeable dearth of research examining the Second Karabakh War in 2020 as a transformative and rejuvenating event that reinstated national self-confidence, especially considering the disillusionment wrought by the First Karabakh War. Significant wars have frequently been catalysts for change, ushering in new developments throughout history. This article will analyze this milestone in nation-building and rewriting history in post-conflict Azerbaijan.

The article aims to answer the following questions: Has Azerbaijan started reassessing its historiography? Why has Azerbaijan initiated a reassessment of its nation-building process and historical narratives?

The central hypothesis posits that Azerbaijan’s heightened geopolitical confidence following the conflict has impeded the revision of its historical narratives and nation-building strategies. Echoing it, in 2021, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan issued a decree designating May 28th as Independence Day, a significant departure from its previous designation solely as Republic Day. Second, October 18th was designated as the Day of the Restoration of Independence, a role previously held by Independence Day (President.az, 2021). The Ministry of Science and Education also published a textbook titled “Zəfər Tarixi” [History of Victory] for the high schools, in which historians dealt with Azerbaijani history regarding Victory in the Second Karabakh War.

In this paper, we argue that the politics of nationalism related to the Soviet and occupation period will no longer help us to interpret post-conflict Azerbaijan. Further, we do not argue that the national politics of victorious Azerbaijan will be built in favor of direct Turkism.

This article utilizes qualitative content analysis within qualitative research methods, with the primary data sources being secondary sources such as written books, articles, academic papers on the issue, and related laws and orders.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: NATIONALISM AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

Clearly, nationalism emerged and played a key role in forming the modern world order. Nationalism needs history not only to preserve and implement a nationalist policy but also to legitimize its relations towards societies’ social, political and cultural life. Furthermore, historical coherence makes it look more substantial and justifiable.

In this paper, nationalism is not considered just a patriotic feeling but the main component in establishing and protecting the processes of the modern order. For instance, the main reason for the nationalist coloring of politics in today’s world stems from the fact that we are establishing a new order in space. The epistemic

status of the urge to raise and protect the flag, one of the basic symbols of the modern national homeland, can be ignored by philosophers who are ahistorical and free from life. However, the nationalist political discourse requires history for the individual to devote themselves to and believe in the national, which is often assumed to be meaningless by philosophers. Considering that nationalism plays a leading role in the construction of sociality in line with the principles of democracy, popular sovereignty, and equality (Greenfeld, 2021), one may point to the delay in the emergence of nationalism in Azerbaijan. Nationalism can be seen as a set of ideas that establishes and maintains the permanence of politics in the fenced modern space. In this respect, it is understandable that nationalism and history pose problems in Azerbaijan, which began its modern era with a lack of popular sovereignty, that is, with colonial modernization.

Nationalism, as a new way of politics (Kedourie, 2017), was a modern phenomenon born in a different context, where technological innovations were forced. Furthermore, modern notions of political/national sovereignty, as well as equality, were based mainly on nationalism (Greenfeld, 2021). National sovereignty that legitimized nation-states' violence eroded (Triandafyllidou, 2020). Migration, digitalization, and climate change are global threats to national sovereignty. Despite rising walls, political sovereignty is slipping out of the hands of nation-states (Brown, 2022). In this respect, history, as the primary tool of nationalist discourse (Valiyev, 2022), will be based not on a homogeneous culture but on a multicultural national culture(s) (Modood, 2014; Tamir, 2019). Thus, it is clear that global politics is witnessing the birth of a new discourse within the modern world.

In modern societies, democracy is equal and based on “national sovereignty and equality in community membership”¹ principles. In this context, building a modern democratic (equitable) society is possible only through nationalism (Greenfeld, 2021). It is justifiable to contend that the legitimating power of political formations in modern societies is nationalism (in the form of nations). The modern world has been constructed politically as a world of nations (Smith, 2002). Because the basis of the modern world is national sovereignty, in this sense, nationalism, with a central position in modern politics and society, needs history to realize itself (Valiyev, 2022).

The fate of nationalism in the twenty-first century is one of the primary issues researchers focus on (Sutherland, 2012). The rise of nationalism was interpreted in different ways. Some scholars view nationalism as a key element in mitigating political uncertainty (Tamir, 2020). In contrast, others assumed nationalism as the instrument of neoliberalism that demolishes liberal democracy (Dardot & Laval, 2022).

