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Becoming Azerbaijani through Language: On the Impact of Cəlil Məmmədquluzadə's *Anamın Kitabı*

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As a unifying principle in nationalism, language has played a crucial role in the development of western European nations, foreign-dominated countries in Eastern Europe, as well as in the borderland regions of the Russian and Ottoman Empires. During the nineteenth century, linguistic nationalism spread from European megacities to these distant borderlands. In this dissemination, intellectuals, mostly Turcophone Muslims from the Russian Empire who circulated between St Petersburg, Crimea, Kazan, Baku, Istanbul, and Paris, played a key role. For one of the co-founders of modern Turkish nationalism, Yusuf Akçura, who was born in Simbirsk, studied in Istanbul, and spent years in exile in Paris, a language was “the most important cultural phenomenon” (Akçura 1998: 19). Turkish sociologist Ziya Gökalp (1876–1924), in his programmatic work *Türkçülüğün esasları* (The Principles of Turkism, 2006 [1923]), promoted the idea of establishing the Istanbul dialect of Turkish as the principal language of the Turks and pleaded for the purging of Arabic and Persian loanwords from Ottoman Turkish (Gökalp 2006: 93–100). The Azerbaijani-Turkish entangled intellectual Ali Bey Hüseynzade stressed the linguistic bonds between the predominantly Muslim Turks and Christian Hungarians in his verse “Turan,”¹ which significantly inspired Turanist and pan-Turkist circles among Turkish intellectuals during World War I and beyond. The same preoccupation with language can be found in relation to Azerbaijani writer Mirzə Cəlil Məmmədquluzadə² and his impact on the language issue in the Russian Caucasus and, later, in Soviet Azerbaijan through the forging of what we could call Azerbaijani nationalism.

This chapter seeks to analyze the interconnections between literature and nationalism within the Muslim society of Azerbaijan, a

country culturally linked with Turkey, Russia, and Iran. In the chapter, I examine the development of Azerbaijani nationalism through the history of a literary masterpiece written in 1918–19 and later intensively reflected upon by Azerbaijani communist and noncommunist intellectuals. Azerbaijani nationalism emerged between about 1870 and the 1930s as a by-product of centuries-long encounters and interactions with Russia, with the neighboring Christian Georgians and Armenians, and with Turkey and Persia. Islam – and the Azerbaijani disputes over Islam with regard to neighboring Christians – played a distinct role in its evolution. Can Azerbaijani nationalism be classified in terms of Azerbaijan's disputed geography between Eastern Europe and the Middle East? Even if, as British historian Ben Fowkes has pointed out, “the Azerbaijanis were the first Muslim nation to form a state of their own out of the ruins of the Russian Empire” (Fowkes 1997: 21), they did not have as long a tradition of statehood as the nations in the “third zone of Europe” (Gellner 1996: 32–7) from the Baltic to the Adriatic and Aegean. Part of the Russian Empire, the Turkish-speaking Shi'i and Sunni population of Caucasia became Azerbaijani during the period of Russian and, later, Soviet dominance. Azerbaijani national mobilization and subsequent consolidation resulted from the observation of similar processes among Gregorian Armenians and Orthodox Georgians as well as Russians in Caucasia.

When Mirzə Cəlil Məmmədquluzadə (1866–1932) wrote the play *Anamın kitabı* (My Mother's Book, 1920), Azerbaijani nationalism was still emerging. The play can be considered a literary milestone in the nation-building process. The first steps in this process had been taken during the 1870s, when Azerbaijani newspapers were founded and Muslim intellectuals began to promote their own cultural sovereignty within a czarist imperial framework.³ Against this background, the question is with which particular tools Məmmədquluzadə sought to contribute to the national mobilization of Azerbaijanis? What was the message of his play? And how was/is this play perceived in Soviet and post-Soviet Azerbaijan? What was the relationship between nationalism and literature in Azerbaijan, an autonomous region under the officially atheist Moscow-backed regime?

Muslim Caucasia

The Muslim population of the multiethnic Caucasus became a religious minority when the entire region became Russian in the wake of the Russian–Persian wars (1806–28). Since the Middle Ages, Turkish had

been the *koine* of the Caucasian Muslims (Sidorko 2007: 7), even if Arabic and especially Persian were still popular as the languages of science and literature. Russian began to spread in the Caucasus after the migration of numerous Russian and Ukrainian colonists – mostly from the Volga region and Ukraine – in search of jobs in the oil industry based around Baku. In spite of growing Russian political and cultural domination, the Azerbaijani population (both Shi‘i and Sunni) was still closely entangled with Persia and the Ottoman Empire. Azerbaijani intellectuals and others for the most part considered themselves Muslim until the end of the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the next century, Azerbaijani nationalism began to coalesce, partly due to external influences but also as a result of Caucasian and Russian interactions. This coalescence was also directly connected to the literary and publicist activities of Azerbaijani intellectuals in the multinational and multi-confessional cities of Tiflis, Baku, and Tabriz (Adam 2008).

