

# Caucasus Edition

---

Journal of Conflict Transformation

## INTRODUCING TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE: DEALING WITH THE PAST IN ARMENIAN-AZERBAIJANI CONFLICT

Caucasus Edition Volume 5, Issue 1  
2022

# **INTRODUCING TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE: DEALING WITH THE PAST IN ARMENIAN-AZERBAIJANI CONFLICT**

Editors: Philip Gamaghelyan, Sevil Huseynova, Vadim Romashov,  
Christina Soloyan

Tbilisi 2022

© Caucasus Edition: Journal of Conflict Transformation  
ISSN 2155-5478





The collaboration of analysts that resulted in this publication has been supported by the European Union, Foreign Policy Instruments.

Caucasus Edition is the publication of the Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation. The Imagine Center is an independent, non-political organization that is dedicated to positively transforming relations and laying foundations for lasting and sustainable peace in conflict-torn societies.

[www.imaginedialogue.com](http://www.imaginedialogue.com)

[info@imaginedialogue.com](mailto:info@imaginedialogue.com)

**IMAGINE**  
Center for Conflict Transformation

# Imperial Legacies in the South Caucasus: Armenian-Azerbaijani Relations, 1918-1920

---

**Diana Yayloyan, N. A., Lala Darchinova**

This article provides a conceptual framework for decolonial approaches and analyses Armenian-Azerbaijani relations between 1918 and 1920 based on the works of two political figures, Hovhannes Kajaznuni and Mahammad Amin Rasulzadeh. The article discusses their views on nationalism, peace, confederation, independence, relations with neighbors, and imperial struggles in the Transcaucasus region. We argue it is necessary to elaborate further on the decolonial dialogue, particularly when it comes to the importance of distinguishing between decolonial and nationalistic thinking in the South Caucasus. Based on this discussion, we provide recommendations for organizing decolonial dialogue, research, and discourse analysis in the South Caucasus and the larger post-Soviet space.

## **Introduction**

The developments of the past years—the 44-day Nagorno-Karabakh war and the war in Ukraine—have made analysis of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Armenian-Azerbaijani relations heavily ‘geopoliticised.’ On the one hand, it is indeed important to keep one’s fingers on the pulse of current world-scale processes, as the South Caucasus once again has become a scene for the active struggle of interests between bigger powers. On the other hand, the existing popular lenses of analysis diminish the regional actors’ agency and the South Caucasus’s internal struggles.

In this article, we use a decolonial lens of analysis to look at local views and discussions in the period between 1918 and the mid of 1920s to analyze how these competing and sometimes colliding interests played a decisive role in the emergence and shaping of the conflict in the South Caucasus. We analyze the works of prominent early twentieth-century officials in the First Republic of Armenia, Hovhannes Kajaznuni, and the First Republic of Azerbaijan, Mahammad Amin Rasulzadeh. Their works exemplify ongoing debates among the political elites of Armenia and Azerbaijan in the contexts of Ottoman-Russian tensions and aspirations for Transcaucasia. We look at the condition of in-betweenness that the Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders found themselves amid the rapidly changing geopolitical situation during and after World War I. While in May 1918, Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Transcaucasia obtained formal independence for the first time in history, the political leaders representing the nations could not overcome the mutual mistrust and establish cooperation, thereby enabling the imperial powers to exploit the situation. By looking at the writings of Kajaznuni and Rasulzadeh, we try to analyze the motives of these leaders' political choices and actions to explain why they could not overcome their fears and establish viable cooperation as independent states. We also show the inconsistencies in their criticism of imperialism, colonialism, racism, and oppression, which was reduced to the Russian (in both cases) and Ottoman (in the case of Kajaznuni) Empires, failing to extend to Western European colonization. While we do not claim that the decolonial approach is a single all-encompassing framework that can explain the history of the Armenia-Azerbaijani conflict, we believe that this approach can help show the patterns of the colonial legacy today and deconstruct some prevalent myths about the origins of Armenian-Azerbaijani hostility. Consequently, this approach can help us to critically analyze those two symbols of the First Republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia, Kajaznuni and Rasulzadeh, and offer alternative readings of their works.

One of the key values of the decolonial approach is its ability to expose how, despite the decolonization of Africa and Asia and the announcement of an equal, universalist, and international law, the legal and non-legal mechanisms of colonial powers persist and are used over the ex-colonies (Villalon 1998). Grosfoguel argues that myths around the "decolonization of the world" obscure the reality of colonial governmentality today (Grosfoguel 2007). In the 1990s, the similar euphoria of becoming a

member of an equal, international law was shared by many ex-socialist countries, including Armenia and Azerbaijan, only decades later to be replaced by disillusionment with “the fixed position they have been assigned within the new world architecture” (Tlostanova 2012). Meanwhile, the acknowledgment and identification of continuity (or some form of it) in the hierarchical structure of power relations, rather than an illusion of a complete rupture and being equal actors of the international law, enables a deciphering of the colonial logic.

The decolonial approach also brings to light domestic ideological struggles, often disregarded by the deterministic neorealist approach that treats nation-states as a single unit of analysis. In the early twentieth century, local political thought in Armenia and Azerbaijan was far from homogeneous. One cannot ignore the severe ideological differences between the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun), the Ramkavar, Hnchakian parties and Armenian Bolsheviks, or the Azerbaijani Musavatists and the Azerbaijani Bolsheviks. Rather than explaining the political developments in the Transcaucasus in the early twentieth century through the prism of the conflict between imperial powers and nations as a single and homogenous unit of analysis, an approach that disregards the ideological heterogeneity that existed in the region at that time, we choose to zoom into the struggles and debates between the main political forces in Azerbaijan and Armenia and the relationship of these sometimes antagonistic forces vis-a-vis the rival imperial powers in a rapidly changing geopolitical context. Discussing the history of the First Republic of Armenia, Gerard Libaridian (2018, 1) argues that such an approach “places a good deal of the responsibility for the way Armenia’s history has evolved on the shoulders of Armenian individuals and organizations who spoke and acted in the name of the Armenian people.” This approach, which he defines as the “domestication and internalization of regional and international rivalries” and “the internationalization of domestic ones” (Libaridian 2018, 21) provides a more comprehensive and responsible reading of the past, emphasizing the agency of different political forces in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Hence our motivation is to adopt the decolonial approach to look at the challenging process of Azerbaijan's and Armenia's unprepared arrival at formal sovereignty, which also moves us beyond a methodological nationalism that would imply nation-states and nations are the modern

world's natural political and social formations (Wimmer and Schiller 2002). Armenia and Azerbaijan obtained formal sovereignty from the Russian Empire, but that did not yet mean that the mechanisms of domination faded away, nor did their formal sovereignty prevent the Ottoman Empire from launching a military campaign and exerting pressure on the region. In this sense, it was essential for us to establish the distinctive character of sovereignty that Azerbaijan and Armenia inherited in 1918 and the relationship the main political forces in both countries attempted to form with each other and with the imperial powers during their state formations.

## **The South Caucasus through the Decolonial Approach**

This article does not seek to theorize the Russian or Ottoman Empires as colonial powers or how their hegemony in the region influenced regional relations and conflicts. Instead, we look at regional developments from a bottom-up approach through discussions of political figures, their challenges, and aspirations as well as the main regional obstacles. Meanwhile, to fully understand the context, it is necessary to survey recent literature on Russian colonialism and discussions on decolonization.

Postcolonial studies in general, as well as postcolonial theory and criticism, arrived in post-Soviet scholarship after an extended delay (Tlostanova 2019). By focusing solely on the Western European colonial experience, postcolonial scholars mostly disregarded the imperial relations of subordination outside of European colonialism and their legacies (Oskanian 2018), notably the Ottoman, Japanese, and Russian imperial legacies. One common feature that some of the postcolonial analyses of the Russian and Ottoman empires share is the emphasis on the Russian and the Ottoman condition of *ambiguity* and *in-betweenness* vis-a-vis the Western European colonial powers. Selim Deringil (2003) uses the concept of *borrowed colonialism* when referring to the late Ottoman “civilizing mission” mentality and its “project of modernity.” In *Age of Anger: A History of the Present* (2017) Pankaj Mishra writes about the resentment felt by the Ottomans and Russians from their position of inferiority to the West, calling the feeling an “existential resentment of other people’s being, caused by an intense mix of envy and sense of humiliation and powerlessness” (cited in Koru 2018, 3). As Kevork Oskanian (2018) argues, even today, the condition of ambiguity and in-



betweenness affects Russia's relationship with its claimed periphery and the West.