As is well known, history and philosophy are considered the two primary modes of acquiring knowledge in human life (Mehdiyev, 2016, 2019). Contrary to philosophy, historical knowledge (opinion) has been the main instrument of politics in the organization and maintenance of social life. History is usually related to politics (nationalism) and emerges as the legitimizing element (Alpay, 2013). For this reason, it can be said that the place of modern history, which started in the nationalist line, is the nation (Maza, 2022). Thus, it is clear that “History has been the focal point of nationalism and nation formation” (Smith, 2002: 193). History is supposed to contribute to building a group [national] identity. The importance

1 Translated by the authors from Turkish into English.

of history stems from its relationship with politics. Therefore, politics is no longer a part of history (Brown, 2010). Thus, it can be reiterated that nationalism, which remains a pivotal ideology in establishing modern political sovereignty, relies on history (Valiyev, 2022). In this sense, history will be in contradiction with philosophy. However, politics needs history to build modern societies, and philosophy could have emerged in established societies, where it would question the relative society that would have been built by history. However, due to the historical and political context of the nations on the occasion of the establishment of national societies, where modern principles and narratives have been practiced, societies developed a history of nationalism (Greenfeld, 2019).

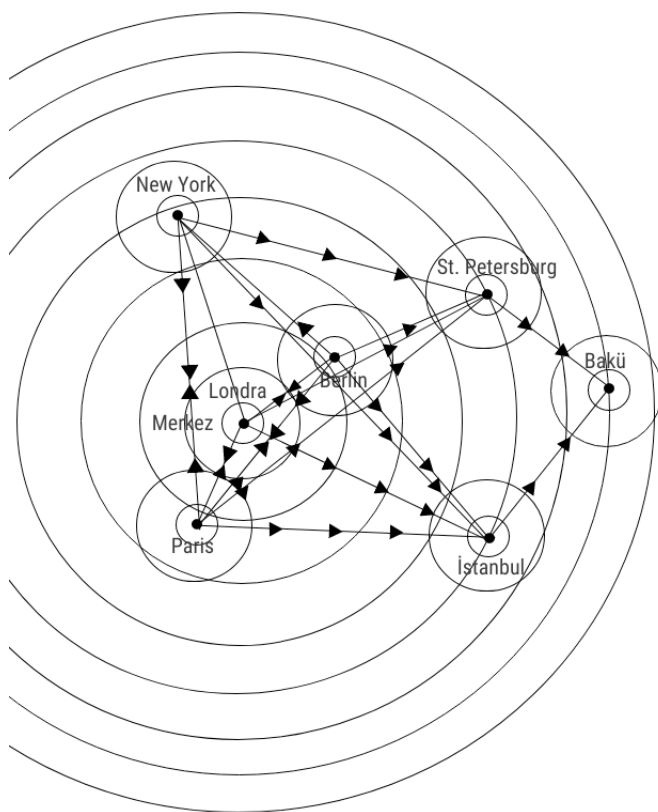
Modern Azerbaijani history, or the nation-building process, started during the Tsarist colonial period (Valiyev, 2023) and was institutionalized in Soviet times. Soviet authorities prioritized historiography, and, on this occasion, Moscow established exclusive historical institutions in all Soviet Republics. Historical institutions were supported in writing an exclusive history that facilitated integration into Soviet Man (советский человек). Pre-Soviet historiography, written under Nikolai Marr in 1920, was replaced with the primordial approach to the history of nations in the 1930s. The history of the Soviet Union nations had to start from antiquity and continue through the Stalin period. This new approach became a basis for the national identity formation of the Soviet Union member states. The primordial or ethnocentric approach to the nation's history became an obstacle to the history of nationalism in Azerbaijan. The Turkic heritage of the titular nation was erased from the historical books to "show" its autochthonous link to the region and differentiate it from the people of Türkiye. The Great Terror of Stalin served for this, which took thousands of lives under the pretext of "Pan-Turkism" (Yilmaz, 2015). It is notable that, after independence, due to socio-political events discussed in this article, the history of historiography has not changed so much; still, the historiography in Azerbaijan is based on strong territorial historical narratives (Alptekin et al., 2022), which do not allow for a substantial reconsideration of the history of nationalism due to a lack of narratives.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF AZERBAIJANI NATIONALISM DURING TSARIST RUSSIA AND THE USSR

