BAKU: VIOLENCE, IDENTITY, AND OIL, 1905-1927

A Dissertation
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in History

By

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Washington, DC
November 14, 2017
ABSTRACT

*Baku: Violence, Identity, and Oil, 1905-1927* is an exploration of the economic, social, and political metamorphosis of Baku, Azerbaijan, from 1905 to 1927, from a growing boomtown to a city divided by ethnic and political violence to a reconfigured existence as a critical oil production center of the Soviet Union. It will address how Baku’s industry, crude oil drilling, and petrochemical refinement had profound social, political, and economic effects on the city—not only on the urban physical environment of the city itself but also on the demographics and livelihood of its population. The core purpose of this work is to connect outbreaks of violence and other events affecting Baku across this period, especially during the Russian Civil War, to the splintering of political identity and the contemporaneous shift in material circumstance that occurred in the city across the first two decades of the twentieth century. Furthermore, the thesis will address how this outcome was additionally complicated by geopolitical tensions caused by the First World War and its aftermath.
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Introduction: Baku at a Turning Point

*Baku: Violence, Identity, and Oil, 1905-1927* is an exploration of the economic, social, and political metamorphosis of Baku, Azerbaijan, from 1905 to 1927, from a growing boomtown to a city divided by ethnic and political violence to a reconfigured existence as a critical oil production center of the Soviet Union. It will address how Baku’s industry, crude oil drilling, and petrochemical refinement had profound social, political, and economic effects on the city—not only on the urban physical environment of the city itself but also on the demographics and livelihood of its population. The core purpose of this work is to connect outbreaks of violence and other events affecting Baku across this period, especially during the Russian Civil War, to the splintering of political identity and the contemporaneous shift in material circumstance that occurred in the city across the first two decades of the twentieth century. Furthermore, the thesis will address how this outcome was additionally complicated by geopolitical interference caused by the First World War and its aftermath.

Initially, this analysis will focus on the origins of the industry, the makeup of its workforce, and how the industrialization of oil secured Baku as a place of immense importance in the global economic order of the period. The purpose of this investigation is to explore a causative effect between the industrial and geopolitical dynamics surrounding the city and the political and ethnic violence that ravaged it. Moreover, this work will analyze the ramifications of this economic process on the formation of ethnic and political identity in the city and its

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1 The preferred terminology in this work, especially during the Tsarist period, is *ethnicity* rather than *nationality*. It is the belief of the author that the terminology surrounding national identity is not as useful for exploring how identity functioned independently from the concept of the nation-state, especially before the foundation of the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic and the Azerbaijani SSR. Likewise, the functional use of religious identity is complicated by the growth of ethnically-inspired politics in Baku, especially after 1900.
surrounding regions and correlate these issues with the rise of violence that increased across the first two decades of the twentieth century until the cataclysm of the Russian Civil War. Finally, this dissertation will focus on the impact of Sovietization and pacification and their legacy on the already traumatized social landscape of both Baku and Azerbaijan as a whole.

In order to accomplish this task, this study will examine elements of social, economic, and political history across the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in its analysis of the factors influencing change in Baku. These elements continually interacted with the process of industrial production and political economy that defined the place and period. In addition, a goal of this work is to weave a sense of humanity into a history that could easily get bogged down as an abstract survey of its industry or an abstract analysis of the strategic geopolitical position of the city.

Chapter One, “Origins of a City: Oil and the Creation of Modern Baku – 1870-1905,” primarily centers on the origins of Baku as a modern urban environment, with an emphasis on the industrialization and labor relations of the city from 1870 onward. This chapter’s purpose is to provide an overview of the impact that industrial development had on forming the physical and social structures of the city, in particular the make-up of the workforce and the working conditions it endured. It addresses how this development further complicated relations between communities and led to an increasing amount of ethnic and political tension in the city.

Chapter Two, “Descent and Recovery: Baku’s Oil Industry – 1906-1927,” centers on the political dynamics surrounding government intervention in the industry, particularly after 1914, and the impact Baku’s industry had on the underlying forces of petroleum production as well as international trade during this period. The focus of this chapter is to place into context not only
how critical oil was to the creation of Baku as an industrial environment, but also how Baku itself became a lynchpin for domestic industrial development for the Russian Empire and its successor governments as well as an important supply source for an emerging international energy market.

The third chapter, “The Geopolitical Cauldron: Baku in an International Context – 1914-1923,” will focus on how the aforementioned events of Baku from 1914 to 1923 influenced the geopolitical rivalry of the period. This chapter will examine the petrochemical industry’s rise and fall, and how the crises that grew around it were inseparable from broader diplomacy and military adventurism by multiple foreign powers around the Caucasus and the Middle East during this period. In particular, it will address the impact the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish national movement, the British Empire, and nascent Soviet Russia had on the city during their struggles for dominance of it.

Chapter Four, “Identity and Industry: Identity Formation in Late Tsarist to Soviet Baku – 1905-1922,” investigates the connection between ethnic and political identity in Baku. It will explore how the social environment of the city was irrevocably shattered by the February and October revolutions and the ultimate effect that growing friction among various political factions in Baku, many based along ethnic lines, had on the security and stability of the city. The goal of this chapter is to fully address the consequences of Baku’s industrial development on its political environment and the acute and eventually irreparable social fissures that formed before and during the Russian Civil War.

The fifth chapter, “The Pacification and Sovietization of Baku – 1920-1938,” will address the impact of Sovietization from the annexation of Azerbaijan onwards and its considerable
effect on transforming the social and economic nature of the city. This chapter’s thematic purpose is to investigate how the Soviets tried to reform the battered and bitterly divided city back into a productive center for oil production and their successes and failures in that process. This chapter will address the social processes of Sovietization, including education and the development of a robust internal security system in Azerbaijan, with the significant presence of the Vserossiiskaya Chrezvychainaia Komissiia [All-Russian Extraordinary Committee] (Cheka) and the NKVD, as well as the mass internment of suspected political enemies in order to quash any potential future uprisings.

1. Synopsis

Baku’s political environment during the turn of the twentieth century was shaped by the often tense relationships between major ethnic and ideological groups. These fraught political relationships can most accurately be seen as formed from a series of sedimentary layers of conjoining forces of ethnic, religious, and class identity that would not only create the communities that formed the bedrock of modern Baku but almost destroyed them when brought into direct conflict with each other. These layers of identity—as well as economic pressures, material forces, and geopolitical impulses—would cause inescapable friction that would thrust through the structure of Baku’s society and help spark the continued unrest that shook the city during much of the early twentieth century.

The first portion of this dissertation will illustrate how the industrial environment of modern Baku came into being and how a confluence of capital investment, ecological damage, and inter-ethnic tension created a fertile ground for much of the internal turmoil that the city would face during the twin Russian Revolutions and Russian Civil War. This chaos would
present a profound challenge to the Soviets when they finally took the city in 1920. The fate of a city cannot be predicted based solely on the material circumstances it faced and it is impossible to identify the complete structural underpinnings for inter-ethnic or political violence in Baku. By looking at the origins of its oil industry and its ecological and economic externalities, however, we can develop at least a better understanding of how these forces gathered together. These factors would help frame later events during the Russian Civil War and its aftermath when ethnic and political violence would explode inside the city and intense geopolitical pressure would be focused from outside of it.

The multi-ethnic nature of modern Baku was formed by the initial impetus of the oil industry itself, which not only brought workers into the city from across the Russian Empire and the Middle East but pitted them against each other in fierce competition for wages and housing. This new cosmopolitan city and the society that would develop as a result of this industry were built on top of the social structures of an ancient Persian city that had existed there for centuries.

In many ways, the new Baku would, in the end, be a distinctly separate city. While the ancient city would continue to physically exist, it would permanently sit in the shadow of the new Baku that rapidly formed around it. Ultimately, ancient Baku would become a relic of a very different past. Despite this shift, the historical memory of what Baku was before the discovery of oil would remain; it would be reflected by the physical structure of the city itself and by the reactions of the original Azerbaijani population that lived there and would remain there throughout the industrial period.

Over time, as both external factors (such as geopolitical maneuverings by rival powers during the Russian Civil War) and internal ones (such as inter-ethnic rifts from 1905 onward)
shifted the dynamics of political power in the city, the population would be caught in a tightening political struggle. During the Russian Civil War, Baku and the political understructure that supported Baku’s society would buckle and then rupture as those pressures could no longer be contained. In order to fully understand this process, one must know how the foundation of Baku—more specifically, how its oil industry—was constructed in the first place, and how this formation helped create the circumstances for its later decline and near dismantlement during the Russian Revolution and Russian Civil War.

As the industrial revolution spread, its demand for petroleum products would only increase alongside Baku’s most valuable petroleum-based output prior to the Russian Civil War: fuel oil and kerosene. This foreign demand, alongside burgeoning demand from the Russian Empire itself, would eventually shape the face of the city and help turn it from a small port city on the shores of the Caspian Sea into the industrial powerhouse of Transcaucasia. Baku’s progression to becoming a boomtown would be, in turn, dually shaped by the dynamic stressors that existed within and outside of it; these stressors exemplified the dramatic expansion of its local industry and its increasingly diverse working population as well as the shifting geopolitical currents surrounding the city.

The development of Baku’s oil industry also meant not only creating the infrastructure needed to produce that oil but harnessing the labor force needed to utilize it. The struggle in supplying the basic needs of that work force, especially food and housing, would guide the

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political and social industry of Baku during the early twentieth century. Despite the complexity of the industry, the social and political mechanics surrounding commodity production as a whole are not necessarily specific only to oil production itself but also to the production of other essential resources. Commodity production by its very nature can have dramatic consequences for its populations by bringing together extremely large working populations in short periods of time—along with the political and social aftermath that comes with any unpredictable and sudden shift in population. If one looks at other parts of the Russian Empire during the same period, he or she will find similar class (if not ethnic and religious) animosity in commodity-producing regions, as Hiroaki Kiromiya has shown in the coal-producing Donbass. In Baku, there was an additional confluence of geopolitical and ethnic friction alongside the mechanics of industrial production that would lead to explosive results during the revolutionary period and the Russian Civil War.

