

## National Identity: “I am the State”\*

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### ABSTRACT

The modern world was shaped, established, and preserved by nationalism and nations. In this sense, human beings became the key legitimated power for politics through the respective revolutions. Consequently, the state form transformed and integrated into the modern requirements of the Westphalian system. Then, nations became the owners of the modern states with the sovereignty and election instruments. Parallel to that, nations emerged within their respective societies. So, nations cannot be imagined without modern societies. In this respect, nations and national identities need to differ from other group identities. According to the author, national identities have emerged as a means of controlling and managing diversities within the territory of nation-states. On the other hand, being a member of nations has emerged as the main way to be recognized as an equal in modern societies. In this article, the author discusses national identity theoretically and integrates it into the case of Azerbaijan.

**Keywords:** Nationalism, Nations, National Identities, Azerbaijan.

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### Milli Kimlik: “Devlet Benim”

### ÖZ

Modern dünya milliyetçilik ve milletler tarafından şekillendirildi, kuruldu ve korunmaya devam ediyor. Bu bağlamda insan ilgili devrimlerle siyasetin temel meşrulaştırıcı unsuru haline gelmiştir. Sonuç olarak devlet formu dönüşerek Vestfalyan sistemin taleplerine entegre olmuştur. Daha sonra uluslar egemenlik ve seçim kurumu aracılığıyla modern devletin sahibi oldular. Buna paralel olarak, ulusları ancak belirli toplumlarda tahayyül etmek mümkün olmuştur. Bu nedenle uluslar ve ulusal kimlikler diğer grup kimliklerden farklı değerlendirilmesi gerekmektedir. Yazara göre göre ulusal kimlikler ulus-devletlerin sınırları dahilindeki farklılıkları kontrol ve yönetmek için ortaya çıkmıştır. Öte yandan ulusların üyesi olmak modern toplumlarda eşit kabul için temel yol olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Yazar, ulusal kimliği teorik tartışmakla beraber Azerbaycan örneğine entegre etmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Milliyetçilik, Milletler, Milli Kimlikler, Azerbaycan.

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### I

National identity is the totality and management of diversity. A nation is a peculiar social and political reality consisting of diverse members. In Modern society, the answer to living, creating, building, protecting and being preserved equally is national identity. The successful application of national identity depends on the fact that people who speak the same language

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and share the same country as compatriots think the same in moments of sadness and joy. All modern nations are built similarly to this method, although this seems to be contrary to liberal democratic principles.

Nation, national identity is the answer found in the hands of the state based on the need of modern man to live equally. In this case, the nation can be considered as the totality of individuals who have reached a consensus on the ontological form and accepted the nation form and its terms (Köktürk 2016: 13). In the Modern world, the political and legal fate of land was determined within the framework of the concept of national sovereignty. In Rome, in medieval European universities, the concept of nation, which has a different essence, has emerged as the leading concept that holds modern man together collectively. The Renaissance, geographical discoveries, scientific revolutions, and political revolutions that gave birth to modernism led to a change in the form of unity of man in the final analysis. More precisely, the modern state, which says “the state is me”, tried to solve the chaos caused by revolutions by creating nations with the support of capitalist economic relations as well. Another aspect of this transformation was the revolutionary change in the economic production process. Humanity has transitioned from the concept based on manual labour to the stage of Mechanical Production. All these revolutionary changes led to the change of man from the concept and need for freedom and equality to the need for hold, collective identity.

The human form was brought to the forefront on a par with Renaissance art, and in the modern era, free and equal man was expressed as the main advantages of modernism. So Immanuel Kant attributed the Enlightenment to the human subject (*Sapere Aude*), who could use his mind. However, Man and his freedom and equality were not created for the first time, just as they were not discovered for the first time. A change was made in the understanding of the political existence of Modern man. Thus, the religious doctrine, which was mustered by the learning and assimilation of the great masses, was separated from the state through secularism. In the Middle Ages, the system, Order-standing religious doctrine and political and legal significance/originality of the dynasty disappeared.<sup>1</sup> Thus, equality and freedom, also present in Plato, Aristotle and in the texts of medieval thinkers, began to be within reach for the broader masses through the new language (national language). The transformation in the economic establishment also played a role in ensuring freedom and equality from the Athenian Senate, the dynastic Palace and religious temples to the broad masses. The Senate of Athens began to

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<sup>1</sup> For detailed: Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined Communities*, London: Verso. s. 9-37.