It may be posited that modern history emerged due to the revolutionary narrative of the Enlightenment. That history followed a nationalist line. (Smith, 2022: 25). Although the revolution adopted liberty as its motto to eliminate the "restrictions" of religious doctrine, it led modern societies to freedom on the axis of the law created by the sovereign under the supervision of nation-states. In this sense, the modern historical narrative, which has adopted the principle of progress as its guiding principle, has largely replaced philosophy, especially since the end of the eighteenth century. In this context, although nationalism initially emerged in England (Greenfeld, 2021), its mass dissemination as a doctrine was at the end of the eighteenth century (Kedourie, 2017). In Azerbaijan, which was under colonial rule during the period of mass national birth, the development of nationalism and, thus, modern history occurred within the context of the small nations model (Valiyev, 2023; Valiyev & Bezci, 2021) (see Figure 1).

In this respect, it is known that Azerbaijan was under colonial rule when modern national histories were born. Therefore, modernization developed within the colonial context (Valiyev, 2020).

Table 1.
Periphery of the Periphery



Source: Valiyev, O. (2023) *Azərbaycan Milliyetçiliği*. 2nd ed. Ankara: Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık: 181.

The national movement is the right concept to explain Azerbaijan’s nation-building process (Valiyev, 2023). The history of historiography was shaped by its direct or indirect relations with politics. In the case of Azerbaijan, due to Tsarist colonialism, the first version of Azerbaijani historiography, *Gulistan-i İrem*, was written for St. Petersburg (Bakıxanov, 2020). Mirza Kazim Bek was another historian; his work, *Derbentname*, was one of the earliest historical/academic sources. In addition to that, due to Tsarist colonialism, “Neither Abbasgulu Aga Bakikhanov nor Mirza Kazim Bek discusses in their work the formation of a nation in Azerbaijan” (Mahmudlu, 2017: 136).

After a prolonged struggle, the Azerbaijani National Council declared the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan, marking the beginning of modern Azerbaijani statehood. However, because of the Tsarist background and the Bolshevik threat, the Republic found itself in a “precarious situation. “Consequently, it could not establish a national identity and a corresponding history, which would have fostered a sense of unity through national historiography (Valiyev, 2023; Valiyev & Alptekin, 2023). Nevertheless, the Soviets began constructing institutional historiography with a clear political purpose to foster Soviet nationhood.

Soviet ideology acted on the principle of limiting the history of the peoples it incorporated into the geography (territory). For this reason, Azerbaijani history was written with a territorial approach rather than ethnic belonging (Turkism). In Soviet historiography, Turkism was viewed as a threat to Azerbaijan's integrity (İsahanlı, 2022). Thus, a vertical attempt at conscientization of history has emerged. For this reason, due to the lack of independence and statehood, the nationalist part of historiography was incomplete. However, the Soviet historiography of Azerbaijan was supposed to facilitate "*homo-Sovieticus*" rather than to promote Azerbaijani nationalism. Therefore, the Azerbaijani national identity was built without a Turkic legacy, which was symbolized in the tricolor flag of independent Azerbaijan.

AZERBAIJANI HISTORIOGRAPHY AND NATIONALISM FRAMED IN THE SOVIET PERIOD

It is said that modern history is based on nationalist lines, starting at the end of the 18th century and culminating in the 19th century. However, Azerbaijan was occupied by Tsarist Russia and remained under its control through the USSR. So, due to its long existence, Soviet time played a key role in the formation of historiography, primarily based on Marxist theory (Gasimov 2014: 70). It would be supported to facilitate integration or assimilation of others in favor of "eternal friendship of all Soviet nationalities" among Soviet citizens, and the short-lived Republic was condemned per the Sovietization of history (Gasimov 2009: 5). Due to the historical context, the Republic of Azerbaijan lost independence, and Soviet-oriented historiography established a geography-based history.

The development of Azerbaijani nationalism in the post-Soviet period

On the eve of the rising global nationalist wave at the end of the 1980s, Azerbaijan had an opportunity to restore its independence. It may be proposed that the national revival started then and continued after independence. Turkism was the cementing element that united the people for independence in the square, which would be named Azadlıq (Freedom). However, the newly independent Republic of Azerbaijan and the loss of some territories during the first Nagorno-Karabakh war also lacked the development of a nationalist/independent historiography that would overcome the Soviet/colonial traces in the historiography.