The fragility of late Imperial Russia and foreign competition would rapidly diminish Baku’s relative position as a production source for crude oil. Transcaucasia, along with the rest of the former Russian Empire, became embroiled in revolution and war, and production in Baku would come under increasing pressure from its local political environment as chaos spread. During 1917 and 1918, the city would take on an increasingly more complex existence as a political, economic, and social battleground that would culminate in pogroms in March and September of 1918. This period provides a valuable point of discussion not only of Baku’s

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5 RGASPI - Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii [Russian State Archive of Social-Political History], f. 70, op. 3, d. 4, l. 138-157. The degree of this violence is corroborated by Soviet evidence of the atrocities committed by Ottoman-Azerbaijani forces during the “September Days” of 1918.
relative economic place in the Russian economy and the larger international market for crude and its byproducts, but also the importance of how those industrial and economic processes would be tied to the politics and physical conditions of the city and region around it. The substantive decline in oil production was connected with a growing lack of private investment and was increasingly affected by mounting political division and a period of near continuous warfare, both within and outside the city.

Baku during this period can be viewed in many ways as directly comparable to other former and current oil boomtowns of the developing world. The city and its history can provide an historical context for the eventual long-term results of similar present-day ethnic, economic, and political struggles over commodities drilled, produced, or harvested in and around densely populated areas, such as the Niger Delta or the present-day northern Persian Gulf, especially the eastern coast of Saudi Arabia and Northern Bahrain. In particular, locations that have seen the existence—if not expansion—of the oil industry experience further inter-ethnic and religious violence and the creation of layers of a workforce split by ethnic and religious identity. Baku’s particular trajectory during the early twentieth century has direct parallels in our modern world, especially in the present-day Middle East and Africa. Not only did communities in this region economically depend on the oil industry, but at the same time, like Baku, they experienced

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6 As Joseph A. Pratt, Martin Melosi, and Kathleen Brosnan (eds.) show in Energy Capitals: Local Impact, Global Influence (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014), very similar boomtowns have existed in Houston and Tampico.


8 As of 2017, a significant decline in oil prices has promoted inter-ethnic violence across Nigeria.
significant degrees of ethnic division and conflict that could be correlated back to those industries.\(^9\)

Therefore, while Baku was known for the potential economic strength of the crude that was located beneath it, the existence of the commodity itself cannot be viewed in isolation but as part of a broader economic process of extraction. In the case of Baku, rents from oil fields allowed for the easy extraction of revenue for their owners. In contrast, the rest of Azerbaijan—if not much of the rest of eastern Transcaucasia—could offer only scant options for investment with its arid climate and lack of modern infrastructure. Largely due to this, significant investment in oil production helped limit regional development in Azerbaijan to Baku. Baku’s oil industry would not only prioritize regional development, including rail infrastructure, in and around Baku but would also over-consolidate capital in and around the city.\(^10\) While other oil development would occur in the North Caucasus, such as in Grozny, by the early 1920s, Grozny still only produced a tenth of the oil that would come from Baku.\(^11\)

Despite the fact that land ownerships were far higher in Baku, Baku itself was far more demographically diverse than the rest of the region. Baku hosted a large, mostly Slavic, European population alongside its Armenian and Azerbaijani population, a level of diversity that

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\(^9\) As Robert Vitalis shows in *America’s Kingdom* (pp.19-20), the oil industry in Saudi Arabia also experienced inter-racial violence when the Jim Crow system was applied to African-American workers employed by Aramco.


\(^11\) RGAE – Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki [Russian State Archive of the Economy], f. 6764, op.1, d. 94, l.106, 112. Gosplan data shows that, during the early 1920s, fields around Grozny produced a tenth of the oil as Baku.
could only be found elsewhere in the Transcaucasia in Tbilisi.\textsuperscript{12} Baku was a distinct industrial island in the Eastern Caucasus, and while its twin life-lines (its railway to the north and its portage on the Caspian) would help diversify its workforce, it would also guide its political dynamics by providing a ready connection to the rest of Russia.

Baku’s oil and its petrochemical industry drew state and foreign investment to its fields across the turbulence of the period that included nearly continuous war. This would fundamentally change the manner of how those governments would attempt to administer the city and its industries. Each of the three major governments (The Russian Empire, the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan [ADR], and the Soviet Union) that controlled Baku from 1900 to the early 1920s used differing strategies of subsidization, price controls, cooperative investment, and nationalization with the hope of maximizing the output of petroleum resources during a chaotic and at times increasingly desperate situation. Amid these strategies, there were sharp philosophical divisions between the utility of subsidization and infrastructure investment as a strategy to help foster further private capital investment versus the direct application of state directives, such as the use of price controls and nationalization. Nevertheless, all of these strategies were rooted in the economic necessities of the state, and the crucible of the First World War and the Russian Civil War opened the door for innovation and compromise as each government attempted to maximize its use of Baku’s resources.\textsuperscript{13}


The reasoning of each state varied depending on the immediate circumstances it faced. Under the Tsar, the state mildly subsidized private investment in oil production as a necessity for industrialization—and to support an increasingly export-focused economy. The development of the oil industry in Azerbaijan would dovetail with other efforts to promote industrialization across the empire. In comparison, the ADR, after it took power in 1918, planned on mass nationalization in order to centralize production under the fragile new state, but it eventually chose to move away from nationalization in order to promote continued unfettered operation of the Nobel Brothers and other oil conglomerates operating in Azerbaijan. The Soviets, on the other hand, had broader motives that extended beyond the oil and petrochemical industry itself, which included striving for total social as well as economic change alongside total nationalization. As time went on, the initial rigidity of many Soviet approaches to economic policy was steadily softened by the pragmatic considerations of foreign cooperation and trade, and the Soviets were progressively forced to acknowledge practical concerns across the period of the New Economic Policy (NEP).

Beyond the considerations of ideological practice, the economic circumstances surrounding the petroleum industry of Baku throughout this period is also a useful way to track the attitudes of all three governments’ motivations and practices regarding commodity extraction. Oil and its derivatives were a single commodity of value, a commodity that faced a

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15 ARDA – Azərbaycanın Respublikası Dövlət arxivi [Azerbaijani Republic State Archive], f. 24, op. 1, d. 110, l. 140, 170,184. This included attempts by the ADR at extracting more revenue from the oil industry, including Branobel, from October to December 1918.

competitive marketplace from its infancy. However, it is this infancy that provides a useful point of historical relevance and discussion as to the pertinent connections between economic activity and a variety of attitudes of government towards subsidization and cooperation with private enterprises versus nationalization.

Furthermore, the politics of the urban environment of Baku was in essence inseparable from its oil fields and catalytic factories that refined and converted Baku’s crude into a variety of machine oils and petrochemicals, and the momentum caused by their development and its externalities would carry over far beyond their daily operations into the lives of the people of the city. Baku, like comparable present-day communities reliant on commodity production, would simply not exist without the industrial needs that made the city’s creation necessary in the first place. That necessity would be reflected in much of the ongoing politics of the locality, and its connection to these economic underpinnings defined Baku as an urban space. In this sense, we can look at industrialization in Baku as a critical example of a process during which revolutionary politics, urban instability, and government intervention were directly tied to a single dominating transformative industry.

Therefore, while the attitudes and practices of the Russian Imperial government, the ADR, and the Soviets had a tremendous effect on both the industrial development of the city and,


18 This included the worker population of the “Black City,” which lived mostly in dormitory housing or low quality apartments closer to the fields east of Baku, and the “White City” of central Baku, which was made up of superior, masonry-constructed dwellings.

19 McKay, “Baku Oil and Transcaucasian Pipelines,” 604-608. In the context of Baku, its urban space is defined by the central city, workers’ housing, and oil fields in immediate proximity to both population centers.
indirectly, on the formation of the political identity of multiple ethnicities inside the city, these competing governmental forces also had a direct social, political, and economic impact on the city and its population through the direct application of military force in order to seize control of it. Moreover, the interior struggle for Baku, which included multiple ethnic and political factions that desired control of the city, cannot be separated from the exterior geopolitical struggle that almost consumed it; ultimately, both campaigns must be connected together. In a sense, the purpose of this analysis is to show that the industrial development and the internal conflicts happening in Azerbaijan also intersected with the geopolitical contests of the region, and often they helped guide each other.²⁰

It is very clear that the economic process of industrialization had unavoidable geopolitical implications for the city as well as its population. The economic necessities of oil production created a focal point for both internal political tension in the city and military adventurism from outside of it. This process, in turn, would frame both the policy of regional powers but also later Soviet internal attitudes toward Baku. For these governments, Baku would become a prize that had to be protected despite the human and physical costs involved. In this sense, the realpolitik machinations of various powers in the region that lapped against Baku across the period are connected to the twin legacies of the First World War and the Russian Civil War, which left both Azerbaijan and Baku in a relative power vacuum inside Transcaucasia.²¹ These legacies would have considerable effect on both Soviet attitudes toward Baku, especially by the Central Committee of the Communist Party, and its value in long-term Soviet planning after 1920. In

²⁰ In the context of this dissertation, the emphasis must be on the broader strategy of powers outside Transcaucasia during the First World War and the Russian Civil War.

addition, this history would frame how Western countries saw Baku: a potential vulnerability that was a part of any long-term strategy for undermining the Soviet economy well into the Cold War.\textsuperscript{22}

In the context of Russian, Soviet, and British archival materials, the acute geopolitical struggle around Baku and the rest of Transcaucasia would be inexorably connected with greater conflicts affecting the region during the period of the First World War and the Russian Civil War. While the Caucasian Front itself was just one of numerous strategic fronts in both wars, Baku could be considered one of several primary objectives for any army entering the region. The central regional rivalry on the Eastern Front during the initial period of the First World War began as an Ottoman versus Russian contest from 1914 to 1917 over Transcaucasia. This contest was rooted in the alliance system that brought forth the First World War but was also a continuation of the longer-term struggles between Muscovy and Russia versus the Ottoman Empire, conflicts that had stretched from the sixteenth century across the frontier of the two states. Moreover, the second period of strife, from 1918 to 1919, can be seen as part of a larger war over Transcaucasia between the Ottoman and British Empires, precipitated by the collapse of the Russian Empire, a conflict marked by growing infighting between political and ethnic factions, such as the Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, Dashnaks, and the Azerbaijani national movement. These movements were often directly connected to larger powers and at other times completely independent agents in a series of escalating wars during this period. The third phase of this period of warfare, from 1919 to 1920, can be seen as an extension of the Russian Civil War and the attempted consolidation of the former Russian Empire by an emergent Soviet Union (USSR).