Viatcheslav Morozov argues that Russia must be viewed as a subaltern empire (Morozov 2015). A subaltern empire is a concept and an empirical phenomenon derived from Morozov's macro-level analysis of the interaction between the domestic context and international developments. Morozov asserts that the postcolonial body of literature was predominantly engaged in analyzing Russian imperial policies, viewing Russia as a colonizer/Self while ignoring the external impact of the hegemonic order and how this impact has been received in the Russian state imagination (Morozov 2015). Margaret Dikovitskaya (2002) argues that across five centuries the Russian Empire utilized expansionist policies at the expense of the colonized people's lands and this qualifies Russia as a colonizer, thus as "a subject/Self rather than an object/Other." She sees the continuity of the Russian colonial mindset in the Soviet Union, which enormously expanded its territory and orbits of influence after the Second World War, imposing its ideology on the peoples of Central Europe, the Baltics, and Asia (Dikovitskaya 2002).

Alexander Etkind provides a valuable account of the Russian imperial conquest and subordination of its own heartlands, characterized as both internal and external colonization since Russia was colonizing not only non-Russian but also Russian people. He makes a valuable contribution to postcolonial scholarship by turning "the focus onto Russia's internal problems, which have not previously been discussed in postcolonial terms" (Etkind 2011, 2). Amid the scholarly debates as to whether Russia qualifies as a colonial power, it is interesting to observe that the terminology of colonialism was already used in the mid-nineteenth century by the Tsarist government. Etkind (2011, 250) notes:

In 1907–17, Problems of Colonization (*Voprosy kolonizatsii*) was the title of the official journal of the Resettlement Administration, an agency that had been founded in 1896 within the Ministry of Internal Affairs and later moved into the Ministry of Agriculture. Led by their "etatist and technocratic ethos," officials of this administration oversaw the colonial efforts of the state that were directed both onto the reorganization of the Russian heartlands (Stolypin reforms) and the migration of the peasantry to Siberia, Central Asia, and Transcaucasia.

In 1828, Alexander Griboedov applied to the Tsarist government with a plan “to resettle many thousands of peasants from central Russia to the Caucasus, creating massive colonies there” (Etkind 2011, 110). The interesting nuance here is that Griboedov saw the settler form of British colonization of North America as the best model for the Russian colonization of the Caucasus (Etkind 2011), as compared to the overseas British colonization of India. Contrasted themselves with the European imperialist powers, the Tsarist elite saw Russian imperialism as relatively more tolerant and assimilationist: “We are not Englishmen, who in India strive by no means to mingle with the native races and who for this reason, sooner or later, may pay with the loss of that country, where they will have no ties of *relationship*; our strength, by contrast, up until now has consisted in that we assimilated the defeated peoples, blending with them peacefully” (Mikhail Veniukov cited in Morrison 2012, 327).

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has raised serious discussions on Russian imperialism and the calls to decolonize Russia (Gunko 2022). The decolonial turn in Russia is seen as a prerequisite for questioning and eliminating the Russian imperial ambitions both in relation to the non-Russian regions of the Russian Federation and former Russian colonies: “To solve Russia’s antagonistic relations with its neighbors, both the Russian state and society need to confront their country’s imperial identity” (Kassymbekova and Mara 2022, 1).

While the discussions on decolonization from the “Russian imperial gaze” (Gunko 2022) are essential, the abundance of opinions on the decolonization process in the post-Soviet realm raises questions related to the methods of dismantling the power hierarchies produced by Russian colonial governmentality. What is understood under decolonization? How to decolonize the cultural legacy produced by the non-Russian peoples in both Tsarist and Soviet times? Should it be entirely rejected? If the answer is yes, then the question is, What will replace the colonial forms of knowledge? While realizing the need for a decolonial dialogue in the post-Soviet space, how do we conceptualize such a decolonial dialogue and how do we see it happening in practice? All these questions will enable us to scrutinize the concept of decolonization and make sure we distinguish between decolonial and nationalistic thinking. In the early twentieth century, some proponents of anti-imperialist struggle would also turn out to be staunch nationalists exerting no less oppressive and

anti-democratic impulses toward other ethnic and religious groups. Decolonization should occur not only in politics, culture, or economics but also in the realm of epistemology and within the critical discourses that deal with imperial-colonial issues (Tlostanova 2019).

Madina Tlostanova (2012, 131) poses a question of how to engage in a meaningful postcolonial dialogue that would not adjust the post-socialist experience to the already established postcolonial theory “traditionally applied to the (ex-)colonies of various capitalist empires” but rather bring to the surface the postcolonial experience growing out of local histories. She argues in favor of problematizing the postsocialist experience by looking at the historically produced local dynamics of relationships in the post-Soviet center and periphery instead of mechanically applying the methodological tools of postcolonial critique predominantly born out of Western colonial history (Tlostanova 2012). Seeing the recognition of the colonial nature of our knowledge as the first step, Nurulla-Khojaeva (2016) proposes *dakhlez*, a philosophical concept that builds a balance between the values of the plural-cyclic culture of the Central Asian region and the influence of external cultures.

Decolonial dialogue has the potential to articulate new ways of rethinking the lasting structural dimensions of the contemporary logic of coloniality in the South Caucasus, offering an alternative framework for understanding the origins of the conflict. The decolonial approach aims to demonstrate the “dark sides of modernity,” parts of history that have been extruded and muted by dominant narratives. Finally, decoloniality seeks to bring to the surface narratives of people that have either been long forgotten or are misinterpreted today.

## **Overview of Critical Political Developments in the Early-Twentieth-Century Transcaucasia**

In this section, we provide a brief overview of the turbulent process in Transcaucasia from 1900-1920. During the first twenty years of the twentieth century, the region experienced several territorial reorganizations for which the Russian Empire would continuously dictate the administrative subdivisions of the region: the First World War; the Ottoman armed forces’ military incursion in the Transcaucasia in 1918; two revolutions in Russia, the collapse of empires; the formation of the short-lived Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic of 1918; the

proclamation of independence of Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia; and their Sovietization in 1920-1921 by the Bolshevik government.

Firuz Kazemzadeh provides valuable insights regarding the political developments in the early twentieth century with regard to Armenia-Azerbaijan relations in his book *The Struggles for Transcaucasia* (1951, 215): “the distribution of population in the border regions between Armenia and Azerbaijan was such that no definite demarcation line could be drawn.” Kazemzadeh elaborates that “Azerbaijani nomads were one of the sources of constant trouble” (1951, 215). These nomads for centuries had driven their flocks from summer residences to winter ones. With the establishment of nation-states and the drawing of borders, such movement of nomads created a serious obstacle on the border of the two newly emerging nations. Kazimzadeh (1951, 215) notes that “now that Armenia claimed the mountains, it tried to systematize migrations by issuing identification papers and certificates of residence to the nomads, establishing guard posts, custom houses, and other such obstacles on their path. The protests of the Azerbaijani Government were of no avail.”

Emerging as the issue of free movement, the conflict was tangled up with numerous factors such as imperial interests, rising nationalism, and greater instability in the region. The inactivity of the Russian imperial authorities aggravated the conflict; although they had the power to prevent the bloodshed by arresting the perpetrators or preventing criminal groups from committing massacres in the first place, the authorities abstained from intervention and remained passive. Viceroy of the Transcaucasia, Vorontsov-Dashkov, himself admits that during the Armenian-Azerbaijani massacres of February 1905, the authorities remained almost completely inactive (Kazimzadeh 1951). This fact is also discussed by Rasulzadeh (2014b) as one of the primary causes of recently increasing Armenia-Azerbaijan hostility.

The majority of the non-Russian peoples in Transcaucasia belonged to the peasantry, who shared a strong identification with their religion, class, and locality rather than with the abstract category of nation. Although the peasantry was often subjected to discrimination by tsarist officials or landlords, their grievances had not yet been articulated into nationalism (Suny 2011). The situation was different in urban spaces, where Georgians and Armenians were more dominant, with a vibrant life of intellectuals,

activists, and a developing working class, while Azerbaijanis were the least urbanized in this sense (Suny 2011).