After the restoration of independence, nationalists within the Popular Front Movement came to office, and the "de-Sovietization of history" or "nationalization of history" period started. Gasimov described that period:

(...) This movement dropped a number of terms commonly used in Soviet historiography. For example, the war between the Soviet Union and Germany was no longer called the "Great Patriotic War" but simply referred to as World War II. The Sovietization of Azerbaijan, beginning in 1920, was now called the "April occupation" (Gasimov, 2009: 6-7).

Nationalists who played a decisive role in restoring independence failed to interpret and evaluate the situation rationally and insisted on ethnic nationalist discourse. The first years of independence were marked by political instability. However, the victory in the Second Karabakh War brought the issues of nationalism and national history back to the forefront.

In this respect, it may be postulated that the nationalist deficit was the main obstacle to the establishment of an independent political entity in Azerbaijan, which was divided and colonized through the Gulustan (1813) and the Turkmenchay (1828) treaties. In short, it is reasonable to suggest that modern political formation in Azerbaijan developed in a context peculiar to small nations (Valiyev, 2023; Valiyev, 2020; Valiyev & Bezci, 2021).

The approach to history can change according to its political context. Our social understanding of the past is made possible by what historians write in line with social and political orders/demands (İsahanlı, 2022). Modern national history ensures that the memory of societies is constructed in a specific contextualization. Within this framework, it is plausible to argue that the nationalist perspective on history remains valid in modern societies. In modern societies, being interested in history means being in the service of life (Nietzsche, 2022). Life in modern societies is made possible through fencing, which makes sovereignty and the nation-state possible. Fencing in the modern context shows that the sovereignty of nation-states is the only power over the land. In a Schmittian context, Nomos (order) (Schmitt, 2020), which makes territorial division possible, was impossible in Azerbaijan. After independence, war and occupation remained the main obstacles to constructing nomos or order.

The proclamation of the Republic in 1918 can be seen as an effort for popular sovereignty and equality. However, the Republic was Sovietized in 1920 as an incomplete nation-state (Valiyev, 2023; Valiyev & Alptekin, 2023). Since the Azerbaijani national identity constructed during the Soviet period was constructed to be articulated with the Soviet identity (Yilmaz, 2013), it left nationalism and history (Turkishness) as a problem for the post-Soviet period. For example, in “Russian Azerbaijan”, the concept of subjection implies the lack of political sovereignty that would make popular sovereignty and equality possible, more precisely, the existence of colonization. Therefore, the long period of subjection has bequeathed the problems of nationalism and history as challenges to be addressed by contemporary Azerbaijan. The reason nationalism is seen as a “danger” to be dealt with in the political discourse after independence can be traced back to the traces of institutionalization during the long colonial period, because the emerging nationalism would not neglect to focus on Turkishness, which the Soviets overlooked in the historiography. It was so much so that even the Soviets determined the political distinction regarding the mountainous part of Karabakh, and only after the victory in 2020 was the Nagorno-Karabakh status abolished. In sum, the history constructed for the construction of the “Homo Sovieticus” supra-identity, especially during the Soviet period, “naturally” ignored the national characteristics of Azerbaijanis. Thus, it is tenable to assert that modern Azerbaijani historiography was constructed by ignoring Turkishness (Guliyeva, 2022).

History can be viewed as an instrument of ownership, established by those who have secured sovereignty over the land through fencing. “Who owns this land?” “Whose ancestors did this land belong to?”; “Who came to this land first?” (İsahanlı 2022: 87). Since history is the art of creating social and national belonging, politics has always kept history at its side to dominate the present in relation to the past. In a sense, we acquire our knowledge (opinion) about the past through history. In other words, our knowledge (conviction) about the past is as much as what history [the political] tells us. In short, historians have facts [opinions] that they believe in or endeavor to make us believe. It is because collective identities

cannot be conceived without history. The historian's conviction about the past is realized in line with the demands of the present (İsahanlı, 2022).