The aftermath of these conflicts was not guided by open warfare, as illustrated by the subtle consolidation of local economic and trade structure by the Soviets after the Russian Civil War. This phase would involve careful negotiation by the Soviets, not only with the Turkish National Movement but also Western governments now interested in increased trade with the consolidated Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (RSFSR) and its attached republics, such as the Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (TSFSR). Despite the broader significance of events in Transcaucasia and their connection with the regional wars of the period, local conflicts occurring in Transcaucasia at the same time would still be uniquely Caucasian, for its reversals of fortune would be born of local history and conflict. As much as there existed a regional struggle for control and reconfiguration of the city inside of it, there also existed an exterior struggle by various foreign powers hoping to seize control of Baku for strategic reasons as well as controlling territory in Transcaucasia in order to utilize the resources under it.

The very nature of the strategic position of Transcaucasia during the war and its aftermath had a dramatic influence on internal conditions in Baku, along with already decisive pre-existing state intervention in the oil industry of Baku. Besides the obvious value of Baku’s resources, the contest for Baku was more than a simple conquest of territory, and while the strategic resources of Baku were a key draw, it is quite clear that the greater strategic value Baku had in the region was also a prime objective for both the British as well as the Soviets.²³

Therefore, the geopolitical ramifications of this struggle need to be framed around the outbreak of the First World War and its aftermath. The First World War would radically shape the political map of Transcaucasia and would not only bring considerable political change to the

region; it would in many ways alter Transcauasia’s relationship with the former Russian Empire. Shortly after the First World War, after centuries of dominance by other powers and amidst the aftermath of the October Revolution, Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan would appear as independent states and then suddenly disappear at the behest of the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{24} After 1914, the geopolitical map would effectively be redrawn as empires carved new borders and new states out of their enemies. The First World War would be a catalyst that would both reshape the region and foreshadow its reconsolidation under the Soviets. As will be shown, this struggle subsequently led not only to significant social changes but also to political division devolving into factional infighting. Often this spontaneous ethnic- and politically-based warfare co-aligned with the interests of the greatest power intervening in Baku and the rest of the region. It also created incentives for the greater powers to take a bigger interest in the city.

This shift in regional politics, such as the strengthening of local, ethnically-focused movements, such as the Müsavat and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnak) parties in Baku and the rest of Transcaucasia during this period, were considerable—especially after 1914.\textsuperscript{25} From 1918 to 1920, as violence overtook the city, the impact of exterior geopolitical influence would be most broadly felt by the working people inside the city, in particular during the tragedy of the events of March and September 1918, which would be the climax of unrest


\textsuperscript{25} The Müsavat Party was a liberal Azerbaijan nationalist party founded in 1911 by Mammad Rasulzadeh. From September 1917 to April 1920, the Party was the dominant political force in the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan. The Dashnaks (or the Armenian Revolutionary Federation) was a socialist Armenian nationalist movement founded in 1890 and was a major presence in Baku from its founding until 1918. The Dashnaks were heavily influential in the Democratic Republic of Armenia from 1917 to 1920.
that had been building since 1905. In this broader milieu, there are multiple ways to frame the struggles of this period. It can be seen as a set of continuous and interrelated skirmishes; for instance, the riots, pogroms, and wars between the Armenian and Azerbaijani populations of the region culminated in leaving Transcaucasia divided and exhausted, the result of discreet rivalries between local populations as well as external influences, in particular from both the British and the Soviets. The wars of this period were not only the result of a series of interlocking conflicts involving long-standing territorial contests by imperial powers, but they would also lead to a reconfiguration of the geopolitical balance in the region that would have a deep and long-lasting effect on the populations involved in those conflicts. Tens of thousands would die, and hundreds of thousands would be forced to flee their homes as refugees.

In essence, both the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict and to a lesser extent the Georgian-Armenian conflict during the Russian Civil War were both rooted in the historical friction that was initiated by the splintering of two multi-ethnic empires, and was exacerbated by a growing globalized contest over resources. This process would both help but also frustrate moves toward self-determination as individual national movements struggled to find a place in an increasingly complex global order. The First World War was an abrupt transition from the nineteenth century

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26 GARF – Gosudarstvennyi arkhiiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii [State Archive of the Russian Federation], f. 8209, op. 1, d. 3. The extent of the property damage the city faced in September 1918, documented by the Allied Control Commission, shows that the entire city had been broadly affected across ethnic and class lines.


28 GARF, f. 3588, op. 1, d. 2, 3. After the spring of 1920, Soviet authorities assisted Armenian refugees fleeing from Shusha.
to the twentieth century, both in terms of the industrialization of warfare as well as a re-sorting of the great powers that thereafter would have, across the next century, considerable influence on the rest of the world. The First World War ended the period of large, multi-ethnic and religious imperial states and ancient regimes, and it saw (as well as began) the initial decline of traditional overseas colonial empires. At the same time, the end of the First World War helped usher in the rise of mobilization states that would be centered not on familial despotism or overseas economic hegemony but on the transformation of the population under their control into an idealized form based on a specific, mobilizing ideology, be it state socialism or an ethnically-framed national identity, such as what happened with the formation of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan.

In addition, the fall of the Ottoman and Russian Empire and their replacements by twin mobilization states, Kemalist Turkey and the Soviet Union, began a new era in the region of how nations would connect with their populations. The process of mobilizing a population would create a fundamental shift in the ideology of state building and would result in political externalities and social complications that would only be fully realized decades after their initial formation.

Due to the weight of world events pressing on the region, Baku itself was swallowed by events that were initially only tangential to its existence. The city was devastated by waves of internal and external violence, and weighed down further by the internal forces pressing from within the city and external forces from outside of it. We may be able to truly assess the weight of these internal and external pressures only by focusing on Baku’s place within the broader

29 Adeeb Khalid, “Backwardness and the Quest for Civilization: Early Soviet Central Asia in Comparative Perspective,” Slavic Review 65 (2006), 223. Khalid presents a compelling argument that mobilization states were both explicitly and implicitly different from a traditional colonial regime because political mobilization of the population created a different social dynamic between rulers and ruled.
trends that were affecting the world from 1914 to 1920. In this setting, Baku was part of a broader local and geopolitical struggle, both of which were inseparable from the industrialization that had built it into a modern industrial city.

The fate of Baku is significant to our understanding of the connection between its material and economic factors, with the broader strategic decisions made by a host of great powers and their allies across the period. For all involved, Baku was both a source of readily obtainable energy as well as a lynchpin for any broader expansion within the neighboring region. At the same time, the military struggle for the city became very much a part of its formative process, which not only created the circumstances of its post-war environment and was important in reconfirming the political, economic, and social spaces of the city, but also defined its future strategic value as well. Ultimately, the city that Baku was during that time was intractably cornered by both internal forces and the intersection of competitive foreign affairs of multiple state actors that trapped Baku in their ongoing struggle for strategic dominance of the region.

From a broader economic perspective, Baku, a city resting on the shores of the Caspian, was increasingly influenced by economic dynamics on the other side of the world. As contemporaneous statistics show, pricing (due to the fungible nature of oil) was international in nature by the nineteenth-century. By 1914, Baku’s oil industry was a part of an ever-enlarging energy market, assisted both by technological advancements (largely acquired overseas) as well as the expansion of Baku’s exports into the international market.

Beyond its geopolitical and economic ramifications, the growth of the oil industry in Baku also had a clear impact on individual and familial identity, specifically on the boundaries of

ethnic identity in the city. Ethnic identity, in the context of this thesis, is not a cultural or political marker on its own, but a self-acknowledged status that individuals and families accepted for themselves. While religious identity also existed, it would be primarily ethnic not religious identity that would become politicized. Moreover, ethnic identity would at times become an accepted marker for the bureaucracy of Tsarist Russia; at the time same time, fluidity existed between individual communities before ethnic division hardened during 1918. As Baku developed, these boundaries intersected with linguistic and political markers, but this social process would neither happen immediately nor predictably, for the formation of ethnic and political signifiers steadily outpaced the recognition of what influence they would have on the political ecosystem of the city.  

By the First World War, ethnic identity had increasingly become a firm and visible marker of an individual’s place in the daily life of the city. Ethnic identity framed how both individuals and families fit within the social, economic, and political boundaries that crisscrossed modern Baku. While ethnicity, like religion, had become a way for individual communities to reference each other and delineate the boundaries that would not only physically separate them from each other but also create invisible social borders, guiding the reactions of communities.

Arguably, a similar process may have occurred in Malësore, on the edge of present-day Montenegro, during the late Ottoman Period. Foremost, a considerable amount of geopolitical pressure on the area caused hardening of ethnic identity. See Isa Blumi, “Contesting the Edges of the Ottoman Empire: Rethinking Ethnic and Sectarian Boundaries in the Malësore,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35:2 (May, 2003): 246-247.

Religious identity obviously existed as a significant identifier in Baku and was an important element in framing communities, but political movements in Baku (in the case of the Müsavat, Himmät and Dashnak parties as well as elements of the Georgian Mensheviks) were focused primarily by ethnic identity.

Auch, “Nationalitätenprobleme in Transkaukasien,” 143-144. While Auch talks of these issues in the Caucasus in terms of nationality, this use is debatable until up to the First World War and its immediate aftermath.
toward each other, ethnicity had a distinct political element in Baku that religious identity lacked in the same capacity. For much of the first two decades of the twentieth century, ethnic identity would come to form intangible social then political boundaries that would shape much of daily life in Baku. It would become an invisible but powerful force in how politics functioned in the city and how daily life itself would be defined.

Over time, ethnic identity and political identity would overlap in the city, a development that would progressively alter the broader structure of local politics and lead to the formation of political parties, such as the Müsavat and Himmât parties, which were created along both political and ethnic lines. This connection between ethnicity and political identity would only reinforce the boundaries between communities as ethnicity became politicized. The outcome of this process would be most fully felt during the February and October Revolutions of 1917 and the Russian Civil War, when this development would lead to the formation of armed militias designed to protect the parties and the communities that backed them.