The transnational character of the Russian Caucasus on the eve of the twentieth century was based on dense networks and interactions between Shi‘i and Sunni intellectuals traveling between Istanbul, Tabriz, Baku, Tiflis, and Kazan. Those communications were in Persian, Turkish, and Russian. This multilingualism was a distinctive feature of the Muslim communities in the borderland region. An educated Muslim in the Russian Caucasus was as a rule able to read and communicate in all three languages. It was under these circumstances and as a result of the continuous penetration of European ideas (nationalism included) into Muslim Caucasia via the Christian intelligentsia (mostly Georgians, Armenians, and Russians), that Azerbaijani nationalism emerged in the early twentieth century. Azerbaijani intellectuals moved between the Ottoman capital of Istanbul, the Russian oil industry center of Baku, and the main czarist municipality in the Caucasus, Tiflis. Several influential Muslim journals and newspapers such as *Fıużāt* and *Kaspii* were founded in those cities. As a reaction to Czar Alexander III's strenuous Russification policy and widespread pan-Slavist ideology, which was actively supported by many Russian intellectuals, a number of Azerbaijani intellectuals – joined by Crimean and Kazan Tatars – promoted the idea of Turan and Turcophone solidarity. During and after World War I, an entangled community of post-Ottoman Turkish, Azerbaijani, Tatar, and Turkestani intellectuals emerged. Some Azerbaijani intellectuals felt close to Russian culture, while others opposed all foreign cultures and favored local traditions. Two consequences flowed from this: first, Azerbaijani nationalist discourse from 1900 to the 1920s was not dominated by a single ideology, for example,

Turkishness. Second, many Azerbaijani intellectuals changed their aims as well as their political and cultural orientations. There were various intellectual movements, but all shared a notion of emancipation and the articulation of cultural sovereignty.

The idea of genuine Azerbaijani nationalism based on belonging to an Azerbaijani nation (*Azərbaycanlı*) developed mainly under Soviet occupation. Azerbaijani nationalists partly dissociated themselves from the Turan concept and pan-Turkist solidarity, focusing instead on Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis. This resulted from two circumstances: first, not all Azerbaijani intellectuals shared the Turanist and Islamic vision. Second, to promote their own nationalist interests, those intellectuals who remained in Sovietized Azerbaijan after 1920 had to accept Russian domination and the communist regime, particularly its nationality policy, which transformed Russian Muslims speaking Turkic languages into Kazakhs, Azerbaijanis, Turkmen, and so on. Their adaptation to the new imperial framework on the Muslim periphery was often only a matter of lip service. After the Red Army seized Azerbaijan in April 1920, nationalist arguments were veiled behind ideological language.

Borderland socialization

Cəlil Məmmədquluzadə was born in 1869 in Nakhichevan, populated mostly by Azerbaijanis, Kurds, and Armenians, and since 1828 a Russian borderland between the Ottoman Empire and Persia. Here, he graduated from the *mollakhane*, the traditional Muslim primary religious school, and a three-class Russian school. In 1887, he was already among the graduates of an institution famous throughout the Caucasus, the teachers seminary in the Georgian town of Gori.⁴ He spent the following decade teaching at several schools in his home region of Nakhichevan. From 1887 he taught at a primary school in the small village of Nehrem. This stay had a double impact on him: he could observe the social life of a Muslim province as well as learn Armenian from his colleague Tigran Smbatyants (Məmmədquluzadə 1967: 15). In 1895, he traveled to the main political and cultural centers of the Russian Empire, Moscow and St Petersburg. Afterward, Məmmədquluzadə was engaged as a translator for czarist municipalities in Yerevan and Nakhichevan until he moved to Tiflis in 1903. Successfully integrated into the intellectual community of that city, he worked for a local Muslim newspaper, *Şargi-Rus* (Russian Orient), which was published in Azerbaijani.

In Tiflis, Məmmədquluzadə founded one of the first satirical journals of the Muslim world, *Molla* (Mullah) *Nasraddin*, which was published

in Azerbaijani in Arabic script. This made him popular among liberal Muslim intellectuals not only in the Caucasus but also in other parts of the Russian empire, as well as in Persia and beyond. In Tiflis, he met an Azerbaijani intellectual Həmidə, who later became his second wife. Educated in Shusha in Azerbaijani and Russian, Həmidə was the daughter of a rich and noble Azerbaijani family from Karabakh. She had immense influence on Mirzə Cəlil and financially supported his satirical journal. From its foundation in 1906, *Molla Nasraddin* criticized Muslim clerics (mostly Shi'i) and the level of local education and social life among Caucasian and Persian Muslims. Language as well as the reading culture of Muslim society and lack of education among women were the most important issues in the journal. Actually, *Molla Nasraddin* was the “life project” of Məmmədquluzadə: his novels and other works were a by-product of his journalistic activity and observation of life in the cities and towns of the Caucasus and Persia. Also, his promotion of Azerbaijani nationalism took place through *Molla Nasraddin*, regardless of the fact that it was censored by the czarist authorities. The journal was definitely against the use of the Russian language in everyday communication among Azerbaijani elites, as well as against the use of Arabic script for the Azerbaijani language.