Firuz Kazemzadeh (1951) claims that developments in the Russian Empire such as its defeat in the war with Japan and the revolution of 1905 coupled with growing nationalism all over Europe. This played a significant role in the transformations of the peripheries, especially the Caucasus. Along with Russian, Ottoman, and Iranian imperial powers, British, German, French, and Italian interests were present and further complicated the political dynamics of the region (Kazemzadeh 1951).

According to Georges Mamoulia (2021), several imperial forces had expressed their interest in Transcaucasia, namely the Ottoman Empire, Germany, and Bolshevik Russia. In the situation of the First World War, the interests of the allies were constantly changing (Brisku and Blauvelt 2020). In this turbulent situation, all three countries were promised different outcomes by different imperial powers. While Ottomans desired annexation of Azerbaijan (and considered Armenia and some parts of Georgia as its own territory), local elites were against it as it would mean the loss of independence whereas they were more inclined toward a confederation of the Caucasian states. The Ottomans also desired Batumi, while Georgians and Azerbaijanis were against this as it was the only access to the sea for the Federative Republic. However, the situation on the ground was changing so fast that these three countries had to adjust their foreign policies in order to guarantee their survival.

The Bolshevik seizure of power in Petrograd after the successful October Revolution in 1917 prompted the leading Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Georgian political forces to gather in Tiflis and form a provisional regional executive board. The task of the Transcaucasian Commissariat was to maintain order until the establishment of a democratic federative Russian republic (Hovhannisian 1969). The Georgian Social Democrats and the National Democrats, the Armenian Dashnaktsutyun (or Dashnaks), and the Azerbaijani Musavatists formed a union state, known as the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic (TDFR); it lasted one month, from 22 April and 26 May 1918. Although a short-lived experience, it provides glimpses into attempts of the leaders of three Transcaucasian nations to collectively discuss and find a solution to pressing issues such as border demarcation, land reforms, economy, and foreign policy (Brisku and Blauvelt 2020).

The Russian revolution and the withdrawal of the Russian imperial armed forces from the Transcaucasia region created an imperial power vacuum, which the Ottoman Empire saw as a good opportunity for seizing the region. Despite having victories, the Ottoman army had to retreat from Transcaucasia as a result of the military success of the Entente powers in the First World War (Panossian 2006). The fall of Kars on October 30, 1920, which remains one of the traumatic pages in the collective memory of Armenians, the occupation of Alexandropol (modern-day Gyumri) in mid-May and Gharakilisa on May 24-28, and the advancement of the Ottoman army towards the Ararat plain were perceived as an existential threat by the Armenian leaders (Zolyan 2021). Many Armenian genocide survivors, among them orphans who found a safe haven in these territories of the Russian Empire, were forced to flee again as a result of the Ottoman military incursions. The Armenian political forces viewed their Georgian counterparts as willing to deal with the Ottoman government while fearing that the Musavat Party might support the Ottoman army (Zolyan 2021). In spite of the existence of some kind of political self-governing system in the Caucasus, the region was not internally stable in addition to challenges stemming from its position as a crossroads between competing empires. In the midst of the ongoing economic and political crisis, the mistrust among the various political authorities within the region that were supposed to control Transcaucasia steadily grew.

One of the main priorities of the Azerbaijani Musavat Party within Transcaucasia was to ensure control over Baku. The leaders of the party were trying to convince the Transcaucasian authorities to show tangible support for taking Baku from the Soviets (Kazemzadeh 1951) following the March 1918 incidents of ethnonationalist violence that have recently been portrayed by Rasulzada as a new “Ashura”<sup>8</sup> or new “Karbala”<sup>9</sup> for Azerbaijanis. Armenians were facing serious insecurities in the eastern part of the region after the Bolsheviks signed the Brest-Litovsk treaty, by which Ardahan and Kars were to be returned to the Ottoman Empire. Although by that time Lenin’s government had no actual jurisdiction in

---

<sup>8</sup> Ashura occurs on 10 Muharram according to the Islamic Hijri calendar. On this day, according to Shia confession of Islam, the third Imam Hussein bin Ali was assassinated by the troops of Khalifa Yezid bin Muaviyyah.

<sup>9</sup> Karbala is the place where Hussein bin Ali was killed.

Transcaucasia, this did not prevent it from transferring the districts of Kars, Ardahan, and Batum to the Ottoman Empire, in addition to promising to “disperse and destroy the Armenian ‘bands’ operating in Russia and in the ‘occupied provinces’ of Turkey” (Hovhannisian 1971, 38).

The major Armenian political force of that time, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, or *Dashnaktsutyun*, believed that only Russia could guarantee the safety of the Russian and Ottoman Armenians united into a progressive autonomous region (Hovhannisian 1971). *Dashnaktsutyun* was split between Avetis Aharonyan, Ruben Ter-Minasyan, and Artashes Badalyan, who opposed the declaration of independence, and Simon Vratsyan, Khachatur Karjikian, Alexander Khatisyan, and Hovhannes Kajaznuni, who saw independence and securing peace with the Ottoman government as the only possible solution for the survival of Armenia (Hakobyan 2019). On the contrary, Azerbaijani political figures and the Musavat party saw the solution in confederation and viewed *Dashnaktsutyun* as a political force preventing them from achieving this goal by forming a stronghold of Russian imperialism in the region (Rasulzadeh 1930).

Contrary to the modern national historiographies of Armenia and Azerbaijan, the national independence of the three Transcaucasian republics in 1918 was a product of imperial contestation and ambitions in the region rather than a long struggle for national liberation. Unable to exert political will and cooperate on vital regional issues such as territorial disputes, economic issues, and foreign policy, the TDFR eventually collapsed.

In his memoirs published in 1924, Alexander Khatisov (cited in Ambartsumyan 2017) would express his disappointment with the inability of the TDFR to cooperate:

These peoples [Armenians, Georgians, Azerbaijanis] received freedom without any preliminary mutual conversation initiated by the authorities. They did not agree among themselves, and often with opposite interests and always opposite ideas, about how to achieve their ideals—some dreamed of the help of the Germans, others—the Turks, while others—allies [Entente], fourth—Russians. In this chaos of thoughts, moods, sympathies, one must

look for the main cause of all the misfortunes that have befallen the Caucasus in recent years.

## **Mahammed Amin Rasulzadeh's Views on Imperialist Influence in the Caucasus**

Mahammed Amin Rasulzadeh is treated as the founding father of the idea of national revival of Azerbaijanis by major opposition and nationalistic groups (Goltz 2015). He is regarded as a great thinker of Azerbaijani national identity and statehood. This section provides an alternative reading of Rasulzadeh's works on Armenia-Azerbaijan relations and national identity to deconstruct and decolonize the ultra-nationalist and militarist discourse of the Azerbaijani political elite, including both the government and the opposition. It demystifies the symbol of the dominant political groups in Azerbaijan who mobilize the public around a specific image of Rasulzadeh to justify their hatred towards Armenians with ethnonationalist ideas. We have no intention to side with Rasulzadeh's arguments or defend his claims. Our aim is to show that his views are misinterpreted by nationalist groups in modern-day Azerbaijan.

In the early twentieth century, political life in the Caucasus became more complicated with the formation of nationalist, pan-Islamist, pan-Turkist, Bolshevik, and many other political groups. During and after the decomposition of Tsarist Russia, Caucasian intellectuals were left with many questions and problems inherited from the previous form of rule. These issues were gradually gaining political patterns. The dominant political actors of the period were nationalists and socialists. Mahammad Amin Rasulzadeh was a prominent Azerbaijani political leader representing the ideological vanguard of the first Azerbaijani Republic. As a Muslim possessing revisionary views toward Russian elitism, Rasulzadeh wrote about language issues and harshly criticized the Tatars who were trying to speak in the Russian language with little to no Russian language skills. Gradually, these criticisms promoted by the Musavat Party leaders were transformed into political statements and proclamations of new cultural-political maxims. In the uncertainty following the collapse of the hegemonic ethnocultural and economic dominion in the region under the Russian Empire, Caucasian intellectuals attempted to define the nation, nationality, national liberation, national solidarity, and other terms derived from the European modernist



traditions. Rasulzadeh was one of those intellectuals who regularly published articles in different media outlets and was perceived as one of the key authors among Muslims despite the fact that he did not have higher education. For him, defining these terms was the primary goal for state-building and the international relations of Azerbaijan. Thus, Rasulzadeh writes in the *Siyavush of Our Century* (2015), they created the state from nothing.