This contest over identity had a profound effect on the ethnically- and linguistically-defined intellectual spheres of Baku. This would be exemplified by the growth of newspaper markets targeted for each ethnic community, and the growth of media would only reinforce the social boundaries between each community. Ethnic identity would eventually form the bedrock of national self-determination movements by inspiring the intellectual thought that would create these movements. It is unlikely that the growth of ethnic identity was “primordial” in any functional sense, but instead it was guided (if not conceived by) the rise of intellectual life,

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economic competition between communities, and the foundation of political movements that were increasingly guided by ethnic identity.

Baku during the early twentieth century had become increasingly cosmopolitan and multi-ethnic. The ethnic groups, among them Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Slavic Europeans, and Georgians, lived alongside each other in what was an often-stressed peace, especially after the violence of February 1905. The outbreak of the First World War and its aftermath created conditions that exacerbated tensions both within the city and immediately outside of it. The economic and geopolitical conditions placed on Baku would push these parties and their backers into a direct collision course with each other as Tsarist government and then Provisional Government’s control over the city steadily weakened.  

At the core of this turbulent period was the connection between ethnic identity, party politics, and the oil industry itself. The oil industry and its demand for a flexible supply of workers was a prime reason for Baku’s rapid expansion across the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Due to the massive influx of workers from across not only the Russian Empire but also other portions of the Middle East, especially Persia, the city experienced significant (if not disruptive) shifts in its population, which in turn helped create the environment for seismic shifts in the social hierarchy of the city. This was especially true for Azerbaijanis. The development of the oil industry and modern Baku would erase the old social hierarchy of the city, and this demographic shift would contribute to the social and political friction the city would experience from 1917 to 1918.

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It is important to not overly emphasize either political identity or economic structures in any analysis of how civil society in Baku functioned during this period. The relationship between the ethnic identity of major populations of the city, local politics, and the oil industry should not be viewed as discrete pieces of a puzzle but conjoined aspects of a single mechanism that shaped and formed an individual’s identity. At same time, this mechanism was exposed to exterior economic imperatives such as global demand for oil, the rise of political philosophies such as multiple forms of leftism across the Russian Empire and Transcaucasia, and the raw machinations of geopolitics, especially the struggle between the Ottoman Empire, Russian Empire then the Soviet Union, as well as the British Empire over the city itself. In this sense, the experience of Baku’s citizenry was formed by a unique sequence of events during this period; although similar processes happened across the rest of the Russian Empire, the formation of ethnic and political identity in Baku occurred at a critical juncture of the city’s economic development and was uniquely affected by a series of political, social, and geopolitical events that all happened in the space of a generation—primarily between 1905-1920.

In addition, the study of ethnicity during the pre-Revolutionary period in Baku, especially as a form of pre-national group identity, provides a wealth of opportunity for the exploration of the connection between the development of ethnic identity on one level, especially between 1905 and 1917, and its influence on broader political movements on another level, such as the formation of the Müsavat Party, including national movements in their fight for self-determination. At the same time, rhetorically shackling the formation of ethnicity to revolutionary politics or the economic imperatives of the oil industry can be potentially problematic, since there is the risk of making essentialist assumptions about how an individual makes political and/or economic decisions based on his or her identity, ethnic or otherwise.
To frame this analysis adequately, it must be assumed that both ethnicity and ethnic identity, as a whole, are expressions of an internalized process, but this assumption is not necessarily connected to a particular political or cultural mode of thinking. While ethnic and political identity can be causally linked in Baku, they are not necessarily intrinsically bound together. Nevertheless, there was clearly an extraordinary connection in Baku between ethnicity and the politics surrounding class identity. In this sense, there was a degree of competition between which class or ethnic identity an individual would categorize him- or herself and family during a period of mercurial (if not at times chaotic) politics in Baku during the first two decades of the twentieth century. It is difficult to explore this connection while giving proper deference to the fluidity to identity in an rapidly changing urban space. There was no easy way to project a clear trajectory of social relationships without relying on overt assumptions. However, it is still necessary to investigate links between ethnicity, politics, and class—even if they are not explicitly causal on their own.

Baku produced a series of communities that existed side by side but were in many ways culturally autonomous from each other, even though they lived together in a relatively small geographic area. These circumstances occurred over a relatively short period of time, largely in the space of 1880 to 1908. Later events that befell Baku, specifically the violence the city experienced during the Russian Civil War, were not necessarily predetermined by the makeup of its social fabric; however, it is clear that the physical makeup of the city and how it evolved must

be considered in light of how events would proceed in Baku—as well as their eventual ramifications.

The pace of construction of Baku as an urban space is also a key factor in how differing communities interacted with each other. The chief commonality of the structures in the “Black City” of industrial Baku was the speed of their construction and their low cost. The intent to provide the cheapest worker housing possible reflected the contemporary purpose of the city itself: to extract rents from the oil fields surrounding the city. Greater Baku was in many ways an artifice, a series of buildings and the people who lived there because of a very specific economic purpose: providing a cheap and vast labor source in order to keep the many fields spread directly outside of it functioning. The rapid pace of construction coupled with the closeness of the fields to the city resulted in the population, largely employed by oil companies such as Branobel, being squeezed into wooden constructions of poor quality, which quickly resulted in significant overcrowding.\(^{37}\)

In the context of this created environment, the interactions of the different communities and the formation of identity could be compared with other urban industrial cities of the period in the Russian Empire, such as Odessa or Moscow, and also in other comparable oil regions in Galicia or around Tampico, Mexico.\(^{38}\) In Baku, the material externalities rooted from this

\(^{37}\) ARDTA - Azərbaycanın Respublikası Dövlət Tarix arxivi [State Historical Archive of the Azerbaijani Republic], f. 798, op.1, d. 504, l.67. This discord is exemplified by continued conflict between Branobel and its workers over the quantity and quality of its company housing, in particular over the issue of subsidized housing.

economic foundation—as well as the connection between industrial dynamics and the urban geography of the city itself—would profoundly affect how the population would relate to each other as communities, which in turn would lead to dramatic political, social, and economic repercussions across much of the twentieth (if not twenty-first) century. Baku’s vulnerability to direct military intervention during this and other time periods only created additional material and social pressure on a population that, in turn, would help to only further this division. The arrival of the Soviets in 1920 would add an additional element to this already volatile mix.

The key purpose of analyzing the process of Sovietization and pacification in Azerbaijan is not only to examine the direct impact the re-assertion of Soviet control would have on Baku, but also to investigate the long-term legacy that the actions of the Soviet government would have on the city’s population—as well as the effect that a return of control by what essentially had become a foreign power would mean for the future of the city. The return of Soviet control over Baku would fundamentally alter the trajectory toward destabilization and violence that Baku had taken since 1905 by bringing long-term stability to the city and reducing the ethnic and political conflicts that had torn it apart. This outcome was only achieved at the point of a gun.

This stability would last as long as the Soviets could control the situation. While the Soviet domination of Baku would provide a definite break from the chaos of the Civil War period, it would also force a realignment of how communities interacted with each other in the city. The type of violence the city had experienced from 1918 to 1920 would simply no longer be possible. Soviet practices in Azerbaijan reflected an attitude that focused on a mobilizing perception of modernity that was co-aligned with what were essentially pragmatic geopolitical concerns. As Francine Hirsch states in *Empire of Nations*, Soviet administrative approaches to its borderlands were often complex due to the unique rhetorical position of the Soviets: “While
Narkomats [the Soviet Nationalities Commissariat] attempted to prove that its vision of ethno-territorial regionalization was economically sound, Gosplan [the Soviet state economic planning agency] endeavored to prove that its project for economic-administrative regionalization was not imperialistic."

The core of this process of Sovietization led to the establishment of a broad system of internal security that focused on pacification, suppressing internal dissent, and stemming subversive influences (real or imagined) from countries abroad, especially Poland in the 1930s. The construction of an internal security in Azerbaijan would occur concurrently with the Soviets putting their stamp on ethnic, social, and economic relations in Baku. The Soviets were rightfully worried about active resistance, considering Baku's past history of civil dissent and violence, and Soviet attitudes reflected elements of paranoia from the Central Committee in Moscow, especially after 1927, about the possible internal subversion of Baku as well as the possibility of real danger to the hold of the Soviet Union on the Azerbaijani countryside.

While modern Baku had always been monitored by some form of secret police, including the Tsarist Okhrana and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the ADR, the arrival of the Soviets brought an unprecedented expansion of surveillance systems and enforcement strategies across the city and the rest of Azerbaijan. Not only would the population be monitored by a wide variety of agencies that would now be responsible for internal security in Baku as well as the rest of the country, but resistance from political opposition and independent labor


40 Department politii, Zagranichnaia agentura [Foreign Agents] (Paris), *Okhrana records*, [Box 19], Hoover Institution Archives: 205-209. It is clearly evident that the Okhrana was running large-scale surveillance operations in Baku across the late Tsarist period.
movements completely disappeared across the 1920s. After 1920, the Red Army was supplemented by a greatly more robust border force and the arrival of the secret police, in particular the Cheka, which would bring with it wide-ranging integrated systems of enforcement and surveillance.\textsuperscript{41}

After 1927, as in the rest of the Soviet Union, the scale of repression only increased. Azerbaijan was profoundly affected by the expansion of the Glavnoe Upravlenie Lagerei [Central Directorate of Camps] (GULAG), and not only were multiple smaller transfer camps established in Azerbaijan, but the Soviets would facilitate the imprisonment of tens of thousands of Azerbaijanis and other ethnic peoples who would be transported from Azerbaijan into the rest of the broader labor camp system, especially to camps in Kazakhstan and the rest of Central Asia.\textsuperscript{42} While the experiences of individual residents of the Azerbaijani SSR with the GULAG similar to that of other populations across the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan’s overall relationship with the GULAG was deeply colored by the nation’s own traumatic history of ethnic division and its complex economic and political relationship with the Soviet state—especially considering the strategic nature of Azerbaijan’s oil reserves and the continued resistance by many Azerbaijanis against Soviet rule. The fact that Baku until the late 1940s contained almost the entirety of the Soviet’s strategic oil reserves in and around it fostered a unique relationship between strategic material interests and state violence.

\textsuperscript{41} RGASPI, f. 80, op. 6, d. 13, l.1. In the Azerbaijani SSR, the local Cheka bureau would be under the direct control of the local Central Committee.