Anamın kitabı

In 1918, when Tiflis became the capital of an independent Georgian state, Məmmədquluzadə moved to Azerbaijan, which, along with Armenia, proclaimed its independence on May 28, 1918. Together with his family, he lived in Karabakh until the occupation of Azerbaijan by the Red Army in 1920. In Karabakh, he wrote his *Anamın kitabı*.

According to the plot, a wealthy Azerbaijani widow Zəhrabəyim lives with her three sons, who graduated from the universities of Petersburg, Najaf, and Istanbul, as well as with her daughter, who has never left the house but was able to “read in Muslim [language] (*müsəlmanca savadlı*).” The sons are fond of the cultures of the cities in which they were educated. Their language is full of words, loanwords, and expressions in Russian, Persian, and Ottoman Turkish, and they understand neither one another with ease nor their own sister and mother. Məmmədquluzadə was concerned about the impact of the neighboring imperial cultures on Azerbaijan and advocated a form of cultural emancipation for Azerbaijani Muslims. The sorrowful mother and her daughter were able to communicate only with three shepherds – prototypes of Azerbaijan itself, uneducated and primitive, but authentic and

native – but not with their own family members and their friends. In the end, Zəhrabəyim dies at home and the sister Gülbahar destroys her brothers' books by burning them: the Russian vocabularies, the Persian books on religion and astronomy, and also the Ottoman poems. The only book to survive this “cultural revolution” is a “book of my mother,” a notebook written in simple Azerbaijani by the family's late father, with notes about the children's birth dates and some wishes at the end to ensure the unity of the family.

Anamın kitabı is not a novel but a play. The author provides a precise depiction of its main characters at the very beginning. The theater piece consists of four parts and involves 25 persons. The core protagonists – members of an Azerbaijani family – consist of a 60-year-old mother (Zəhrabəyim), her three sons (Rüstəmbəy, the eldest; Mirzə Məhəmmədəli; and Səmədvahid) and her daughter Gülbahar. The author briefly describes the principal figures: Rüstəmbəy is clothed as a member of the Russian intelligentsia (*rus intelliğenti libasında*), so he wears a tie (*qalstuk*) and jacket. He has graduated from a Russian university (*Rus darülfın*) and is an adherent of Russian education (*rus tərbiyəsi tərfdarı*). Mirzə Məhəmmədəli is quite different. His clothes are Iranian, broad trousers and white socks. He leaves his shoes at the door and sits down on the carpet. The youngest brother, Səmədvahid, studied literature in Istanbul. “There is a fez on his head, he has a sacco, jacket, white-collar shirt and a tie, he wears glasses.” He prefers Ottoman education. Gülbahar is dressed as a Muslim girl (*ümumi müsəlman qızları libasında*). “She is fond of her mother,” we read in the description at the very beginning. Other characters are servants of the house, the peasants and friends of the brothers, and some neighbors. The setting is “one of Azerbaijan's towns under Russian rule” (*Azərbaycan şəhərlərinin birində, Rusiya hökuməti əsrində*) sometime in the 1910s (Kazımov 2012).

The play opens with a description of the brothers common working room: it contains a big table (*böyük yazı stolu*), several chairs, and a lot of books. There is a table for Rüstəmbəy: “On one side there is a book shelf (*etajerka*) with plenty of books; close to it there is a chair for Rüstəmbəy.” The author describes in the same way the corner of the room in which the “Ottoman” Səmədvahid works. “To one side there is a chest, numerous ancient Muslim books with black covers are in and on it. There is a mattress near the chest. That is the place of Mirzə Məhəmmədəli.” In accordance with Persian Muslim tradition, the Nadjaf-educated brother reads his religious books on the carpet, while the “Ottoman” and “Russian” brothers study at their tables.

Zəhrabəyim tries to keep her sons together, but they are too ardent in their debates about what is true science, a better culture, and so on. She is eager to consult them about whom their sister should marry. Each brother proposes a close friend, educated and socialized in the same way as he has been. But even the discussion of this issue does not last long: the brothers seem to be quite different in their worldviews and in their language. Zəhrabəyim is despairing and sad: the only people she can trust and communicate with are her daughter, uneducated servants of the house, and peasants. Then the depressed Zəhrabəyim falls ill: the simple anecdotes of the peasants, their folk songs, and conversations with Gülbahar prolong her life for a couple of days until she dies in the arms of her daughter and in the presence of her sons.