While the so-called civilized world was speaking in a new meta-language of pseudoscientific geopolitics, Rasulzadeh, urged on by security concerns and the need to find solutions for the functionality of local decision-making, myopically attempted to frame history and worldview. However, dissatisfied with the Western powers, i.e. Europe and the U.S., in his article "It Is the East's Turn", published on May 15, 1926 in the journal *New Caucasus* (*Yeni Qafqaziya*), he stated that even the most radical political movements in America and Europe were not concerned with political movements in the East. Only after World War I did the Americans and Europeans pay attention to the solid movements taking place in the East (Rasulzadeh 2018).

Thus, mentioning the new solid movement of so-called Eastern nations, Rasulzadeh was reiterating his main argument: it was now the turn of the East to follow suit. Drawing from the security paradigms of European nations, he was prioritizing anti-Bolshevik, and even anti-Russian stances as an element of the nation-building process of the Caucasian people, a process he saw as inviolable (Rasulzadeh 2018). He stressed that the hatred of the masses seeking their liberty from the lying oppressor is natural. It is also natural that the movements are guided by ideas and fated to show a struggle (i.e. direct the hatred of the masses towards repressive aristocracy and opponents of democracy). Rasulzadeh further draws some parallels with European history: "That is why the tactics of German solidarity was enmity toward France, the tactics of Slavian solidarity was enmity toward Germany and Turkey, the tactics of Italian solidarity was enmity toward Austria" (Rasulzadeh 2018). Consequently, based on such examples from European history, Rasulzadeh concluded that the unity of intellectuals with the masses is essential for nation-building purposes, liberation from the oppressor, and democracy.

Analyzing the historical evolution of nationalism in continental Europe, Rasulzadeh puts forward three formation periods:

1. Period of Rationalism under the influence of the French School;
2. Period of Racism under the influence of German philology;
3. Period of Hybridical Formation under the influences of both French School and German philology.

According to Rasulzadeh, the concept of nation was conceptualized as a legal phenomenon in the period of rationalism. Drawing the legal boundaries for the nation, the nation was perceived as a social group wherein common normative and legislative prerogatives were formed and accepted. Surprisingly, during the second formation period, genetic and blood causes were prioritized alongside romantic excitement. Without ignoring genetic commonalities, in the period of hybridized formation, the concept of the nation was viewed not as static but as a dynamic phenomenon/process influenced by different social drives. Rasulzadeh argued that, while European empires were forming their political attitudes towards Others through the aforementioned phases, analogous developments took place in Turkey during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As a leader of an emerging political agency with a western-oriented direction, Rasulzadeh was compelled to make hard-and-fast decisions within the framework of the given modernist and colonial socio-political realities. His works demonstrate that he adhered to nationalism as an idea against the imperialism and colonialism of the time. However, as a leader of an emerging agency with a western-oriented direction, Rasulzadeh was compelled to reproduce the knowledge structures provided by the narrators of the history and political sociology of Western societies. In such a situation, he was expected to work within the framework of the given modernist and colonial socio-political realities. In other words, he could not escape the trap of imperialist interests by putting forward a decolonial struggle but rather adhered to a specific form of anti-colonialism against the Russian empire, which led him to a nationalist understanding of politics.

In almost all of his major works, Rasulzadeh describes Russia as an empire and as the cause of the bloodshed in the Caucasus. His thoughts transformed during the existence of the Azerbaijani Republic and throughout the decades after its dissolution. That he maintained the same anti-Bolshevik tone in an article written in September-October 1929 for the *Journal Caucasian Hill People* (Qafqaz Dağlıları) is remarkable in terms of

revealing his views on neighboring Caucasian nations. The article was adapted to the modern Azerbaijani language and re-published by the Baku Research Institute on March 24, 2022. In the article, Rasulzadeh underlines the necessity of solidarity among Caucasian people from different ethnicities to consolidate against the same oppressor (Rasulzadeh, 2022). With undefended argumentation and an anti-Russian stance, Rasulzadeh (2022) writes that a “Caucasian Union will be welcomed by Iran and Turkey with sympathy, and is there any need for long explanations that [this] particular Union is essential for these two Muslim states [as a buffer zone against Russia]?” Stressing the importance of the creation of the Caucasian Confederation, Rasulzadeh implies that the idea of confederation is affirmed by the Caucasian peoples.

A similar discourse is present in the article “Panturanism and the Problem of Caucasus”, presented in 1930 in Paris for representatives of Caucasian, Ukrainian, and Turkistani emigres. His primary argument was the need for the Turkic people of Russia to unite against the oppressor and have political consciousness; therefore he saw Turkism as a political ideology capable of uniting these people against the empire for independence. However, Pan-turanism, according to Rasulzadeh, was a romantic political ideology that was not realizable at the time. On the contrary, he elaborates that Turkism allows different nations, not only Turkic ones, to emerge under this ideology. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that the Pan-turanism developed in Azerbaijan led intellectuals of that time to the path of federalism, seeing independent Azerbaijan in the union of the Caucasian Confederation similar to Pan-slavism in the Czech Republic.

If, in the good old days, the Caucasus was an arena of mutual struggle for neighboring peoples, then the last period of joint life and the suffering of this region proved that the separate course of action of individual Caucasian peoples brought disasters not only to this people but also to all other peoples of the Caucasus. The commonality of history, the commonality of suffering, more precisely, the commonality of fate created a common, more or less similar psychology among all the peoples of the Caucasus. The terrible years of terror and red imperialism, which equally crushed all the peoples of the Caucasus with a bloody pressure, brought these peoples even closer and strengthened in them the

consciousness of the commonality of their national and political interests (Rasulzadeh 2011).

In addition, the overview of Rasulzadeh's selected works in this article clarifies the fact that Rasulzadeh referred to nationalism as a progressive and modernist ideology coming from Europe that could unite people in empires against the imperial yoke and was not based on ethnonationalist rhetoric. In fact, his calls for peaceful coexistence and peace in the Caucasus put him closer to the modern-day peacebuilders and anti-war activists who were rejected and silenced by society during the Second Karabakh War (Samadov 2020). To clarify, Rasulzadeh saw the enmity between Armenians and Azerbaijanis as a result of Russian imperialism, while the modern-day peace activists do not share this rhetoric as their struggle is directed against ethnonationalist hatred, militarism, and authoritarianism and for building peace between the two independent nations. For example, Rasulzadeh in his "Remedy of Disease" ("Mərəzimizizin Çarəsi") published in Davat Goch in 1906, discusses the importance of identifying the disease, which he regards as attempts of the Russian empire to divert the attention of people from instability, corruption, war, and chaos in the Russian Empire.

I think everyone knows the reason for this disease that is affecting us. Everyone knows and recognizes the tyranny and bureaucracy that plunged Russia into a bloody vortex that left the heaven [of the] Caucasus in hell. Or who doesn't know the Russian tyranny-cruelty that is making Ukraine miserable or other non-Russian cities of Odesa, Chisinau?! Anyone who is familiar with the treachery of the Caucasian emirs will agree with me on this. Because it's impossible to see *nagashidzis*, *alikhhanovs*, *goloshapovs*, *lyutskis*, *pivovarovs*, and others and not agree. Bureaucrats revived from the grave of the Russian revolution, in order to find salvation, resorted to all sorts of menial tasks and made impossible tricks to keep the poor subjects of two nations under oppression and isolation from each other. They tried to make the two nations clash with each other and in this way drown the revolution in unjust blood. But the main cause of pogroms and massacres, the bureaucracy that has lost its mind because of the awe of the revolution, is unaware of the fact that the blood of the generous

drowns the oppressors, free thoughts that are kindled are not extinguished by blood (Rasulzade 2014a, 27).

He ends this work with a call to end hostilities between the two peoples and redirect it against the real cause of the conflict: imperialism. Such calls these days can be considered equal to treason in Azerbaijan and peace activists advocating similar discourse are oppressed or silenced (Rasulzade 2014a, 28):

Peace activists from the Caucasus: If you want peace, meaning if you want to find a remedy for the disease, unite to get rid of this illness. As long as the cause is there, this disease will remain.