Sovietization and pacification in the context of Baku is shown through both the creation of political and security structures and a broader plan by the various organs of the Soviet state, including Kavburo and Gosplan, to transform Baku from the bitterly divided city that had existed from 1918 to 1920 to a comparatively economically stable petrochemical production center. This transformation would not only be physical (in terms of capital investment) or legal (in the sense of total nationalization of major industries and private real estate), but it would involve a structural reworking of the mechanics of daily life in the form of worker relations, education, and surveillance. This vast transformation would be a contrast to—if not a historical break from—the Tsarist period, where political plurality had remained a common part of social fabric. It would also stand in sharp contrast to the Russian Civil War—a period where the city had stood on the brink of destruction.

While Baku had experienced considerable change across the previous fifteen years before the takeover (1905 to 1920), during that time it had never been directly affected by a totalizing program such as the Soviets had planned. While demographically the city’s population would not be considerably ethnically different from its pre-war population, the structural differences the Soviets would bring to interior security and political culture would reflect a much more totalizing structure of authority than had previously existed under either the Tsar or the ADR.

Pacification, in the case of Baku and the rest of Azerbaijan, was not only the application of Soviet control of newly administrated areas but the creation of new security, political, and

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social networks that would dominate, mobilize, and mold these territories. These localities often struggled to move past the legacy of the Tsarist period, and, as in the rest of Transcaucasia, Soviet control of Baku and the rest of Azerbaijan meant a reversion to pre-civil war status in terms of self-determination; the formal Azerbaijani national movement as well other national movements across Transcaucasia, such as the Müsavatists and the Dashnaks, would go into a deep dormancy (if not practically cease) after the arrival of the Soviets. However, this did not mean resistance against Soviet rule failed to continue into the 1930s.

For the population of Transcaucasia as a whole, the loss of independence of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan was a dramatic reversal for aspirations of self-determination for the region and could be accurately portrayed as a reversion to the status quo in terms of sovereignty to the Tsarist era as the Soviet-state consolidated its control over the region. While this period also led to an era of relative stability as the inter-Caucasus wars and the large-scale pogroms that had rocked Baku and the rest of Transcaucasia finally ceased, that stability would come at the cost of severely limiting the agency of multiple nationalities that had fought hard to carve out their own national states at considerable human cost.

After their intervention, the Soviets were forced to balance local desires for national independence with a limited recognition of the autonomy of nationalities living in territory now occupied by the Red Army. Through this policy of Sovietization, they hoped to provide cultural, linguistic, and educational autonomy to these non-Russian nationalities. From a sympathetic

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viewpoint, their efforts could be seen as a genuine attempt to address any lingering national sentiments and to realize the ideological framework Lenin was already forming on nationalities.\footnote{Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, “The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination (1916),” in 
*Lenin’s Collected Works*, Volume 36 (1973), 1.} According to Lenin, each nation deserved self-determination, but in practice, the advances of the Soviet Union in Transcaucasia meant an utter rout for movements of self-determination and their hard-won political autonomy. In a formal sense, the Soviet Union would be a union of autonomous nationalities, but the reality of that goal was complicated by the centralized hierarchy of the Communist Party itself and the fact that the Soviet Union, especially in Transcaucasia, ended up as a family of nationalities forced together through direct military action and kept within the union through a security structure designed to quash resistance and dissent.

2. State of the Field

This dissertation fills a critical gap between major works of literature in the field, such as Ronald Suny’s *The Baku Commune 1917-1918*, Tadeusz Swietochowski’s *Russian Azerbaijan 1905-1920*, Audrey Altstadt’s *Azerbaijani Turks*, and Robert Tolf’s *Russian Rockefellers*. Rather than focusing on the specific events of the Russian Civil War (the focus of Suny’s and Swietochowski’s works), a familial history (such as Tolf’s work), or a history of a specific ethnicity (such as Altstadt’s), I will focus on broader thematic trends between material processes and their impact on the formation of ethnic and political identity and their relationship with
foreign and domestic political actors, eventually including the Soviet Union itself.\textsuperscript{47} Furthermore, my goal is to present the geopolitical influence of foreign powers on Baku during this period.

Other seminal works in the field, such as Alexandr Igolkin’s “Sovetskaia neftiania promyshlennost’ v 1921-1928” [Soviet Oil Production in the years 1921 to 1918] and “Otechestvennaia neftianaia promyshlennost’ v 1917-1920” [Domestic Production from 1917 to 1920], have provided a vivid illustration of the complexity of the situation of Baku’s oil industry during the Russian Civil War and the eventual nationalization of that industry and the establishment of Azneft.\textsuperscript{48} However, both works center primarily on the mechanics of the industry itself rather than the society and states that relied on it. While Jörg Baberowski, in Der Feind ist überall. Stalinismus im Kaukasus [The Enemy is Everywhere: Stalinism in the Caucasus], provides a broad illustration of Soviet policies of coercion and cooptation in Azerbaijan, and the ultimately invasive nature of these practices, Baberowski’s chief focus is on the mechanics of state socialism as it was applied to Azerbaijan primarily in the 1920s and 1930s.\textsuperscript{49}


\textsuperscript{47} For more general literature on Soviet approaches toward nationalities, see Terry Martin, The Affirmative Action Empire, and Francine Hirsch, Empire of Nations.

\textsuperscript{48} For a recent general overview of the early origins of Russia’s oil industry in Russian, see Alexandr Igolkin’s more recent publication, Russkaia neft’ o kotoroi my tak malo znaem [Russian Oil About Which We Know So Little]. (Moscow: Olimp-Biznes, 2003).

\textsuperscript{49} Jörg Baberowski, Der Feind ist überall. Stalinismus im Kaukasus [The Enemy is Everywhere. Stalinism in the Caucasus (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2003).}
Brinegar focuses explicitly on the internal dynamics during the initial formation of Azneft, and through her dissertation she illustrates the competitive dynamics and personalities at the top of the leadership of the Azerbaijani SSR during its early years. In comparison, Lund provides an in-depth analysis of the administrative and policing framework of the late Russian Empire in Baku and the rising worker unrest before the First World War.

Through this dissertation, I will provide a continuous, multi-thematic, analytical narrative of a single city, from its initial industrialization to the early years of the Soviet Union.\(^{50}\)

Within this narrative, I hope to further the study of both Baku and other commodity-producing localities by giving a cohesive analysis of the relationship of highly localized commodity production (such as oil), local identity formation, invasive economic and military intervention by a series of states, and the ultimate long-term ramifications of these entangled processes.\(^{51}\)

### 3. Purpose and Goals

The goal of this project is to illustrate how a combination of material processes, originating from the dynamics of the oil industry and state policy, can slowly affect if not mold a

\(^{50}\) Other comparable analyses of regional oil industries include Alison Frank in *Oil Empire: Visions of Prosperity in Austrian Galicia.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), and Myrna Santiago in *The Ecology of Oil: Environment, Labor and the Mexican Revolution, 1900-1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

city population and industry over decades. This analysis will provide an instructive study of how social and political change can happen through often unintentional alteration in material circumstances, and that these changes may help foster deep ethnic and political divisions. In addition, the events in Baku can provide us broader information on the effects that modern commodity production has on local populations across the globe.

Considering the impact that commodity extraction has on our world, especially in oil-producing regions such as the Niger Delta and the Persian Gulf, it is absolutely essential to uncover what occurred in our past in order to more fully recognize the ultimate effect that seemingly unrelated events can have in causing irreversible consequences for populations. It is critical to examine the instability caused by ecological, economic, and social upheaval brought by the continuous extraction of energy, especially oil and gas, in and around a populated setting. Furthermore, these processes should be considered in a broader context, comparative examples of this period and its legacy are still being played out on a global scale roughly a century later.52

4. Sources and Methodology

I have worked to find substantial archival material from the multiple governments that occupied Baku in order to investigate the methodology of states and private enterprises in their drive to advance their economic and geopolitical interests in Baku. In addition, beyond archival material, I have used other sources of the period, including memories and other independent sources from the Hoover Institution and previously published sources, such as the surveys of Baku workforce by Bolshevik sociologist Alexandr Stopani. This material has filled in gaps left

52 In particular, Robert Vitalis, in America’s Kingdom: Myth Making on the Saudi Oil Frontier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), illustrates the possible political and economic regional instability that may be caused by direct collaboration between the U.S. and Saudi governments across the twentieth century.
by state archives in order to investigate both the direct impact this contest over oil directly had on the population of the city as well as the legacies that emerged from that contest.

To accomplish this analysis, extensive research trips to Russia and Azerbaijan were taken in order to retrieve the material necessary for this work. In particular, trips to the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), the Russian State Archive of the Economy (RGAE), and the Russian State Archive of Social Political History (RGASPI) in Moscow provided material that will illustrate how understanding Baku during this period requires a closer examination of how the series of events affecting Baku from the origin of the industry to the early Soviet period are connected. In addition, research at the Azerbaijani State Archive (ARDA) and the Azerbaijani Historical Archive (ARDTA) has been equally useful.

These sources have given me useful tools to explore Baku’s past. First, access to ARDA has allowed me in particular to investigate rare material on the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan and its unique political and economic relationship with private oil companies from 1918 and 1920. Second, the empirical evidence provided by these a variety of sources, including by economic and statistical data from Stopani on demographics of the city and its workforce as well as other statistics on oil production of Baku given us a tool to analyze the nature of how commodity production have cotemporaneous effects on a population from the late Tsarist to early Soviet period. Third, archival material from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (RGASPI), the Soviet State (GARF) and Gosplan (RGAE) have provided me both direct documentation of Soviet planning during the period and inside look at the motives of major figures in the fate of Baku, such as Alexandr Serebrovskii and Sergo Ordzhonikidze. Together this research has allowed me to a unique chance to document Baku’s experience from the late Tsarist period through the Russian Civil War and into the Soviet period, and therefore form a
cohesive narrative of how a population and its actions were molded by structural economic, political and geopolitical forces in and outside the city.