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be replaced by professional political activists engaged in politics in modern parliaments and parliaments on behalf of nations. To perceive this change, it is necessary to consider the revolutionary change in economic relations. Emerging as part of the mechanical world, the capitalist economic establishment began to create a new world. Thus, nations' national identities began to be considered the parent element of collective identity in the modern world. Membership in the nation has become one of the main conditions for being considered equal and free. Membership in the nation would not be possible without citizenship; on the other hand, citizenship created the opportunity to be equal and free with people living in a certain land. What conditions were necessary for membership in the nation? Would it come to be considered a member of a nation based on lineage or social relevance (equal living)? In this vein, various approaches and theories appeared, and gradually, the field of nationalism was formed.

It is also obvious that constructing a successful national identity depends on not identifying ethnic or racial unity as the main condition for the nation's national identity. In this regard, it is enough to mention the fascism that the world has experienced over the past century. More frankly, the construction of national identity, guided by racial relevance, is a difficult issue at a time when people are so conveniently displaced geographically. After all, the nation is the result of a conscious activity. It is impossible to establish a direct relationship between lineage affiliation and awareness. Of course, being born as belonging to a lineage, biological affiliation is an important issue. However, in constructing national identity, it is questionable to what extent collective coexistence would be possible if biological affiliation were held in the centre. Relevancy and commitment are prerequisites for the formation and completion of the nation. For this, it is necessary to give preference to the concept of a nation rather than an Ethnos.

However, the nation expresses conscious unity rather than racial commitment. For Nations, national identity is sometimes a sociological reality, even if it is the choice of individuals, as in John Locke, and the method of determining the individual by the common will, as in Rousseau. The modern world has included human communities in a new political category with the form of a nation. Thus, in the modern world, man's political and legal value has become possible through membership in a nation.

In this case, the nation consists not only of individuals but also of the total belonging of the lineage and religion to which individuals belong. Man (individual) cannot build a conscious existence on the lineage, race, or ethnicity acquired by birth. More frankly, a person cannot achieve a conscious perception of the world by his lineage acquired by birth. The dilemma faced

in a Muslim country like Afghanistan is not to be a nation. Thus, the artificial political establishment established in Afghanistan prevents Afghanistan from becoming a nation of ethnic, religious, small, divided groups.

Man's" existence in the world is determined by his consciousness." In the Modern world, the form of the political unity of man was formed in the form of a nation, and the modern state was gradually nationalised; nations began to play the role of a legitimising element of power, the protector of the National motherland. Law was also formed in this context. It is also necessary to pay attention to the requirements of the modern economy. Thus, modern capitalist economic relations have necessitated the existence of people as a nation. Africa, South America, etc., one of the main reasons why the locals continue to live the traditional way of life today is that they are left out of modern economic relations and production.

At the same time, the formation of nations and nation-states and their construction took place according to the subjective context of each country. While in some countries, the state and nation appeared in the same mirror, in others, the nation was formed without a state. In another case, neither the nation nor the state existed. In this case, the people had to fight for the nation and the state.

## II

The political and economic institutionalisation or division of modernism led to the displacement of the population or the separation of people from the same lineage, family, and culture, and some were forced to migrate. The deportation of Turks from the Balkans due to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire led to the disintegration of the order established by the Turks against the Muslim Turks.

The Azerbaijani people who practised modernism in Kurekchay and Turkmenchay would be subjected to displacement, migration and deportation, which would last for decades. However, political power and sovereignty in a country with clear borders were prerequisites for the modern motherland. Thus, a healthy, strong relationship and attachment could not be formed on the land for long. The migration from Yerevan, Tabriz, and Tbilisi to Baku, the centre, continued from the end of the nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century. However, the lack of a state could not make Azerbaijan a homeland for the people living here, as well as build an institutionalised relationship, connection and identity. Even the Baku identity, formed in Soviet Azerbaijan for the service of "homo-sovietiucus", has long been influenced by the idea that those who can speak Russian, those who study, have a "right" to adopt. However, the

modern urban culture of Baku was supposed to mean that this understanding would be possible institutionalised only after the military-political victory achieved by the second Karabakh War.