This section provided a different reading of Rasulzadeh's selected works, which are widely manipulated by Azerbaijani nationalists. The ideas of nationalism were mobilized by Rasulzadeh as a reaction to Russian imperialism and followed the trends of European intellectual circles. Modern ethnonationalist hatred and enmity are justified as normal and as a legacy from the founding fathers of Azerbaijan. However, Rasulzadeh's works from different periods cited in this article do not reflect the same ethnonationalist hatred and enmity; on the contrary, in many cases, Rasulzadeh supports the idea of Caucasian Confederation. His aspirations were for an independent Azerbaijan but within the Caucasian Confederation, which he saw as a natural solution for people sharing common values, traditions, sufferings, and struggles. Along with Turkic identity, which he embraced and theorized in his writings, he also had a strong Caucasian identity. For him, the motherland along with Azerbaijan was also the Caucasus. His ideas of Pan-turanism and Turkism sought political ends of uniting and mobilising the Turkic population of the Russian empire, which in many cases was the Muslim population and at the same time most backward. His analyzed works do not reflect ethnonationalism and hatred but the cooperation and unity of Caucasian people along with aspirations for peace and stability in a region independent from imperialism.

## **Hovhannes Kajaznuni's Views on Imperialist Influence in the South Caucasus**

The writings of Armenian political figures from the First Republic of Armenia (May 28, 1918- December 2, 1920) comprise valuable sources on the political developments and public debates in Armenia before its

takeover by the Bolsheviks and Sovietization in December 1920. This section will focus on two articles by Hovhannes Kajaznuni, one of the founding fathers of the First Armenian Republic and its first prime minister. Kajaznuni's writings not only illustrate the heavy emotional burden of making critical choices for the newly independent country squeezed between the former Ottoman and Russian imperial powers but also reflect a pragmatic line of thinking that was necessary for the unprecedented newly emerged state. Even a century later, the debates between Kajaznuni and his party colleagues over which political orientation should Armenia take, what the regional challenges and chances for the country's survival were *vis-a-vis* the external forces—Turkey and Russia—remain relevant today. At the same time, Kajaznuni's reflections on the nation and nationalism, his criticism of the Ottoman and Russian imperial powers' oppressive policies, and his inability to decipher and debunk the oppressive British or German colonial policies indicate a limited understanding of imperialism and colonization due to the civilizational divides that structured the modern world.

Before declaring independence from Russia on May 28, 1918, Armenia was in the middle of a severe humanitarian crisis. The country was flooded with Ottoman Armenian refugees, among them many orphans, survivors of the Armenian Genocide. Starvation and disease left thousands dead on the streets of Yerevan and Echmiadzin. The dire humanitarian crisis in Armenia was further complicated by the heavy consequences of the Bolsheviks' deal with the Ottoman Empire reached at the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on March 3, 1918, which was seen by many Armenians as a vile betrayal (Hovhannisian 1971).

The geopolitical situation in Transcaucasia was rapidly changing, and new security risks were added to the old ones, affecting the alignment of small states such as Armenia. With the First World War still going on, Transcaucasia remained under the Ottoman-German occupation with all the catastrophic consequences of the humanitarian crisis. The Armenian government had to prioritize peace and the development of the First Republic of Armenia:

I will follow a single supreme principle: to establish good-neighborly relations with neighboring states, in every possible way avoiding clashes with them. This is dictated by the fact that our country needs peace, we need peace, even if it is fragile... At this

moment, we can have only one goal—to save the fragments of the Armenian people and heroically try to create a state in the small territory that still remains in our hands. (Petrosyan n.d., 1).

With the Ottoman army stationed at Armenia's borders in mid-June 1918, establishing good relations with the Ottoman Empire was outlined as a top priority in foreign policy and an essential pillar of Armenian national security. Moreover, the presence of the Ottoman armed forces in the region had led to uprisings by the Muslim populations in Armenia, who, "encouraged by the Ottoman Empire and Azerbaijan, adhered to an anti-state position" (Kajaznuni 1923, 36). The situation was similar in Georgia, where thousands of Georgian Muslims in Ajaria were assisting the Ottoman forces that moved into Batum, the district's major city (Hovhannisian 1971). As Hovhannisian writes, "religious identity played a much more significant role than national origin did in determining political loyalties" (Hovhannisian 1971, 158).

In his first speech to the Armenian parliament on August 3, 1918, Kajaznuni raised the main issues that needed rapid solutions and outlined the main foreign policy directives (Ani Armenian Research Center 2020):

1. Reinforce peace with the Ottoman government and establish neighborly relations. Rigorously fulfill all commitments agreed upon with the Ottoman government and ensure that the Ottoman government acts mutually. In particular, solve the issues of removing Ottoman troops from our country and returning refugees [to their homes].
2. Mutually solve border issues between Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia by accepting the principle of self-determination, which corresponds to the spirit and aims of democratic states.
3. Liquidate the institutions that remain from the Transcaucasian Republic by reaching a mutual agreement with Azerbaijan and Georgia.

Russia was missing from the program. While broad political and civil society circles of Armenia were in favor of establishing diplomatic relations with Russia regardless of who was in power, with the unstable political situation in Russia and the civil war between the Soviet and (anti-Bolshevik) non-Soviet groups still ongoing, Kajaznuni refrained from

making any public statements regarding the fate of Russian-Armenian relations (Petrosyan n.d.). Under pressure from the Ottoman Empire, on June 3, 1918 in Batumi, the head of the Armenian delegation, Alexander Khatisyan, signed a document according to which “the Government of the Republic of Armenia undertakes throughout the war not to maintain any diplomatic relations with those states that are in a state of war with the Ottoman Empire (Petrosyan n.d.).” The pressure from the Ottoman Empire, which remained until the end of the First World War, and the uncertainties of the civil war in Russia between the Red and White armies forced the Republic of Armenia to maintain unofficial, secret communication with both fighting political forces in Russia, limiting relations to trade and an economic framework (Petrosyan n.d.). The end of the First World War and the defeat of the Ottoman Empire marked a turning point for the Transcaucasus region. The commitments of the Armenian government signed at the Batumi peace conference with the Ottoman Empire became invalid. From the end of November 1918, the British armed forces began to gradually enter the region, replacing the retreating Ottoman military units (Petrosyan n.d.).

In his six-part article published in 1922 in the ARFD’s *Jakatamart Daily*, Kajaznuni reflected on Armenia’s economic and geopolitical challenges, working-class conditions, and the difficulties of implementing the communist program in the economically backward and collapsed Armenia (Kajaznuni 1922). As his long-time party colleague and the last Prime Minister of the First Republic of Armenia Simon Vratsian (1924, 9) argued, Kajaznuni imagined Armenia as an independent state under a mandate “in some vague relationship with a great power, but never with Russia.” Despite denouncing Ottoman and Russian imperialism, Kajaznuni failed to debunk European imperial/colonial expansion and oppression. His essay “Nation and Homeland” [Ազգ և Հայրենիք], published in 1923-1924, presents an interesting take on the anti-imperial struggles led by the colonized peoples, where the Ottoman and Russian imperial regimes were categorized as “autocratic for everyone” and the British regime was a “civilised” one—an assessment that resulted from that period’s epistemological Eurocentric perspective:

The regimes of the Sultans and Tsars were autocratic for everyone. All their subjects were lacking in rights. [...] The English regime was not alike the Turkish one. The abuses committed by the



Sultan's rule in Greece were not familiar to the Irish. The English government was not massacring them, ravaging their country, imposing additional taxes, nor did it differentiate the Irish from the English in the courts... Nevertheless, the Irish rebelled against English rule. Why should the English lords and elected representatives of English communities invent laws for Ireland? Why shouldn't the Irish themselves create their own laws and run their country?... The Greeks were subject to a barbaric regime where in addition to abuses of national rights there were also abuses of political and civil kinds. The English regime in Ireland was a civilised regime under which the Irish, belonging to another nation, enjoyed national liberties to the extent that is possible in any state (Kajaznuni, 1923-1924, 50).