The ultimate goal of this work is to establish a framework of how to investigate the rapid expansion of an economically and militarily strategic industry and the political and geopolitical ramifications of that expansion—as well as the profound and often divisive legacy this growth can have on populations over the space of decades. Among the reoccurring features of this history are the constant efforts by multiple governments to remediate the turmoil that plagued Baku during this period and how the attempts to repair these rifts by the Soviet Union left its own problematic and divisive legacy.
Chapter One: Origins of a City: Oil and the Creation of Modern Baku – 1870-1905

1. Introduction

Looking from the heights looming over what would become the working class neighborhood of Nizami, it would have been impossible for an observer in the mid-nineteenth century to predict that the small port city of Baku sitting underneath would dramatically shape the future of the modern oil industry and would become a city of significant geopolitical importance in the space of a few decades. While the Abershon Peninsula had for centuries been largely relegated to the fringes of the Safavid, Afsharid, and Qajar dynasties, under its soil was a viscous liquid, crude oil, that would make the peninsula one of the most strategically and economically valuable regions of the early industrialized world. While surfaced crude oil was a known phenomenon witnessed by its inhabitants for centuries, it had remained economically unimportant for generations except for local use as tar until the mid-nineteenth century. However, the modern expansion of that local industry from household use to full industrial production during the late nineteenth-century would have a profound but often underestimated effect—not only on the future of Baku but the eventual dynamics of contemporary oil production as a whole.

Petroleum’s existence in Baku was simple happenstance rooted in a quirk of geography and geology; its fate was tied to the decisions of certain state and private actors that steered the focus of the city. This sheer chance of geography and geology would eventually lead to a series of cascading forces and events that would form the foundation of a revolutionary expansion of petroleum production as well as an equal explosion of violence during the Russian Revolution and its direct aftermath. While in this sense Baku is not truly unique (for there are other urban areas throughout history that have been located near valuable commodities, such as Tampico,
Mexico), in the case of Baku, it is the timing and circumstance of events that provides us such a useful study of how commodity production can and did mold the life of a city.\(^{53}\)

Other works on pre-revolutionary Baku, such as Robert Tolf’s *Russian Rockefeller*, have analyzed parts of the origins of the oil industry in Baku through the familial enterprise of the Nobel Brothers (Branobel). This chapter employs a broader scope and has a very different purpose than simply chronicling the origins of Baku’s oil industry. Instead, its purpose is to take a broader overview of both the origins of the industry and the growth of Baku itself as a multi-ethnic and cosmopolitan city and then explore the relationship between the growth of the oil industry and its effect on the city itself. Furthermore, while the development of the oil industry is essential to understanding Baku, as covered in part in Daniel Yergin’s *The Prize*, it is only one historical strand in these events. This examination will explore not only the industry itself but its considerable impact on political and social relationships inside the city.

In order to provide an overview of the economic and social structures of Baku prior to the First World War, I have utilized material on Branobel and its associated enterprises from the Azerbaijani Historical Archives as well as other source material from the period, such as Alexander Stopani’s detailed economic surveys of Baku workers. Together, these sources provide contextual knowledge not only of the mechanics of Branobel and other oil production companies but considerable statistical data on the wages and lives of workers. Together, these documents allow a more cohesive analysis of the correlation between the astounding growth and

\(^{53}\) To see a similar example of the profound effect of oil on an urban center, see Myrna Santiago’s “Tampico, Mexico: The Rise and Decline of an Energy Metropolis” in *Energy Capitals: Local Impact, Global influence* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014): 150-151. Tampico, like Baku, faced a severe housing crisis and ongoing labor strife during its boom period but never experienced the same level of ethnic or political violence.
eventual decline of the oil industry in Baku and rising division between its working class as well the aftereffects this division would have.

The relationship between the city and its chief export was distinctive because the rise of that industry would be contemporaneous with a critical historical juncture of geopolitical competition between the Russian Empire and its neighbors and the rising movements of national self-determination across the Empire. It was in these circumstances that Baku, a city in an ethnically heterogeneous region on the fringes of a weakening multi-ethnic empire, would be fully exposed to a period of political and social upheaval amidst the relentless warfare of the First World War and the Russian Civil War. Furthermore, this confluence of events happened during a period when oil and its products were becoming a strategic resource for powerful industrial states that, at that point, had only a handful of sources to feed their supply needs.

Political life developed in Baku beyond the control of any government or company. While the construction of identity was heavily influenced by the organization of oil extraction and refining, but there was no way that governments, companies, or political parties could truly predict the outcome of its development. In many ways, Baku, like any other unplanned city, grew organically in response to short-term economic demands, and in turn those demands would be acutely affected by the shifting economic and geopolitical world around it. Baku’s fate prior the Soviet period was determined by a growing market for petroleum as a growing urban population in industrialized states demanded an increased supply of kerosene and then eventually other petroleum products, such as benzene and fuel oil. In turn, the increasingly complex issues of labor supply and market access also created a mercurial environment in which the populace of the city would have limited agency to guide its individual and collective fates and would become a victim of geopolitical and economic circumstance.
2. Origins of Baku’s Oil Industry

The beginning of the modern history of Baku is rooted not in the discovery of oil around the city, which had been known about for centuries, but in the development of a reliable method of extraction necessary to make it profitable on an industrial scale. While knowledge of combustible liquids in the area would stretch back to pre-history and the traditional use of crude from tar pits (often extracted with little more than long shovels), this form of production would not be useful on an industrial level.\(^5^4\) A reliable manner of extraction that would be profitable only became available during the mid-nineteenth century. Nevertheless, despite the availability of new technology, it would still take years for the industry to move from basic extraction from a handful of tar pits during the early nineteenth century to a state of industrialized mass extraction during the 1860s and 1870s. Furthermore, this development would take place after the 1850s, by which time drilling in American (Pennsylvania), Austrian (Galicia), and Romanian fields (Ploiești) were well under way.\(^5^5\)

The commercial use of oil in Baku began independently in the early nineteenth century with the solidification of Russian control over Azerbaijan after the Russo-Persia war of 1804-1813 through the Treaty of Gulistan. However, despite this territorial expansion, it would take decades for formal Russian control to spread across the region, and it was only by the 1830s that Russians were fully able to control Azerbaijan as a whole. It was at this time the oil industry began its first faltering steps towards industrialization.\(^5^6\) The Tsarist government, allowed in only a limited

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\(^{5^6}\) The first vertical pit was dug in Bibi-Heybat in 1846.
number of areas of the fledgling industry, would as yet have little physical or economic impact on the city itself.\textsuperscript{57}

In 1834, the Russian Mining Department laid the foundation of Baku’s oil industry when it ordered then Major Nikolai Voskoboinikov to begin excavation for oil near the banks of the Kura River, just outside of Baku.\textsuperscript{58} These initial oil pits were shallow (31.5 feet deep) and allowed reliable extraction via buckets. Despite the primitive nature of these pits, by 1835 oil production was 42,355 barrels of crude per year. From 1836-1837, further pits and surplus oil reservoirs, were dug around Balakhany, just northeast of Baku, which produced a further 14,650 barrels.\textsuperscript{59} By 1837, Voskoboynikov was successful in accruing the resources for Baku’s first oil refinery in nearby Surakhany, which produced primarily kerosene for lighting. From 1840-1842, the Russian government’s net income from the 136 oil pits surrounding Baku grew to 109,000 gold rubles.\textsuperscript{60} While there was an attempt to build a similar industry in Kuban in southern Russia in 1847, this venture was significantly less successful than drilling in Baku.\textsuperscript{61}

In 1859, two key events occurred: first, the Russian Ministry of Finance signed “a new tax-farming agreement” with Russian entrepreneur, Ter-Gukasov; second, his Transcaspian Trading Partnership began production near Surakhany. These two events began a sudden

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{57} Joseph Matellaro, in “The Acquisition and Leasing of Baku Oilfields by the Russian Crown,” \textit{Middle Eastern Studies} 21, no. 1 (1985): 80-81.
\item \textsuperscript{58} Vagit Alekperov, \textit{Oil of Russia: Past, Present and Future} (Minneapolis: East View Press, 2010): 32-33.
\item \textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 54.
\item \textsuperscript{61} Alexandr Igolkin, \textit{Russkaia neft’ [Russian Oil]}, 16-17. In Kuban, subsurface oil deposits could not sustain a large-scale industry on the same scale as Baku.
\end{itemize}
privatization of production and were the first genuine stirrings of the modern private oil industry in Baku.

During the same period, the United States saw a burst of development. While the US had produced only 2,000 barrels of oil (350 tons) in 1850, by the late 1850s “an avalanche of Pennsylvanian oil hit the US domestic market.”

By 1864, the US produced 2,497,000 barrels of oil a year and was able to supply 347,000 barrels of kerosene to St. Petersburg for its lighting systems. Moreover, the rise of hard rock drilling techniques, pioneered by Colonel Edwin Drake in Pennsylvania, allowed American producers to dig deeper (over 60 feet) through bedrock into the sedimentary layers beneath. This advancement allowed Pennsylvania to greatly expand drilling beyond swallow deposits just under the surface.

This improvement and its enormous effect spurred Gennady Romanovsky, in 1866, to publish “On Petroleum Generally and North American Petrol in Particular” in the *Gorny Journal*, outlining the need for further investment in domestic production in Russia and explaining how that could be achieved through duplicating American production processes.

While oil drilling had been attempted in other parts of Russia by the 1860s, including Kerch, Kuban, and the Lower Volga, it was only in and around Baku that further drilling allowed Russia to compete with the American oil industry. The key change to occur in Baku, however, was a further reform of the tax-farming system in 1861, which allowed ethnically Armenian

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62 Alekperov, *Oil of Russia*, 54.


64 Alekperov, *Oil of Russia*, 56. Moreover, the oil industry in and around Galicia was gradually expanding across the same period.
entrepreneur Ivan Mirozoev to accrue sizable acreage in and around Baku for drilling. In his first year alone, Mirozoev had produced 40,830 barrels of crude, almost all of Russian production for that year. By 1870, production had risen to almost 204,000 barrels of oil. The oil industry in Baku had finally arrived in full force. However, this advancement did not come without risk. By December 27, 1870, the first major oilfield fire in Russian history broke out at Mirozoev’s field in the Surakhany District, and after workers had “struck a gusher of gassy oil, . . . the firebox of a steam locomotive operating near the rig ignited massive fire, subsequently causing significant human casualties and considerable material losses.”

Despite the well-known existence of oily pits of flameable tar, the effective development of Baku’s largest natural resource took decades due to several factors. First, modern methods for extracting oil in a reliable manner were slow to develop during the mid-nineteenth century. After drilling was first used in Pennsylvania, then Galicia, there was a necessary technological lag before it could be applied elsewhere, especially in what was a particularly lightly populated periphery of the Russian Empire. Second, there was the issue of regional demand for kerosene. While kerosene demand grew during the nineteenth century, and there was an active market by the 1860s, there simply did not exist an effective way for kerosene from Baku to enter markets in Europe until transportation infrastructure was further developed in the region. However, by the turn of the century, the market for petrochemical byproducts expanded, and after 1900, the development of the internal combustion engine (ICE) would lead to a massive expansion in the

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65 Ibid., 54.