Misunderstood and ignored; that is the position of Gülbahar, the servants, and Zəhrabəyim. All the models seem doomed. The salvation of the national cause lies neither along the Russian path, nor along the Persian and Ottoman ones. In this play, Məmmədquluzadə criticizes both the Russian–Azerbaijani mixed language, which was spoken by the Azerbaijani intelligentsia, the Persian-instead-of-Azerbaijani language of the local Shi'i clergy, and also Ottoman Turkish, which was admired by certain Azerbaijani intellectuals. Məmmədquluzadə wrote in, and thereby promoted, the Azerbaijani literary language based on the spoken language of Caucasian Shi'a living between Tiflis and Baku, but also in Tabriz.

Play on stage

According to Azerbaijani historians of literature, Məmmədquluzadə completed *Anamın kitabı* in 1920 in Shusha.⁵ In June of that year, Məmmədquluzadə moved with his family to Tabriz. From February 1921, he began to publish the journal *Molla Nasraddin* there. In April, Məmmədquluzadə was invited by the Bolsheviks to return to Soviet Azerbaijan, and in summer 1921, Məmmədquluzadə's family was already in Baku. The reception of any literary work in the authoritarian and, since the 1930s, totalitarian Soviet Union was connected with the position of the author and his importance to the regime. The benevolence of the local Communist Party as well as local communist intellectuals was significant for non-Russian literary figures. Being an active atheist, Məmmədquluzadə had a good start in Soviet Azerbaijan. On January 15, 1923, the first performance of *Anamın kitabı* took place at the Dadaş Bünyadzadə Theater in Baku (Məmmədquluzadə 2004: 653). In 1924, the play was on stage in the Rustaveli Theater in Tbilisi. Three years

later the Baku-based Russian director A. Ivanov put *Anamın kitabı* on at the Baku Theater of Workers and Peasants, the capital's main theater.

However, the end of the so-called indigenization period (*korenizatsiia*) caused a rethinking of national literatures on the peripheries of the Soviet empire: critiques of czarist nationalities policy were heavily restricted. Between 1929 and 1932, then, Məmmədquluzadə was out of favor with the communist regime. In 1931, Məmmədquluzadə's main *oeuvre*, the satirical journal *Molla Nasraddin*, was closed. He was invited to become editor-in-chief of the newly founded journal – and organ of the local branch of the Atheist Movement – *Allahsız* (Godless). Məmmədquluzadə rejected the offer. In January 1932 he died in poverty in his flat in Baku. He was buried in Fəxri Xiyaban, the central and prestigious cemetery in Baku. So, his treatment “from above” was ambiguous: Məmmədquluzadə was no longer favored as he had been in the early 1920s, but neither was he prosecuted or imprisoned like many other writers. Through his network of contacts with communist intellectual elites in Baku, he was able to find a reasonably secure place within an ideological sphere that he never fully supported. The founding of a museum devoted to him was allowed only in the late Brezhnev period, in 1981, and the museum finally opened much later, in 1994.

The play *Anamın kitabı* enjoyed a revival on stage only during the era of perestroika under Gorbachev and in the post-Soviet period. In 1989, the Nakhichevani Theater had *Anamın kitabı* as part of its program for the first time.⁶

Two general dimensions of the work's reception

The *Encyclopedia of Cəlil Məmmədquluzadə*, published in 2008 in Baku, presents a long list of PhDs and post-doctoral research papers devoted to Məmmədquluzadə. No work on *Anamın kitabı* had been written by 2014, even if its author had been thoroughly examined in Azerbaijan and beyond (Hitchins 1983: 30–5; Uygur 2005: 9–18). With regard to Azerbaijani research on Azerbaijan's national literature, it was actually divided into research in exile and research in Soviet Azerbaijan. When the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic was occupied by the Bolsheviks in 1920 and became one of 15 Soviet republics, a group of Azerbaijani intellectuals – among them numerous linguists and historians of literature – left for Europe. Educated mostly in Paris and Istanbul, they stayed in Europe or moved to Ankara. Azerbaijani émigré research on Azerbaijani history and literature began in the 1920s. The academies and universities in Baku – the capital of Soviet Azerbaijan – first had the opportunity

to read those articles and books during the perestroika era at the end of 1980s, and only in the 1990s did a type of “merged” literary research appear in Azerbaijan.