In February 1921 an anti-Bolshevik uprising took place in Armenia, and the Committee for the Salvation of the Fatherland took power in and outside of Yerevan from the Armenian Revolutionary Committee, which retreated to Artashat (Vratsian 1924). With Dashnaktsutyun seeing the February uprising as a critical moment to restore its rule in Armenia, Kajaznuni supported the policy of rapprochement with Turkey as the only way to prevent the absorption of Armenia by Russia:

Today, we have two real powers by our side: one is Soviet Russia, and the other is Turkey. The rest of the powers are too far away from us. As bitter experience has shown, we cannot put up with the first force. What is left is to become friends and make peace with the second force. The return of the Bolsheviks is undesirable for the Turks and us. The return of Bolsheviks will mean nothing but annexing Armenia to Russia. In this case, Turkey will again have a border with its centuries-old enemy—a large and aggressive Russia (I say aggressive, because it is clear to everyone that Soviet Russia is the same imperialist power as tsarist Russia). (Vratsian 1924, 18)

Vratsian denounced Bolshevism as the continuation of Russian imperialism, lamenting that Armenians had futile hopes with the Bolsheviks, for whom "Armenia was nothing but material for their communist experiments" (Vratsian 1924, 10). He wrote about the large-scale terror campaign launched by the Soviet secret police against Dashnak party members, Armenian military officers, and anyone seen as

political opposition: “the independence of Armenia remained a dead letter. Our country simply became one of the provinces of Greater Russia” (Vratsian 1924, 13).

Kajaznuni’s motivation to establish good relations with Turkey and rely on Ankara to fight against Bolshevik Russia’s influence stemmed from a pragmatic assessment of Turkey’s strategic interest in Transcaucasia. According to Kajaznuni’s line of thinking, if Soviet Russia was seen as the continuation of imperialist tsarist Russia and would absorb Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, thus ending their formal sovereignty, Turkey was interested in keeping the three republics as a buffer zone between Soviet Russia and itself. As Kajaznuni wrote in March 1921, “These three newly formed, small, and powerless [states] cannot pose any danger to Turkey, but at the same time, they represent certain security against the Russian impingement” (Vratsian 1924). Moreover, the leading Dashnaktsutyun members Hovhannes Kajaznuni, Aram Manukyan, Alexander Khatisyan, Ruben Ter-Minasyan, and many others were convinced that the improvement of relations with the Ottoman Empire would also restrain Azerbaijan’s territorial claims to Armenia (Ani Armenian Research Center 2022). However, this strategy of relying on Turkey against Bolshevik encroachment could work only as long as the geopolitical conditions did not contribute to a Turkish-Russian rapprochement.

1923 marked a dramatic turn in Kajaznuni’s political orientation. While before 1923, Kajaznuni’s position toward the Bolshevik government was irreconcilable, after Armenia became a part of the Soviet Union, contrary to most of his party colleagues, he backed the unpopular idea that Armenians around the world should support Soviet Armenia. In an address to the Dashnaktsutyun Party Congress held in Bucharest in 1923, Kajaznuni read the manifesto “Dashnaktsutyun Has Nothing to Do Anymore,” which was a critical review of the party’s proclaimed aims and policies and a heavy criticism of illusionary expectations from great powers such as Russia and the Western powers, predominantly the United States, the British Empire, and France. The article “Open Letter to Z: Turkey or Russia?” written a year later presents interesting parallels with Armenia’s attempts to protect its sovereignty in the changing geopolitical neighborhood with two major powers—Russia and Turkey—fighting for influence in the region (Kajaznuni 1924).

As for the question of who Armenia should ally itself with, Kajaznuni saw Armenia's neighbors—Georgia, Azerbaijan, and other national-political units (Abkhazia, Ajaria, South Ossetia, Zaqatala and, partly, Dagestan)—as Russia's most natural allies to form a state union due to the geographically, economically, and historically intertwined relationships among by these nations. Looking at the first attempt of Armenians, Georgians, and Azerbaijanis to form a political union under the umbrella of the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic, Kajaznuni blamed the collapse of the TDFR on the three nation-states being unable to come to an agreement and the external powers exploiting these internal disagreements. The leadership of the first three Transcaucasian republics could not find enough political maturity to solve their border disputes, nor could they overcome "mutual mistrust, suspicion and fear" (Kajaznuni 1924). Instead of using this unique opportunity of formal independence and rupture from their imperial sovereign to ally with each other, Azerbaijan and Georgia favored an alliance with Turkey, while in the eyes of the Armenians, Turkey was an existential threat. Kajaznuni (Kajaznuni 1924 1) lamented these lost opportunities in the past:

If the Transcaucasian peoples had been politically a little more mature then, indeed, they would have found a way to solve their internal disputes peacefully and with their own means. But they had not reached that level of maturity and so the alliance collapsed, for it to be restored under external duress.

Speaking about the interests of Western powers, in particular, the British Empire and the United States in the Transcaucasia region after the end of World War I, Kajaznuni noted the illusory hopes that the Armenian people had tied to the West, which was not interested in the region due to a potential conflict with Russia. With the Sovietization of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, the freedom of choice to decide one's fate had been lost. Given Transcaucasia's limited options as a part of the Soviet Union, for Kajaznuni, the only viable option of the alliance for Transcaucasia as a state entity was standing between the two regional forces of Turkey or Russia. For the small and internally weak Transcaucasian states, balancing between two forces was not an option; thus, Armenia had to align with one of the two powers.

The ethnic kinship, geographical position of Azerbaijan, and ideological proximity with the Azerbaijani "Musavat" party are essential reasons why

Turks established themselves in Baku. As Kajaznuni writes, during the First World War, the Musavatist intellectuals saw the Ottoman Empire as their most natural ally. Kajaznuni emphasizes the strategic importance of the Azerbaijani connection for Turkey, which is "separated from Nakhijevan only by the Arax river and Nakhijevan is separated from Azerbaijan by a very short corridor in Armenian Zangezur. The Alyat-Julfa railway, which has almost reached completion, will end that separation and Baku will be linked to Nakhijevan physically, and thus also to Ankara" (Kajaznuni 1924, 1). Considering the Georgian government's positive stance towards Turkey and the easily eliminated resistance to Turkish hegemony in the region from Armenians (and probably from some Georgians), the only obstacle on the Turkish path to incorporating Transcaucasia was Russia. Thus, separating Transcaucasia from Russia would inevitably lead to the region's subjugation to the Turkish imperial hegemony: "In the past, we have seen a Russian Transcaucasia; in the future, we may see a Turkish Transcaucasia" (Kajaznuni 1924).

Kajaznuni does not see a fundamental rupture of Kemalist Turkey from the Ottoman Empire. On the contrary, the Republic of Turkey was seen as continuing the essence of the imperialist policies of its Ottoman predecessors. Such force "cannot be an ally, but simply a dominating force, in its most harsh and primitive sense" (Kajaznuni 1924 1). Taking the internal relationships of the governments with their minorities as a critical factor underpinning the psychology of alliance, the inability of Ankara to recognize the rights and aspirations of the Kurdish people was seen by Kajaznuni (1924, 1) as an essential indicator of the state's inability to respect the alliance and an indicator of its dominating power:

Turkey has thus far not shown any such intention, neither in practice nor in words. We have not heard, for instance, of the governors in Ankara planning, or intending to plan, for any granting of rights to Kurdistan (let alone allying with it). We see the opposite--they are making every effort to centralize power and nationalize the state, as soon as possible and as completely as possible. A state that, in contrast to the glaring reality, declares that there are no "minorities" within its borders and so cannot grant them "rights" is a state that is psychologically not prepared to make alliances.

Contrasting the national-militarist Kemalist Turkey to Bolshevik Russia, Kajaznuni refers to the distinctive character of the *system of alliances* that constituted part of the Bolshevik political system and was already put into practice. Considering Turkey's existential threat to Armenia, the fall of the Bolshevik government would also signal the end of the Armenian state. Kajaznuni concludes that with no allies in the West and being under the fatal threat of Turkish dominance, Armenia has no other political option but to ally with Russia.

In 1923, Kajaznuni left the ARF and appealed to the Soviet government, allowing him to return from exile to Armenia. In Yerevan, he continued to work as an architect, gave lectures at Yerevan State University, and helped Alexander Tamanyan draw up Yerevan's plan (Stepanyan 2018). Along with many prominent Armenian intellectuals and public figures, during the Stalinist repression, he was accused of treason against the Soviet state and being a covert Dashnak member. He was arrested in 1937 and died in prison in 1939.