67 Alekperov, Oil of Russia, 64. Oil fires would be both a continual safety and environmental danger across the late Tsarist period in Baku.
demand for oil, in particular refined kerosine and fuel oil. This increased demand would complicate Baku’s productivity, though, for it coincided with a steadily decreasing supply inside Baku itself. It would take years for producers to switch from kerosene to benzene production. While fuel oil production would remain relatively constant, fuel oil and kerosene production would dominate into the early 1920s.

Moreover, in the case of Baku, there was also the issue of limited access to land needed for drilling. After the conquest of Azerbaijan, ownership of the lands surrounding Baku fell to the imperial government, and the leasing of lands around Baku itself was centrally controlled through a state leasing system. During most of the early nineteenth century to the 1850s, state leasing of lands around Baku occurred quite slowly and was limited in its territorial extent.68 The government, by restricting leasing dramatically, reduced the possibility of any major expansion of the industry beyond minor surface extraction or “grazing.”69 In addition, with oil extraction itself still very much in its technological infancy, the potential amount of production that could be accomplished was still quite small, only thousands of tons a year.70

By 1865, the nascent industry in Baku amounted to two petroleum refineries.71 The creation of the industry itself as an expansive force beyond local processing, and its full growth into a major industrial sector, involved both the improvement of industrial methods of drilling and a large movement of workers to Baku in the 1870s and 1880s. It would also involve the

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68 Matellaro, “The Acquisition and Leasing,” 82-83.

69 Ibid., 83-85.

70 Alekperov, Oil of Russia, 77.

export of kerosene to the rest of the Russian Empire through portage on the Caspian and
eventually via Batumi in Western Georgia and across the Black Sea to expanding European
markets by railroads, eventually resulting in the Baku-Batumi pipeline.\textsuperscript{72}

\begin{center}
\textbf{Table 1.1: Russian Oil Production, 1863-1872}\textsuperscript{73}
\end{center}

\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
 & Oil Production in Barrels Per Year & Oil Production in Tons Per Year \\
\hline
1863 & 40,830 & 6,140 \\
1864 & 64,723 & 9,730 \\
1865 & 66,564 & 10,010 \\
1866 & 83,079 & 12,490 \\
1867 & 119,957 & 18,030 \\
1868 & 88,284 & 13,280 \\
1869 & 202,736 & 30,420 \\
1870 & 204,685 & 30,780 \\
1871 & 165,184 & 24,835 \\
1872 & 183,252 & 27,735 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}

In 1873, a sizable shift occurred in land management: the tax-farming system was
abolished completely in exchange for a state auctioning system. Oil fields, instead of being tax-
farmed for the state, would now be leased and fully controlled by private interests for a onetime
fee. Through this process, prominent Russian businessmen Vasily Kokorev and Petr Gobonin
leased six parcels for 1,323,328 rubles in Balakhany; Ivan Miroyez acquired four parcels for
himself for 1,222,000 rubles, and three additional smaller parcels were leased to the Baltic
German-Russian business interests of Benkendorf & Muromstev for 120,834 rubles. Up to that

\textsuperscript{72} John McKay, “Baku Oil and Transcaucasian Pipelines,” 609.

\textsuperscript{73} Alekperov, \textit{Oil of Russia}, 77. By 1872, the Russian oil industry would reach production levels
equal to its nadir in 1920. This amounted to 6.65 barrels per ton compared to the standard 7.33 barrels,
illustrating the relatively heavy nature of Baku’s oil and its comparably less usable petroleum per ton.
point, the Russian government had received 5,966,000 rubles through its tax-farming system, but in 1873 it immediately accrued 2,980,307 rubles through direct land leasing, although it lost potential revenue from tax-farming.\textsuperscript{74} Through this shift in revenue generation, the investment and number of facilities dramatically increased. By 1873, there were eighty refineries around Baku, and by the end of the end of the decade that number had increased to over two hundred while production quadrupled from 1873 to 1877 to over 279,900 tons of oil.\textsuperscript{75} At this point, production techniques were still primitive. Oil refineries were primarily producing distillates, such as kerosene, through fractional distillation. Through this process, crude was heated until separation occurred and surface liquids were extracted and filtered. Most of these refineries were small and often ramshackle affairs, and they employed up to sixty workers to ensure there was a constant supply of crude fed into their systems and that the heating was working properly.\textsuperscript{76}

The first vertically-integrated oil company in Baku, the Baku Oil Company (BOC), was founded in 1874 by Kokorev and Gubonin from the oil parcels they had recently leased from the Russian government in 1873. By 1877, these fields accounted for 460,690 barrels’ worth of Baku’s production, and further investment led to the first fully integrated series of wells, underground storage chambers, and refineries in Baku. By 1888, the BOC was producing 1.3 million barrels of oil, but by 1890 it had fallen to second place, behind Branobel.\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 79.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{76} Yergin, \textit{The Prize}, 59, and Alekperov, \textit{Oil of Russia}, 64. This process undoubtedly would have produced noxious fumes as crude was heated.

\textsuperscript{77} Alekperov, \textit{Oil of Russia}, 84. The BOC would subsequently slide to third place after the Rothschild family entered the oil market in 1892.
During the boom, the largest of private companies able to direct the development of the industry was the Nobel Brothers Company, commonly known as Branobel, a joint venture initially funded by the Swedish-born Ludvig Nobel and his brothers, Alfred and Robert, along with Baron Peter von Bilderling. On May 18th, 1879, the Nobel family business received a license from the Imperial government to develop their leased fields, and by the end of the year they had produced 35,548 barrels of crude and 37,227 barrels of kerosene. By 1888, this output had “risen more than 80 times to 3.1 million barrels (13.4% of total Russian production)” and, soon after, Branobel was the largest producer in the Absheron peninsula.

Other industrial groups owned by Russian interests during the 1880s, such as the BOC, accounted for the rest of production in and around Baku itself. While foreign-owned interests dominated much of the ownership of productive fields in Baku, the development of the fields themselves nevertheless remained critically important to nascent Russian steps toward industrialization, and the kerosene exports they provided were a necessary part of that process across the late imperial period. Consequently, while there were a large number of foreign companies in Baku, according to Ronald Ferrier in his history of the British Petroleum Company, British capital constituted two thirds of the foreign capital invested in the Russian oil industry by 1917. Therefore, while the companies were owned by a variety of interests, the capital backing was primarily British.

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79 Alekperov, Oil of Russia, 88.

Table 1.2: Russian Oil Production, 1878-1888

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Oil Production in Barrels Per Year</th>
<th>Oil Production in Tons Per Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td>2,479,000</td>
<td>372,790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1879</td>
<td>2,829,000</td>
<td>425,415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>2,978,000</td>
<td>447,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>4,914,000</td>
<td>738,860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>6,202,000</td>
<td>932,545</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>7,181,000</td>
<td>1,080,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>10,688,000</td>
<td>1,607,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>13,810,000</td>
<td>2,077,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>14,831,000</td>
<td>2,230,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>19,214,000</td>
<td>2,889,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>21,856,000</td>
<td>3,286,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Russian production steadily expanded across the late 1870s and 1880s it began to compete with American oil in European and Asian markets. In 1877, Russian oil exports accounted for 552,404 barrels of oil; by 1887, it had risen to more than 3 million barrels of kerosene.\(^{82}\) Production during the 1880s would increase, and by 1899 Branobel reached 11.2 million barrels of production: 18% of Russian production and 8.6% of total world production. The company had over 1,300 workers working on 303 wells. During the same year, it exported 2,201,933 barrels of kerosene, which made up 26.6% of total Russian oil exports. Even more impressively, Branobel also controlled 50.1% of the domestic kerosene market.\(^{83}\)

\(^{81}\) Alekperov, *Oil of Russia*, 94.

\(^{82}\) At the same time, British columnist Charles Thomas Marvin began publishing stories in the British press urging further British investment in Baku. This included the publication of *The Region of the Eternal Fire: An Account of a Journey to Petroleum Region of the Caspian* in 1883 (London: W.H. Allen & Co., 1891).

\(^{83}\) Alekperov, *Oil of Russia*, 109.
By 1880, Nobel Brothers ordered a new shipping vessel, a prototype of today’s modern tanker. This new tanker allowed oil to be transported more efficiently to Astrakhan and up the Volga. By 1898, Baku was the largest production center in the world and accounted for 8.77 metric tons, nearly half of worldwide production. This rise was supported through tariffs on American fuels issued in 1877, 1882, 1885, and 1893, which helped curb Russian imports of American kerosene. According to Yergin, this expansion had a sizable effect on trade: America's share of the world export trade in illuminating oil fell from 78 percent in 1888 to 71 percent in 1891, while the Russian share of production rose from 22 percent to 29 percent.

The expansion of drilling in the 1870s and 1880s led to a fuller industrialization of Baku as production soared and heralded the emergence of a regional energy market by providing a considerable surplus of crude oil that in turn would promote the production of kerosene (rather than tallow candles or whale oil) as a more consistent and smokeless form of lighting. Moreover, the fate of Baku became inextricably connected to a continually increasing market for other petrochemicals—initially almost entirely kerosene, then fuel oil and benzene alongside machine oils and lubricants. By the turn of the century, fuel oil, chiefly used in railroads and shipping, would overtake kerosene production.

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84 Tolf, *Russian Rockefellers*, 56.
85 Alekperov, *Oil of Russia*, 134.
87 Yergin, *The Prize*, 62.
For that outcome to occur, crude drilling and refining would have to become efficient and profitable enough to induce a mass migrations of workers, who were necessary to transform an isolated port on the Caspian, surrounded on three sides by arid plateaus and long stretches of desert, into an industrial boomtown. Such a development would not have been possible for the sleepy port town on its own but would require massive amounts of capital investment in production and transportation infrastructure from outside of Azerbaijan. These investments came from the rest of the Russian Empire and from Europe, principally the United Kingdom, and allowed the industry to build needed infrastructure, such as refineries and transportation links.  