İhsan Fazlıoğlu expresses the essence of a nation as its historical experience. Fazlıoğlu continues as follows: "The essence of Anatolian-Balkan Turks is the historical experience in the line of Great Seljuks – Anatolian Seljuks – Principalities – Ottomans – Republic and the opportunities that this experience contains"² (Fazlıoğlu, 2015). From this perspective, the long-standing colonial experience of the modern period profoundly impacted Azerbaijan's essence and historical experience. The long-lasting colonial legacy has created a distinct context for Azerbaijan. More than seven decades of the Soviet period (colonialism) continued to prevent the formation of political will (nationalism) to claim the historical experience. Therefore, the formation of a nationalist political will to claim historical experience has not been possible for Azerbaijan, which has built its modern narrative around the periphery (See Figure 1) as a small nation (Valiyev, 2023; Valiyev & Bezci, 2021; Valiyev & Alptekin, 2023). The fact that independence came simultaneously with war and territorial loss prevented the formation of a nationalist political will to take ownership of the historical experience.

Rethinking the politics of nationalism and rewriting history following the victory

The construction of the modern world is the product of Europe's innovation/change (Wallerstein, 1992), resulting from its political and economic hegemony (Frank & Gills, 1996). The emergence of national states or nations on the stage of history appeared through the internal victories of each nation. With King Henry VIII's declaration of his political authority over the church (1532), the English emerged as the first nation of the modern world or the "First Son of God" (Greenfeld, 2017: 54). However, the triumph of modern nations or the nation-building process took place in a different context. Modern nations can be categorized into three types: large (state nations), medium (developing nations), and small (non-dominant ethnic groups) (Hroch, 1995; Valiyev, 2023: 28-41). The modern political structure of Azerbaijan has developed in a way typical of small nations (Valiyev, 2023: 28-41). Thus, due to the lack of established statehood, the first modern Republic was not legally recognized as a state (Valiyev & Alptekin, 2023).

In this respect, the victory in Karabakh was Azerbaijan's first modern victory, which led to the completion of sovereignty. The victory made it possible to erase colonial traces, including those of Tsarist and Soviet times, in nationalism and history. At the same time, Azerbaijan could not escape its modern context, including its Tsarist and Soviet background. Therefore, based on nationalism, it is not possible to define identity and history only in the context of Turkishness.

However, due to the lack of victory or the completion of sovereignty through the liberation of the invaded territories, the Soviet Union has maintained its impact on historiography. Soviet-oriented Marxist historiography that supported facilitating the integration of the Soviet nation appeared in daily life. For example, one of the main avenues is named after "Moscow" and the "Workers" or "Labourers". However, after the restoration of independence, "Moscow" was renamed "Haydar Aliyev", and "Workers" was renamed "8 November" (liberation of Shusha).

2 Translated by the authors from Turkish into English.

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union brought about a significant shift in the global political landscape, even if it did not mark the end of history. Nationalism has played a decisive role in the emergence of new states (Tamir, 2019). In this sense, the influence of nationalism was decisive in the restoration of Azerbaijan's independence. After that, debates on nationalism and history continued in the contexts of Azerbaijanism and Turkism. The proponents of the Turkism ideology insisted that the political and legal (constitutional) definition of history should be based on the concept of Turks, the majority ethnic group. The proponents of Azerbaijanism, on the other hand, argued that the political and legal (constitutional) definition of history should be in the context of the geography (Azerbaijan), taking into account the historical context of Azerbaijan (Ergun, 2021). In post-independence Azerbaijan, debates about whether we should call ourselves "Turk," "Azeri," "Azerbaijani Turk," or "Azerbaijani" are still current. This issue has given rise to two different factions in the political establishment: those who advocate "Turkism" and those who advocate "Azerbaijanism."

History can become a problem if the political institution that makes history possibly takes its discourse on history to a distant past that it cannot claim. For example, the historiography of Azerbaijan, which the Soviets constructed in the late 1930s, has been stuck in the past to such an extent that it has difficulty owning it by ignoring the traces of Turkishness. In short, Azerbaijani politics, which will continue on the nationalist or national line, has to form its approach to history with a state reflex. In other words, Turkishness, which was excluded from the character of the Azerbaijani nation by Soviet historiography, needs to be reevaluated as a central element of Azerbaijani national identity.

Nationalism, which plays a leading role in establishing and protecting modern societies, cannot consider itself independent of history in this sense. For this reason, Nationalists are generally more interested in history. Because under whose supervision history is written, politics and the state are dominated by that thought and ideology. It follows that nationalism and history are essential for establishing a collective identity. However, an approach that overlooks the context of nationalism and history may cause harm. For example, the Azerbaijan Popular Front, which paved the way for Azerbaijan's independence, failed when it took office after independence because it failed to consider the context of Azerbaijan's struggle for independence and the challenges of independent Azerbaijan. In particular, the developments of the 71-year Soviet period constitute the context of today's Azerbaijan. Therefore, the political discourse of nationalist Azerbaijan may indicate a willingness to consider Turkism.