Despite being one of the founding fathers of the First Republic of Armenia, the figure of Hovhannes Kajaznuni remains neglected today. Kajaznuni's criticism of the ARF programme, his split with the party, and appeal to the Soviet government have contributed to the negative remembrance among ARF-affiliated circles. Kajaznuni's intellectual legacy remains neglected in the Republic of Armenia as well, and the attendance of only a few Armenians at the 150th anniversary of Kajaznuni's birth in 2018 is a sad testimony to this fact (Stepanyan 2018).

In his classical work *The Historian's Craft*, Marc Bloch (1977) sees history not just as a sequence of grand epochs and significant dates but as the action and creation of ordinary men and women that makes them *historically conditioned beings* in the sense of how they learn and pass on the stories and narratives they tell about themselves (Little 2020). The Blochian approach to history opens up an innovative way of rethinking the connection between the present and the past in the life of every community. The historical facts are important, but the narration and (mis)interpretation of these facts by subsequent generations are no less important. As an intellectual and a public figure, Kajaznuni's writings provide deep insight into the most critical challenges faced by Armenian statehood and the nation. Many of these challenges remain relevant today.

## Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

This article looked at Armenian-Azerbaijani relations from the angle of the decolonial approach. The legacy of colonization, despite the collapse of empires, remains embedded in the knowledge, discourse, and mentality of formerly colonized countries; the South Caucasus is not an exclusion. The inability of the political leadership of both Azerbaijan and Armenia to agree with each other, instead assuming that reliance on powerful allies will eliminate the threats to national sovereignty brings to mind parallels between the situation of Armenia and Azerbaijan at the beginning of the twentieth century and today.

Despite living a century ago, the questions raised by Rasulzadeh and Kajaznuni, and the discussions led by the various political forces in Azerbaijan and Armenia regarding the political orientation each country should adopt, are still relevant today. At the same time, while Rasulzadeh was advocating for the anti-Russian imperial struggle and Kajaznuni was criticizing the Ottoman and Russian/Bolshevik imperial powers, both were nationalist leaders whose anti-imperial criticism failed to debunk the Western, mainly British, French, and German imperialism, colonialism, racism, inequalities, and exploitation of the colonized peoples. For many Transcaucasian thinkers of that time, including Kajaznuni and Rasulzadeh, the imperial powers identified as the West were seen through the civilizing mission leading the less developed nations toward progress. While the Russian and Ottoman Empires were enacting the material colonization of the region—which involved economic, political, and/or cultural forms of domination over the colonized—the Western European powers were successful in the reproduction of discursive domination. Even today, many postcolonial scholars argue for the need to critically reread the Eurocentric modernization project that still retains its universal position. This rereading will also require a critical engagement with the terminology that today's postcolonial social sciences use to identify the various geographies as West and non-West, which is deeply problematic due to the division of vast geographies between civilizational lines, thus turning them into binary oppositions that are irreducible (Parashar 2016).<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Cynthia Weber makes a similar criticism of Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations", see, Weber 2010, 171.

The collapse of state socialism left Armenia and Azerbaijan with two opposite choices—either to align with the West, which would mean moving farther from the Russian sphere of influence and closer to the fantasy of catching up with the ‘civilized world,’ or adopt semi or full alignment with Russia, thus resubmitting to a former imperial power. Moreover, imperial nostalgia has become a part of state discourse with the rise of the global right-wing and populism across the world in general, and in the two regional powers, Russia and Turkey, particularly. As Çapan and Zarakol (2017) argue, anti- and post-colonial critiques are weaponized by authoritarian regimes. As a case study, the authors analyze the Justice and Development Party (the AKP) government’s employment of postcolonial concepts to justify its policies. Alexander Dugin offers another example of how the postcolonial critique, in his case, the one against the West, is instrumentalized on behalf of Russian neo-imperialism (Ivakhiv 2022).

The first and second Nagorno-Karabakh wars left Armenian and Azerbaijani societies in a severe condition, with thousands dead and displaced as well as deeply traumatized generations. The closed borders and isolation from each other since the first war have further alienated societies and paved the way for the radicalization of narratives of the past and stripped away any prospect of cooperation and dialogue.

For the sake of the long-term stability and development in the region, we would like to make the following recommendations to the communities of people, scholars, activists, policy-makers, and peacebuilders:

- To engage in a decolonial dialogue by establishing ties, joining networks, or attending conferences and other significant events of the Global South community;
- To decolonize knowledge and practices of conflict resolution by focusing on local knowledge and grassroots peacebuilding;
- To organize workshops, conferences, and general public discussions among the communities of the South Caucasus to problematize the continuation of the Western colonial logic in global peacebuilding and debunk the legacies of Russian and Soviet colonialism (such as the construction of Caucasian identity, the role of Muslim women in society and private life, origins of the

conflicts and current relations with neighboring states, etc.) in the post-Soviet space;

- To stimulate post-(de)colonial discussions in Armenia and Azerbaijan that would go beyond the academic scholarship over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to tackle the hostile narratives;

While the primary focus is peoples of the South Caucasus, we believe it is necessary to enlarge the spaces for a bottom-up, and not state-initiated, decolonial dialogue and engage scholars and activists from Russia and the post-Soviet subalterns while looking for ways to address all forms of colonial oppression, both external and domestic, to transform their societies together. Adrian Ivakhiv (2022, 1) reminds us that “decoloniality is by definition not just an anti-imperialism, but an anti-*all*-imperialisms. That makes every place in the world an ‘obligatory passage point’ for decolonialism.”

## Bibliography

- Ambartsumyan, K. 2017. “Русская Революция И Образование Республики Армения На Кавказе (1917–1918 гг.) А. И. Хатисова” [A.I. Khatisov: The Russian Revolution and the Formation of the Republic of Armenia in the Caucasus (1917–1918)]. *Dialogue with Time* No: 60: 365-383.
- Ani Armenian Research Center. 2020. “Hovhannes Kajaznuni’s First Speech in the Armenian Parliament: 1918.” August 3, 2020. Accessed May 15, 2022. <http://www.aniarc.am/2020/08/03/hovhannes-kajaznunis-first-speech-in-the-armenian-parliament-august-3-1918/>.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2022. “Թուրքիան է միակ պետությունը, որի հետ Հայաստանը պիտի խոսի” [Turkey Is the Only Country with Which Armenia Should Talk]. March 10, 2022. Accessed June 2, 2022. <http://www.aniarc.am/2022/03/10/tyria-is-the-only-state-armenia-will-speak-to-3102022/>.
- Bloch, March. 1977. *The Historian’s Craft: Reflections on the Nature and Uses of History and the Techniques and Methods of Those Who Write It*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.



- Brisku, Adrian., and Timothy K. Blauvelt. 2020. "Who Wanted the TDFR? The Making and the Breaking of the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic." *Caucasus Survey* 8, no. 1: 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23761199.2020.1712897>.
- Çapan, Zeynep Gülşah, and Ayşe Zarakol. 2017. "Postcolonial colonialism? The case of Turkey". In *Against International Relations Norms*, edited by Charlotte Epstein, 193-210. London-New York: Routledge.
- Deringil, Selim. 2003. "'They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery': The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 2: 311-42.
- Dikovitskaya, Margaret. 2002. "Does Russia Qualify for Postcolonial Discourse?: A Response to Ekaterina Dyogot's Article." *Ab Imperio* 2002 2: 551-557. <https://doi.org/10.1353/imp.2002.0020>.
- Etkind, Alexander. 2011. *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Goltz, Thomas. 2015. *Azerbaijan Diary: A Rogue Reporter's Adventures in an Oil-Rich, War-Torn, Post-Soviet Republic*. London-New York: Routledge.
- Grosfoguel, Ramón. 2007. "The Epistemic Decolonial Turn: Beyond Political-Economy Paradigms." *Cultural Studies* 21,no. 2-3: 211-223. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162514>.
- Gunko, Maria. 2022. "'Russian Imperial Gaze': Reflections from Armenia since the Start of the Russia-Ukraine Military Conflict." *Political Geography*, [In press]. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2022.102739>
- Hakobyan, Tatul. 2019. *Armenians and Turks: From War to Cold War and Diplomacy*. 2nd ed. Yerevan: Lusakn.
- Hovhannisian, Richard G. 1969. *Armenia on the Road to Independence, 1918*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1971. *The Republic of Armenia: The First Year, Vol. I: 1918-1919..* Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ivakhiv, Adrian. 2022. "Decolonialism and the Invasion of Ukraine". *e-flux Notes*. March 23, 2022. Accessed November 10, 2022. <https://www.e-flux.com/notes/457576/decolonialism-and-the-invasion-of-ukraine/>