With the Turkmenchay treaty, the uncertain fate of the Azerbaijani people, which would last for a long time, also began. Thus, they could not have a standardised identity for a long time since they lived under the control of various regimes. The main disadvantage here was the unsuspecting statelessness. When it began to find a solution to this problem with the Republic, so that Sovietization began! The longest-lived State in Modern Azerbaijan became Soviet Azerbaijan, and the construction of identity was institutionalized in Soviet times. What does this mean? It means writing the history within the requirements and needs of Soviet Azerbaijan. That is, the local values of the Turkic and Muslim people living in Azerbaijan and forming the majority in the Soviet Azerbaijani national identity could not find a place in the spelling of history. More precisely, Turkism and Islam did not see acceptance as a value. As a result, the writing of history, the main instrument of the policy of national identity, fell victim to the search for antiquity and manifested itself as Manna, etc. found “at the depth”. The restoration of independence did not take place either. Thus, the occupation of the lands did not allow to eliminate traces of dependence on identity formed in the shadow of Kurekchay and Turkmenchay to reveal a political strategy in this context. However, the victory at the end of the 44-day war provided an opportunity to institutionalise an identity that had not been institutionalised for decades by changing regimes. More precisely, with victory, the Azerbaijani people, for the first time in modern political history, acquired a stable and intact homeland, which others also knew and accepted. In summary, Azerbaijan is already a fully formed sovereign state.

### III

All modern nations adopted a root for themselves according to their political need and social, economic, political, and military capabilities. For example, during the nineteenth century, the Ottoman intellectuals and statesmen, who tried to save the empire with Ottoman and Islamic ideas, adopted Turkism to save Anatolia, which, in the final analysis, was left behind by the Empire and seen as the main homeland (Turkey). However, the Turkish intelligentsia, who took refuge in the Ottoman Empire from the oppression of Tsarist Russia, did not agree that the idea of Turkism should be limited to one country. Because their main homeland was under the colonial rule, for that reason, Atatürk and intellectuals like Ali Bey Huseynzade, Yusuf Akcura, and Sadri Maqsudi, who emigrated from Russia to Turkey, could not get along. Thus, Turkism initially emerged as an idea that included all Turks. However, Atatürk and his team, who

founded the republic, limited Turkishness to Anatolia, taking into account the possibilities of the new state. For that reason, historical researches and historiography related to Turkishness were limited to vertical excavation.

By the way, Turkishness and Turkicness should be valued differently in the process of building the Turkic World partnership. Turkicness is a bed and a source that Turkic-speaking or noble peoples will use and benefit from. However, Turkism mainly got its political essence in Turkey. In this sense, the construction of state and national identity in Azerbaijan was built on the basis of Azerbaijanism. After all, we discussed that national identity is unique. In Azerbaijan, the situation is somewhat different. Thus, the Soviet phase, which began after the republic, which entered history without completion, is the phase in which the search for the roots of national identity, or rather, the writing of history, was instituted in Azerbaijan. A vertical historiography, extending to Babek, Atropat, Manna, Midia (in no particular order), to serve the Azerbaijani identity *homo-sovieticus*, emerged. From here, the question is which political establishment serves the order of this past belonging to the geography of Azerbaijan more than Babek, Atropat, Manna, and Midia. After all, history is usually written by political and social order in one way or another.

#### IV

Affiliation is considered one of the main conditions for the construction of social unity. How to define belonging will be decisive for the future of social cohesion. The construction of social existence and identity with a geographically based affiliation will be a difficult issue. For this reason, the construction of a culture-based relationship is more favorable for the future of Azerbaijan. Legally and politically based citizenship of culture-based belonging includes the nuances of nationalism and even religion (Köktürk 2016: 92). Rather, the Azerbaijani national identity should be reconsidered taking into account the cultures of the people(s) living in the geography. In this context, during the years of independence, Azerbaijan introduced a new identity policy. Multiculturalism is a very serious and important policy for the formation of the international image of young Azerbaijan. However, for the formation of strong affiliation, commitment and responsibility, a culture that does not ignore the dominance of the majority is necessary. That is, multicultural policy should take into account the dominance of the majority, and minorities should not be allowed to enter into a struggle with the majority. At the same time, minorities should be considered as equal founders.<sup>2</sup> It seems that the construction of