Over the years, *Anamın kitabı* was evaluated by Azerbaijani intellectuals both within and outside Soviet Azerbaijan. In Berlin in 1936, the most prominent Azerbaijani émigré intellectual, former chief-of-state Məmməd əmin Rəsulzadə (1884–1955), published his short monograph *Çağdaş Azərbaycan Edebiyatı* (Modern Azerbaijani Literature, 1936), based on his speech delivered at a conference organized by Ukrainian, Caucasian, and Turkestanian emigrants in Paris. In this work, Rəsulzadə tried to show the main trends in Azerbaijani literature, but also the circumstances of its development under the Soviet regime. His account of *Anamın kitabı* began with a statement that the play had been forbidden in the Soviet Union. Rəsulzadə briefly depicted the essence of the masterpiece and pointed out the significance of the author's main message: the three brothers should not be alienated from their mother. It is interesting to see how he contextualized the play with regard to both his own perspective and the émigré reception of the Soviet reality: “The Communists who try to alienate the society from its roots have forbidden putting this play on stage, because it was appealing to the society to keep in touch with its own traditions” (Resul-zade 1936: 9).

In Wiesbaden in 1965, Ahmet Caferoğlu (1899–1975), an Azerbaijani linguist, graduate of the Oriental studies department of the University of Breslau and professor of Turkish linguistics at the University of Istanbul, published a longer article on the history of Azerbaijani literature. According to Caferoğlu, *Anamın kitabı* was written in 1919, during the period of Azerbaijan's independence and without a framework of foreign dominance. Caferoğlu continued that Məmmədquluzadə could work without restriction on this piece (Caferoğlu 1964: 684).

Nationalist but Soviet: Mirzə İbrahimov and beyond

Anamın kitabı's criticism of Russia was accepted by the Bolsheviks, because it corresponded with the zeitgeist of the Soviet Union's the so-called *Korenizatsiia* policy that prevailed until the mid-1920s and tolerated criticism of czarism. The playwright and influential communist politician Mirzə İbrahimov,⁷ along with other Soviet–Azerbaijani intellectuals, praised Məmmədquluzadə for his critique of religion. He spoke the language of ideology but promoted Məmmədquluzadə's late works in his critical essay *Böyük demokrat* (Great Democrat, 1939). Being an active communist, İbrahimov was a prototype of a nationalist-minded

Azerbaijani intellectual. In 1954, after the death of Stalin, İbrahimov became a chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan and reformed the constitution of the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic by including Azerbaijani as a state language along with Russian.

The first edition of *Böyük demokrat* was published in Baku in 1939, and the second was published in 1957 under the editorship of the well-known Azerbaijani writer Mir Cəlal Paşayev.⁸ There are significant differences between the two editions that help to explain why the author's works were not banned under Stalin. In the book, İbrahimov drew attention to the fact that it was Məmmədquluzadə who first used the notion *Azərbaycan milləti* (Azerbaijani nation) in an article published in the newspaper *Keşkul* in 1890. *Azərbaycanlı* was also the signature of one of the feuilletonists of the newspaper. İbrahimov republished the conversation between an Azerbaijani and a foreigner described or fictionalized by Məmmədquluzadə in *Keşkul*:

Foreigner: *Siz nə millətdənsiniz?* (What is your nationality?)

Azerbaijani: *Müsəlmanam* (I am a Muslim)

Foreigner: *Xeyir, mən soruşdum ki, nə millətdənsiniz?* (No, I asked which nation you belong to.)

Azerbaijani: *Müsəlmanam, deyirəm.* (I say, I am Muslim.)

Foreigner: *Əfəndim, millət ayrı, din ayrı. Bildim, dininiz islamdır, ancaq istərdim biləm millətiniz nədir?* (Sir, nation and religion are not the same. I see your religion is Islam, but I wanted to know about your nation).

(İbrahimov 1957: 92)

The Azerbaijani is driven to despair by the foreigner's questions and recommends that he pose the question to Mullah and Akhund. The foreigner answers his own question by saying: Your nationality is Azerbaijani. In 1891, according to İbrahimov, *Keşkul* was closed down (İbrahimov 1957: 92).

The remarkable aspect of the two editions of İbrahimov's *Böyük demokrat* is not only the change in views expressed but also the choice of language to express them. The 1939 edition, which emerged at the zenith of Stalinism, has plenty of citations from Stalin's works (İbrahimov 1939: 145). İbrahimov defended Məmmədquluzadə by criticizing and condemning the Azerbaijani émigré intellectuals in Europe or Turkey. He wrote on the patriotism of Məmmədquluzadə and simultaneously reproached Rəsulzadə, Ağaoğlu, and Hüseynzadə – three Azerbaijani intellectuals and promoters of Turanism – for “servitude to

Turkey and anti-Azerbaijani strategies." The critiques in the second edition are much less belligerent. İbrahimov mentions Ağaoğlu again, but there are no longer any citations from Stalin or criticisms of Musavat.⁹

Məmmədquluzadə's wife Həmidə was engaged by the Academy of Sciences in Baku in 1934 to edit the memoirs of her late husband. In 1938, at the height of the Stalinist purges, she completed the project: 59 exercise books, of 20 pages each, in Russian (Məmmədquluzadə 1967: 10–11). At the same time, *Anamın kitabı* was not popularized as widely as Məmmədquluzadə's other works, such as *Ölümlər* (The Dead, 1909) because of its nationalistic content and opposition to Russian education. *Ölümlər* criticized only religious rituals and the behavior of the clergy, so its popularization served the interests of the Bolsheviks. While criticizing Islam, the play was not anti-Russian at all. However, since the mid-1950s *Anamın kitabı* has been staged many times in Azerbaijani theaters. In 1994, it was turned into a film.