- Kajznuni, Hovhannes. 1922. "What Path Should We Take?" ARF's *Jakatamart daily*. Published by Ani Armenian Research Center. February 9, 2021. Accessed May 1, 2022. <http://www.aniarc.am/2021/02/09/what-path-should-we-take-by-hovhannes-kajznuni/>.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1923. *The Armenian Revolutionary Party Dashnaktsutyun Has Nothing To Do Anymore*. Bucharest. Reprinted by Ani Armenian Research Center. Yerevan.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1923-1924. *Uqq li Հայրենիք [Nation and Homeland]*. Published by Ani Armenian Research Center, 2016.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1924. "Open letter to Z: Turkey or Russia," Published by Ani Armenian Research Center. May 8, 2021. Accessed May 1, 2022. <http://www.aniarc.am/2021/05/08/open-letter-to-z-turkey-or-russia/>.
- Kassymbekova, Batakoz, and Eric Mara, E. 2022. "Time to Question Russia's Imperial Innocence." *PONARS Eurasia*. April 27, 2022. Accessed November 10, 2022. <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/time-to-question-russias-imperial-innocence/>.
- Kazemzadeh, Firuz. 1951. *The Struggle for Transcaucasia (1917-1921)*. New York: Philosophical Library.
- Koru, Selim. 2018. "How Nietzsche Explains Turkey." June 21, 2018. Accessed April 12, 2022. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/06/turkey-erdogan-election-kurds/563240/>.
- Libaridian, Jirair. 2018. "The 'Garbage Bin' Approach to History and Its Discontents." *Heinrich Böll Stiftung Tbilisi South Caucasus*. May 28, 2018. Accessed April 10, 2022. <https://ge.boell.org/en/2018/05/28/garbage-bin-approach-history-and-its-discontents>.
- Little, Daniel. 2020. "Philosophy of History." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. November 24, 2020. Accessed June 13, 2022. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/history>.
- Mamoulia, Georges. 2021. "Azerbaijan and the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic: Historical Reality and Possibility."

- In *The Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic of 1918: Federal Aspirations, Geopolitics and National Projects*, edited by Adrian Brisku, Timothy K. Blauvelt, London-New York: Routledge. 21-44.
- Morozov, Viatcheslav. 2015. *Russia's Postcolonial Identity: A Subaltern Empire in a Eurocentric World*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Morrison, Alexander. 2012. "Metropole, Colony, and Imperial Citizenship in the Russian Empire." *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 13, no. 2: 327-364.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2022. "After The War: Central Asia Without Russia." *Österreichische Akademie Der Wissenschaften Study Of Islam In Central Eurasia*. October 24, 2022. Accessed November 12, 2022. [https://www.oeaw.ac.at/sice/sice-blog/after-the-war-central-asia-without-russia#\\_edn25](https://www.oeaw.ac.at/sice/sice-blog/after-the-war-central-asia-without-russia#_edn25).
- Nurulla-Khodzhaeva, Nargis T. 2016. "Деколонизальность Исторических Знаний и Межкультурный «Дахлез» В Центральной Азии" [Decoloniality of Knowledge and Intercultural 'Dahlez.']. *MGIMO Review of International Relations* 4, no. 49: 16-25. <https://doi.org/10.24833/2071-8160-2016-4-49-16-25>.
- Oskanian, Kevork K. 2018. "A Very Ambiguous Empire: Russia's Hybrid Exceptionalism." *Europe-Asia Studies* 70, no. 1: 26-52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2017.1412398>.
- Panossian, Razmik. 2006. *The Armenians: From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars*. London: C. Hurst & Co.
- Parashar, Swati. 2016. "Feminism and Postcolonialism: (En)gendering Encounters." *Postcolonial Studies* 19, no. 4, 371-377.
- Petrosyan, G. n.d. *Сравнительный анализ отношений между Республикой Армения и антибольшевистским правительством южной России* [Comparative analysis of relations between the Republic of Armenia and the anti-Bolshevik government of southern Russia]. Yerevan State University.
- Rasulzadeh, Mahammad A. 2011. "Пантуранизм и проблема Кавказа" [Panturanism and Problem of the Caucasus]. Presented at the Presentation for Caucasian, Ukrainian and Turkustani emigre, Paris. *Turan Today*. March 6, 2011. Accessed November 10, 2022.

<https://www.turantoday.com/2011/03/rasulzadeh-panturanizm-kaukas.html>

\_\_\_\_\_. 2014a. Mərzimizin Çarəsi [Remedy of disease]. In *Məhəmməd Əmin Rəsulzadə əsərləri. I cild. 1903-1906. [Vol. I. Compilation of Mahammad Amin Rasulzadeh's works: 1903-1906]*. Baku.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2014b. "İki Nüktə" [Two Subtle Messages]. *Məhəmməd Əmin Rəsulzadə əsərləri. I cild. 1903-1906. [Vol. I. Compilation of Mahammad Amin Rasulzadeh's works: 1903-1906]*. Baku.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2015. "Əsrimizin Siyavuşu." [Siyavush of Our Century]. *Azadlıq Rədiosu*. January 31, 2015. Accessed November 10, 2022. <https://www.azadliq.org/a/26823199.html>

\_\_\_\_\_. 2018. "Sıra Şərqiindir." [It Is the East's Turn] *525-ci qəzet* October 8, 2018. Accessed 10 May 2022. <https://525.az/news/107584-resulzadenin-muhaziresi-qerbde-ve-serqde-milli-mesele>.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2022. "Qafqaz Birliyi" [Caucasus Unity.] *Baku Research Institute*. March 24, 2022. Accessed June 15, 2022. <https://bakuresearchinstitute.org/qafqaz-birliyi-2/>

Samadov, Bahruz. 2020. "Azerbaijan's Peace Activists Face Harassment, and a Reckoning." *Eurasia.Net*. November 20, 2020. Accessed October 27, 2022. <https://eurasianet.org/perspectives-azerbaijans-peace-activists-face-harassment-and-a-reckoning>.

Stepanyan, Suren. 2018. "Hovhannes Kajaznuni and Aram Manukyan: Armenia's Forgotten Founding Fathers – Chai Khana." *Ani Armenian Research Center*. April 2, 2018. Accessed June 11, 2022. <http://www.aniaarc.am/2018/04/02/hovhannes-kajaznuni-and-aram-manukyan-armenias-forgotten-founding-fathers-chai-khana/>.

Suny, Ronald G. 2011. *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press.

Tlostanova, Madina. 2012. "Postsocialist ≠ Postcolonial? On Post-Soviet Imaginary and Global Coloniality." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 48, no. 2: 130-142. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2012.658244>.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2019. "The Postcolonial Condition, the Decolonial Option, and the Post-Socialist Intervention." In *Postcolonialism Cross-Examined*, edited by Monika Albrecht, 165-178. London-New York: Routledge.

- Villalon, Leonardo A. 1998. "Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans: Race and Self-Determination in International Law." *American Political Science Review* 92, no. 4: 975-976.
- Vratsian, S. 1924. *Խարխափումներ [Kharkhapumner]*. Ani Armenian Research Center. Boston: Hayrenik Publishing House.
- Weber, Cynthia. 2010. *International Relations Theory: A Critical Introduction*. London-New York: Routledge.
- Wimmer, Andreas, and Schiller, Nina. G. 2002. "Methodological Nationalism and beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences." *Global Networks* 2, no. 4: 301-334. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-0374.00043>.
- Zolyan, Mikayel. 2021. "Between Empire and Independence: Armenia and the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic." In *The Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic of 1918 Federal Aspirations, Geopolitics and National Projects*, edited by Adrian Brisku, Timothy K. Blauvelt, 9-20. London-New York: Routledge.