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<sup>2</sup> For detailed., Tariq Modood, "A Multicultural Nationalism?", *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, volume xxv, issue ii, 2019, pp. 233-246.

identity in the years of independence, which is expected to contribute to equal living from national identity, tries to take into account these conditions. Culture should be built based on the people living on the land rather than the land. Azerbaijan has already reached the stage where it can reckon with all institutions and concepts created by others and other political structures, including the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. In other words, Azerbaijan expected to settle with the artificial statuses created by the colony. In such a case, it is necessary to deconstruct the Soviet traces related to identity and think about a new identity construction.

On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that Azerbaijan will prefer the identity that it can establish, protect and continue politically, economically and militarily. In other words, Azerbaijanism will protect its power in the center. Thus, within the process, everyone (religious and ethnic groups) is given the opportunity to be represented on platforms and participate in discussions. After the Second Karabakh military-political victory, the representation of all religious and ethnic groups with their national elements under the umbrella of Azerbaijan at the First Kharibulbul Festival can be expressed as a result of modern Azerbaijani identity. Thus, the state expected to hold the people together as a nation in Azerbaijan has achieved a significant achievement in this field, including multicultural policy.

### V

At the same time, the world is on the verge of a new transformation. In such a case, modern national identities and nation-states are also facing challenges. Thus, migration spreading on a global scale threatens national sovereignty and border security. The states are also gradually finding the solution in building a wall on the (temporary) borders, which is difficult to sustain from an economic point of view. In such a case, what will be the fate of nations, national identities, nation-states?

We already know that the modern world was built within the mechanization of the production process. Thus, the turning point for the English, who were the first to implement and institutionalize the social, political and economic transformation in the modern world, was in 1583 when a local priest's proposal for the mechanization of textile production was accepted (Acemoglu, and Robinson 2013: 182). Thus, the changing economic relations made it possible to establish a human-centered social structure. The world built within the framework of mechanical principles led to the transformation of the medieval social structure based on manual labor. In modern societies based on the principles of mechanical production, the role of man has also changed. Thus, the nation-states, which are a new state form, have risen with the

existence of nations. However, the modern mechanical world cannot meet the demands of the new electromagnetic world, and the new era requires change and transformation in human understanding and social structure (Köktürk 2016: 230, 231).

The 21st century is being built in a context where the mechanical concept has been replaced by the electromagnetic concept. In such a case, there will be a change in the role of people (nations) in the new social structure. This process first started in the 70s and 80s of the last century with postmodernism and neoliberalism. Thus, the French postmodern philosopher Lyotard, while explaining postmodernism, writes that the color of time has changed, that humanity is experiencing a period of abandonment and relaxation (Lyotard 1994: 45). Globalization, neoliberalism, technological development, climate change and global migration have strengthened the claims of postmodernists. Thus, modern revolutionary changes, the industrial revolution, were made possible by technological innovations such as the railway, steamship and the telegraph. These innovations were decisive in the transformation of a modern state into a national state. Currently, the changes are taking place within the electromagnetic framework. Thanks to the opportunity created by technology, citizens of Azerbaijan can now order from their homes through trendyol. Thus, the nation-states lost their closed hegemony of the last century. However, states that are gradually gathering their power sacrifice nations in this process, as Habermas wrote at the end of the last century. That is, the state is already becoming the state itself. The concept of a classic nation and national identity is beginning to lose its decisiveness.

In the twenty-first century, classical national identity establishments are being questioned and undermined by current threats. On the other hand, regional political establishments are emerging in the economic, technological and military framework. In this context, the Organization of Turkic States, instituted under the leadership of Azerbaijan and Turkey after the Second Karabakh War, can be a new defence system against the challenge. Thus, Azerbaijan can fight against the challenges of the classical national identity and nation-state establishment under the umbrella of the Turkic World. In this context, it is necessary to look for a reason why the president stated that Azerbaijan's main affiliation is the Turkic World at the swearing-in ceremony.



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