In Soviet Azerbaijan, Məmmədquluzadə was extolled as an atheist intellectual and adherent of modernization. His major works were published and republished and became an obligatory part of school curricula. However, *Anamın kitabı* was an exception, even if it indirectly criticized religious education in Iran. It was not among Məmmədquluzadə's plays published in 1959 in Russian translation in the Moscow-based Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury (State Publishing House for Literature). Nor can one find it even in the edition of his select works published in Armenian in Yerevan a year earlier. In the 1960s, one of the most prominent Soviet Azerbaijani poets, Rəsul Rza (1910–81), wrote a verse under the title *Anamın kitabı*. Rza, who was quite conformist with regard to the official ideology of Brezhnev period, describes a dialogue with his mother and her attitude to an ancient book in their house. The pages were "yellowed and the lines were like mountain paths" (Rza 1967). His mother told him that she had got it from her ancestors and he should continue to read it after her death. If he stopped reading it, he would lose the connection with his own past and culture, thereby also abusing his mother. Rza demonstrated in that short verse the importance of reading his own mother's book, in other words, a book in the Azerbaijani language. The verse was published in 1967.

At the end of the 1970s, Bəxtiyar Vahabzadə wrote his *Anamın kitabı*, a short two-page poem that directly references the "original" text by Məmmədquluzadə. The verse begins with the author's devotion to Cəlil Məmmədquluzadə. Vahabzadə, a favored Soviet Azerbaijani poet, was

known among intellectuals of Baku as a conformist and quite nationalist author. After Stalin's death, Vahabzadə published several poems and verses on the importance of the mother tongue and promoted the spread of the Azerbaijani language, which competed with Russian, the only official language in the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan until 1956. In *Anamın kitabı*, Vahabzadə condemned those Azerbaijanis who distanced themselves from national culture and values. Vahabzadə did not target czarist or Soviet language policy, which allowed Russian to dominate in Azerbaijan, but criticized instead the Arab and Persian dominance of the past. Soviet-Iranian relations were dramatically strained in the 1960s and 1970s due to Tehran's cooperation with the United States. Harsh criticism of Iran arose in Soviet Caucasia and Central Asia. Vahabzadə, famous for his anti-Iranian poem "Gülüstan," attacked the Persian poet Shakhriyar in his *Anamın kitabı*:

Let Shakhriyar pardon me,
Thirty long years he called the aliens "barādar" (lit. brother).
In his own motherland,
He called his mother "mādar" (lit. mother).

(Vahabzadə 2004: 48)

The Persian words for "brother" (*barādar*) and "mother" (*mādar*) are for Vahabzadə synonyms for traitorousness, ingratitude, and lack of national consciousness. Məmmədquluzadə's long half-Persian and half-Azerbaijani monologues were symbols of religious fanaticism and belong to the Shi'i community. Vahabzadə presents the use of Persian in the northern part of Iran, populated by ethnic Azerbaijanis, as a betrayal of national consciousness. The fact that many ethnic Azerbaijanis living in multinational Baku mainly used Russian in everyday life – and even among themselves – was not even mentioned by Vahabzadə.

In 1974, another Soviet Azerbaijani poet, Məmməd Araz, published a poem *Atamın kitabı* (My Father's Book). In place of the language issue, the focus is on extolling the virtues of village life and nature. The poem, written between 1970 and 1972, consists of several "confessions" by the poet to his father. Araz wrote, "Nature is a sort of library. Each cave is a school, each mountain is a teacher. It's my mother tongue, that book is my mother" (Araz 1974: 118). In praising nature and relating language to the provincial environment and local Azerbaijani nature, Araz chose the obviously altered title of Məmmədquluzadə.

After the Soviet collapse

During perestroika, Azerbaijani nationalism enjoyed a rebirth. Liberalization “from above” as well as a territorial dispute with neighboring Armenia prompted intense debate about the national past, language, and literature. Azerbaijani intellectuals went through a postcolonial phase of rethinking their identities. Literary works, historical events, ideas, and traditions were revisited and redefined, and “enriched” with retrospective views.