On the other hand, it seems out of context for the law to directly define the state, language, and nation as "Turk" or "Azerbaijani Turk". The development of Azerbaijani historiography to integrate Azerbaijanis with the Turkic world may be a more rational step. However, to strengthen national identity throughout history, Turkishness should be prioritized, which would facilitate strengthening the state and its integration into the Turkic World.

CONCLUSION

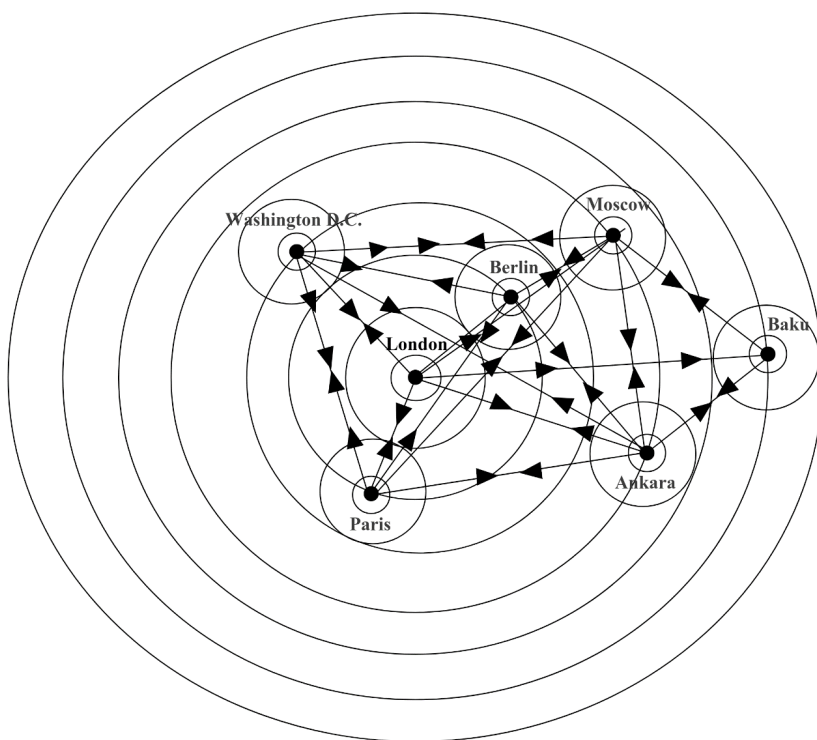
This study highlights the importance of reconsidering and rethinking Azerbaijani historiography and politics of nationalism in the post-conflict period following the Second Karabakh War. An analysis of the historical dynamics of nationalism

and its transformation over the past two centuries reveals the profound influence of the colonial policies of Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union on the formation of Azerbaijani identity and the writing of national history. However, the Victory in the Second Karabakh War revealed the need to break free from outdated colonial approaches and develop an independent national historiography that adequately reflects the modern understanding of the country's sovereignty and independence.

Thus, decolonization becomes a central element in forming an independent and relevant historical perspective necessary for nation-building. This approach entails rejecting colonial narratives and undertaking a profound re-evaluation of national identity. Reformatting the Azerbaijani identity, incorporating elements of Turkishness, strengthens national cohesion and preserves cultural diversity, which in turn meets the challenges and needs of the modern, multinational structure of society.

Victory in the Second Karabakh War was crucial in solving Azerbaijan's sovereignty problem. Based on this, it could be argued that Azerbaijan does not fit into the small nation category, but rather the middle power category (See Tables 1 and 2). To sum up, Victory in the Second Karabakh War can be considered a shift in the region's status quo, and it triggered a re-evaluation of the politics of nationalism, including historiography.

Table 2
Regional Power



Source: Dadashli, R., & Valiyev, O. (2024) "Debating on Transport Corridors of Azerbaijan in the Context of Globalization" *Universal Journal of History and Culture*, 6(1), 1-20.

Ethical Commission Approval

This study did not require approval from an ethics committee as it did not involve human participants, animals, or sensitive personal data. All data used in this research were obtained from publicly available sources.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of this study.

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