One of Azerbaijan’s most famous writers, the present head of the National Writers’ Union Anar Rzayev, wrote in the foreword to the 2008 edition of the *Encyclopedia of Cəlil Məmmədquluzadə*: “I think that by writing *Anamın kitabı*, Məmmədquluzadə entered the discourse on the triad *İslamlaşmaq, Türkləşmək, Müasirləşmək* [lit. to become Muslim, Turkish, contemporary/modern, alternatively Islamicization, Turkification, Modernization] which was initiated by Ali Bey Hüseynzade and deepened by Ziya Gökalp in Turkey” (Anar 2008: 23). Məmmədquluzadə propagated *Azərbaycançılıq* (Azerbaijanness), which meant being *Azərbaycan türkü* (Azerbaijani Turk) and speaking *Azərbaycan Türkçəsi* (Azerbaijani Turkish). Məmmədquluzadə may also be considered the founder of Azerbaijani consciousness (*Azərbaycançılıq şüuru*), even if he never used this notion. Anar wrote an article, “The problem of understanding,” for the famous Soviet literature journal *Novyi Mir*. For the reprint in Baku, censors planned to cut that part of the article concerning Məmmədquluzadə’s critique of the czarist Russification policy. However, İsmail Şıxlı, a chief editor of the journal *Azərbaycan*, the main organ of the Writers’ Union of the Azerbaijani SSR, managed to convince the censors not to make the cut (Anar 2008: 26).

Anamın kitabı stood against extreme Westernization as well as extreme orientalizing, the Azerbaijani literary critic Zöhrə Əliyeva wrote (Əliyeva 2010: 139). There is no doubt that Məmmədquluzadə knew of the ideas of Ali Bey Hüseynzade and Ahmet Ağaoğlu. They had worked at the same time in Tiflis, issuing journals in Azerbaijani and Russian for a Muslim readership. Məmmədquluzadə accepted Bolshevik rule and died in Baku in 1932; Ağaoğlu and Hüseynzade spent the rest of their lives in exile in Turkey, becoming extraordinarily well integrated into its political and intellectual life. The reinvention of this interconnected and entangled Turkish-Azerbaijani intellectual space by modern Azerbaijani writers and essayists is the result of perestroika, which resulted in the “return” of emigrant literature to Azerbaijan and the fall of the communist regime.

During perestroika, the issue of national language became one of the most emotional topics for the Azerbaijani Popular Front, an organization of Baku intellectuals that challenged the Communist Party of Azerbaijan and Moscow in 1989–91. Its leaders argued for greater use of Azerbaijani in official communications and the linguistic integration of the huge Russophone community residing mostly in the capital Baku. Literary works such as *Anamın kitabı*, despite their having been written long before, gained prominence because of the contemporary situation. There was a reinvention and repopularization of the work. It even rivaled Məmmədquluzadə's most famous, and until then most popular, work *Ölümlər* (The Dead).

Nationalist reception of a literary work is, as a rule, accompanied by social and political change. In Azerbaijan today, Azerbaijani enjoys the status of official language. While it is predominant in local politics, Russian and Turkish secondary and high schools are popular among the population. Moreover, Russian and Turkish television, soap operas, and pop culture attract more interest than the ill-equipped Azerbaijani TV channels. Russia, Turkey, and Iran are the main destinations for Azerbaijani emigrant workers. In 2009, a well-known Baku-based essayist, İradə Tuncay, published an essay *Anamın kitabı* (Your Mother's Book). She criticized the mostly Russian-Azerbaijani and Azerbaijani-Turkish mixed-languages often used by TV presenters. "Zəhrabəyim also has sons speaking English, French etc. Which books should Gülbahar burn now?" Tuncay is here referring to one of the last chapters in *Anamın kitabı*, when Gülbahar burns the Russian, Persian, and Ottoman books of her brothers. In Tuncay's essay, English and French speaking mark a new stage in the continuity of Azerbaijani discourse on "books of mothers." This view corresponds with the new challenges the oil-rich nation has encountered since the fall of Communism in 1991.

A trajectory of *Anamın kitabı*

Language has played a crucial role in the development of Azerbaijani nationalism. Confronted with other cultures and languages in his environment and family,¹⁰ Məmmədquluzadə promoted the Azerbaijani language through his publicist activities and works like *Anamın kitabı*. Endorsing the language issue as a cardinal aspect of his model of Azerbaijani nationalism, Məmmədquluzadə became one of the most prominent atheist intellectuals in the Muslim Caucasus and beyond. Educated in a *mollakhane* and socialized in extremely religious

environments, he criticized, in his journal, the Muslim clergy and their attitude toward the “national language.”

After his death, Məmmədquluzadə's ideas were supported by several generations of intellectuals regardless of their ethnic origin and political views. The communist Mirzə İbrahimov protected the literary legacy of Məmmədquluzadə by proclaiming him “a great democrat.” While İbrahimov worked on his monograph, Həmidə was writing her memoir of the writer's life. The philologist Abbas Zamanov (1911–93)¹¹ prepared both the Russian edition and the Azerbaijani translation of her memoirs. In the first project, he was supported by the famous Azerbaijani literary critic Əziz Şərif (1895–1989) and in the latter by the doyen of Azerbaijani philology, Həmid Araslı (1909–83). One could observe similar reactions among the Azerbaijani émigré community in Europe.

Məmmədquluzadə's popularity among Azerbaijani intellectuals after 1991 was based on the issue of the Azerbaijani language. During the Soviet period, cultural and political life in Baku was dominated by Russian. During perestroika and after the collapse of the communist regime, the language issue assumed paramount importance. That led to the reinvention of *Anamın kitabı*. The secularism of the new political elites in post-Soviet Azerbaijan secured the authority of an atheist author like Məmmədquluzadə.

As in the West, in the Muslim world fictional literature and nationalism are closely interrelated. The reciprocal use, and misuse, of nationalistic rhetoric and literary works depends on current politics and the prevailing zeitgeist. Written in a pre-Soviet period, *Anamın kitabı* was seized upon by Azerbaijani émigré intellectuals in Europe and instrumentalized by those in Soviet Azerbaijan, just as it was later in the post-Soviet era.

Notes

1. In *Turan*, Hüseyinzade praised the “ancestral commonness” of Turks and Hungarians. For him, Hungarian Christianity and Turkish Islam should not obstruct close cooperation between both peoples. This short verse was written by Hüseyinzade during his studies at the University of Istanbul in 1892. He tried to publish it later in the Cairo-based newspaper *Türk*, but without success. In 1915, Yusuf Akçura published it in *Türk Yurdu* (Hüseyinzadə 2007: 23, 459).
2. The personal names of Azerbaijani intellectuals are used here in the Latinized script, introduced into the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2000. The Azerbaijani alphabet also uses “ş,” “ç,” “ğ,” and “ı,” as in Turkish, and “q” (like the English “g”), “ə” (like the second “e” in German *Leben*), and “x” (German “ch” in *Bach*).

3. The second of the three stages proposed by the Czech historian Miroslav Hroch (Hroch 1996: 62–3). According to Hroch, a tiny group of intellectuals, mostly linguists and historians, launched the nation-building, primarily as an intellectual discourse, through their preoccupation with the national language and literature. In the second stage, the number of intellectuals and cultural associations grows and the national cause becomes an issue for national elites. During the third stage, a national movement, ready to challenge foreign domination and aspiring to political rights, emerges as a conglomerate of the intelligentsia, clergy, and broader society.
4. The main task of this teachers' seminary was to prepare primary and secondary school teachers for Caucasia. The language of instruction was Russian. Many prominent Azerbaijani, Georgian, and Dagestan intellectuals graduated from the seminary.
5. The original handwritten text has been preserved in the archive of the Institute of Manuscripts of the Academy of Sciences in Baku.
6. See http://calilbook.musigi-dunya.az/n/naxchivan_dram_teatr.html (last accessed August 26, 2012).
7. Mirzə İbrahimov was born in 1911 into an Azerbaijani family in a small village in northern Persia. In 1918 he and his family moved to Baku to work in the oilfields. İbrahimov belonged to that group of Azerbaijani intellectuals who were socialized in Persian and Soviet Azerbaijan and had relatively weak affiliations with Turkey. Between the 1930s and 1950s, he had a brilliant career in local politics and as a writer of novels eulogizing Soviet progress and the like. Simultaneously, he promoted Azerbaijani nationalism by thinking not in terms of Turcophone solidarity but in terms of Azerbaijani geography.
8. Mir Cəlal Paşayev was born in 1908 into an Azerbaijani family near Tabriz, northern Persia. He studied literature and oriental studies in Kazan and Baku and was preoccupied with Fizuli. Like İbrahimov, Mir Cəlal had an academic and public career in Soviet Azerbaijan, while also writing his novels (e.g. *Manifesto of a Youth*, 1939), which were wholly consistent with social realism.
9. Founded in 1911, Musavat was primarily the nationalistic party of Caucasian Turks, and was a leading party during the short-lived independence of Azerbaijan (1918–20).
10. Məmmədquluzadə's wife wrote her memoirs in Russian and they wrote letters to each other in Russian, even if they sporadically used Azerbaijani phrases and word combinations. Məmmədquluzadə's children attended Russian schools.
11. Born in Nakhichevan, Abbas Zamanov studied literature in Baku. From 1971, he was a chair of Soviet Azerbaijani literature at Azerbaijani State University. In 1993, he died in Baku and was buried in the same cemetery as Həmidə and Mirzə Cəlil Məmmədquluzadə.

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