The expansion of Baku’s industry in the 1870s and 1880s was a direct result of the relaxing of these leasing contraints, which had previously restricted foreign investment. In particular, the imperial government, by relaxing the leasing structure of government land surrounding the city, opened up sites with the highest potential for extraction, such as Bibi-Heybat, Surakhany, and Sabunchy, fields that were located ten kilometers from Baku. Moreover, these reforms allowed private enterprises to initiate mass leases of state lands around the city, which in turn provided the opportunity to initiate massive investments needed to expand the industry. Already, by the 1860s and 1870s, critical technical improvements, especially in drilling and tool machining, had allowed firms to begin extracting petroleum more efficiently. Eventually, technological change—coupled with increasing supply and drilling


91 Ibid., 85-87.

92 Ibid.

93 “The Oil-Wells of Baku,” 149-150.
access—allowed Baku’s industry to begin meeting increased demand for kerosene in the rest of the Russian Empire.  

Baku was not isolated from developments in the oil industry outside of Transcaucasia, and, as Pennsylvania and then Galicia started to drill, both sites experienced comparable production booms that spurred further combined technological development and investment into the broader industry. As Alison Frank shows in *Oil Empire*, it took both scientific advancement and capital investment to provide an initial jumpstart for the broader industry in the 1860s. In turn, development in Baku gave birth to an expansion of production that continued unabated across the rest of the nineteenth century and provided a supply of crude that would make the overall industry more viable.

Furthermore, drilling was greatly assisted by improved metallurgical techniques, such as the Bessemer process, that allowed for low-cost production of the high-quality steel needed for the variety of drills, machine parts, and other tools essential for the oil industry to function. Nevertheless, significant geographic distance would often isolate these industries, and while technological developments would be regularly shared between the companies, including multinational companies such as Royal Dutch Shell, each industry would follow a historical trajectory that would reflect its own local circumstance and the price point at which oil could be sold. This price was lower in Baku due to the generally poorer quality of its crude compared to potential

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94 Alekperov, *Oil of Russia*, 32-33, 52.

95 Frank, *Oil Empire*, 84-85.
rivals, but steadily increasing demand provided enough incentive to justify continued expansion.96

At its heart, the oil industry in Baku grew up alongside the first stirrings of industrialization as a whole in the Russian Empire, and the companies that would form the core of this process would not only be private but also increasingly multi-national in their ownership. The large oil-producing companies that were investing in Baku, such as Branobel and the Rothschild’s Mazut Oil, were owned by private actors who were largely funded from outside of Russia, especially by France, Germany, and the United Kingdom.97 While initially the majority of production came from Russian-owned companies, over time, companies with foreign ownership increasingly took a larger share of production.98

Branobel and its fields represented a significant portion of all oil production in Baku from the 1890s onward. Other companies, including Mazut Oil, contributed roughly half of total oil production in Baku.99 Although foreign-owned interests dominated much of the ownership of productive fields within Baku, the development of the fields themselves were critically important to nascent Russian steps toward industrialization, and, during the late Tsarist period, the exports


97 Wilber E. Post, “A Resume of Events in the Caucasus since the Russian Revolution.” (November 21, 1918). Wilber E. Post and Maurice Wertheim History, [Box 1], Hoover Institution Archive: 9-14. Mazut Oil, until purchased in 1912 by Anglo-Dutch Shell, was owned by the Rothschild family.

98 RGIA- Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv [Russian State Historical Archive], f.1276, op.19, d.504, l.172, as cited in Nicholas Lund, “At the Center of the Periphery,” 43.

99 Ibid.
they provided abroad were necessary for providing the Russian Empire with an account surplus in trade, although this remained substantially smaller than grain exports.\textsuperscript{100}

### 3. Late Tsarist Era Expansion of Baku’s Oil Industry

Baku and the Absheron peninsula was one of the first successful oil-producing regions outside North America and the first major oil industry in or around the Middle East.\textsuperscript{101} The so-called “Black City” surrounding Baku, including villages such as Sabunchu, Surakhany, and Bibi-Eilat, formed the basis of the oil industry for the Russian Empire and was a test-bed for conducting production on an enormous scale.\textsuperscript{102} According to Sarah Searight, “In 1886 a particularly ferocious gusher in Bibi-Eilat . . . was said to have produced more oil in one day than all the rest of the world’s wells put together.”\textsuperscript{103} Baku’s rapid development during this period provides an illustrative example of how commodity production, as an economic process, can vastly shape economic policy as governments struggle to grapple with maintaining basic regional stability while fostering ongoing production.

In the context of transition to a modern milieu, the early twentieth century was not only a period of realignment for Baku itself as an urban locality, but also a period of crucial change in


\textsuperscript{101} Brian Black, \textit{Petrolia: The Landscape of America’s First Oil Boom} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 13-14. Pennsylvania began to develop as the first major petrochemical industry in the 1850s. As Alison Frank states in \textit{Oil Empire}, early extraction in Galicia likewise began around the same time.

\textsuperscript{102} Tolf, \textit{Russian Rockefellers}, 98-100.

how politics and industry functioned in imperial Russia. Baku’s development is a useful point of juncture to illustrate this shift in the economic paradigm of mid-nineteenth century Russia. The Russian Empire was forced to adjust from a reliance on forms of land bondage originating from the late medieval to early modern period to a more complex world in which emerging national identities, international commerce of commodities, and ideologically-inspired politics of various republican forms would become readily prevalent. By the 1860s, the traditional method of dominating the rural population by tying it to the land was abolished, but it would take decades for labor mobility to fully become realized across the empire. At the same time, as international trade continued to flourish in the later nineteenth century, Baku and rest of the Russian Empire became connected to this trade in a more extensive manner. The Russian Empire was regularly engaged in exporting agricultural and raw goods in exchange for finished and industrial materials. Industrialization required local sources of crucial commodities, such as oil. While these resources would exist in abundance in the Russian Empire, utilizing them required an immense shift in capital, manpower, and infrastructure to areas such as Baku.

Therefore, by transitioning from an overwhelming agrarianism to nascent industrialization, the economy of the Russian Empire became increasingly reliant on the industrialized urban centers from the 1880s onwards as both centers of competitive industry and a source of industrial resources. Russia, which had industrialized later than any other major European power except the Ottoman Empire, had rapidly industrialized due in part to the large influx of labor from rural provinces, principally ex-serfs, who provided a source of low-cost


labor in large numbers. However, with rapid industrialization came both political and social stresses and an alarmingly growing gap in infrastructure. Baku, in particular, had the added complications of its multi-ethnic and multi-denominational population due to the high number of migrants coming from largely agricultural areas in the Russian Empire and Persia and then later Iran. Nevertheless, as shown in Chapter One, the collective results of this industrialization process in Baku were impressive: from 1889 to 1901, Russian oil production would increase 340%, from 207.2 million pds (poods) (3.74 million metric tons) to 706.3 million pds (12.75 million metric tons). Likewise, oil exports would double during the same period.

During the early twentieth century, the growth of oil as a strategic commodity would dramatically shape the increasingly industrialized world. The rise of the internal combustion engine and the broader use of petroleum for transportation prioritized its development, especially the production of benzene. As demand increased, especially in the more developed industrialized states in Europe, so did the market opening for appreciable increases in supply. Crude oil and its products had moved from a product of moderate consumer need (primarily kerosene for lighting) to fuel oil, a commodity of increasing military and economic necessity. This transformation was most strongly felt in global prices. At the turn of the twentieth-century, the

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107 V.N. Kostormichenko, *Inostrannyi kapital v sovetskoi neftianoi promyshlennosti: 1918-1932* [International Capital and Soviet Oil Production: 1918-1932] (Volgograd: Volgograd State University, 2000), 44. The pood is a measurement stemming from Medieval Rus and fixed during the Tsarist period; it is equal to 36.11 pounds (or 16.38 kilograms).

108 Frank, *Oil Empire*, 75-80.

109 RGAE, f. 4372, op. 11, d. 15, l. 158-165. The Central Oil Syndicate of the Soviet Union made increased oil (especially benzene production) a clear priority.
average global price for oil was between $0.80 to $1 a barrel (or $20-24 a barrel in 2013 dollars). In comparison, by 1920, it had jumped to $3 a barrel ($36 in 2013 dollars), a likely result of both increasing demand and short-term restricted supply.\textsuperscript{110}

In common with other industrial development in the Russian Empire, Baku’s growth into a prime industrial center was heavily reliant on capital invested by private enterprises from Europe and European Russia. In this context, because crude remained an export of significant value to foreign interests, capital investment in Baku was almost solely focused on petroleum and infrastructure for its refinement and transportation. This led to the development of elements of a colonial relationship between the European center and the Caucasian periphery. Moreover, the rents accrued by private enterprises, such as Branobel, were not just extracted from Baku but also reinvested through industrial capital or private assets, including many of the Italianate mansions and townhouses that would spring up in the city’s center.\textsuperscript{111}

Furthermore, as Robert W. Tolf shows in \textit{Russian Rockefellers}, Branobel only became more influential in Baku during the 1890s. However, not only was Branobel a powerful economic force in Baku, but it was a social one as well. The Nobel Brothers and their clubhouse was the center of Baku’s social life at the turn of the century, and Branobel was known for its lavish parties, where “blocks of ice overflowed with caviar.”\textsuperscript{112} According to Tolf, by 1899, Branobel had over 12,000 employees.\textsuperscript{113} By 1912, Branobel, on its own, produced 7.9 million

\textsuperscript{110} British Petroleum, “BP Statistical Review,” 11. There are 8.45 barrels to a metric ton for the heavy oil from Baku.

\textsuperscript{111} Tolf, \textit{Russian Rockefellers}, 72, 100-101, 139.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 149.

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 166.
barrels of crude from 479 wells and refined 6.9 million barrels but had shrunk to just over 2,451 workers as initial construction was completed.\textsuperscript{114}

Table 1.3: Russian and US Production, 1898-1904 (in Millions of Metric Tons) \textsuperscript{115}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Russian Oil Production</th>
<th>US Oil Production</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>8.77</td>
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<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>9.5</td>
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<td>12.09</td>
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<td>1904</td>
<td>12.03</td>
<td>17.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standard Oil, of course, was well aware of the threat to its own European markets posed by the growth of Branobel and other Russian oil exporters: “the Standard Oil Company’s ongoing actions clearly worked toward the realization of its strategy to displace Russia completely especially from the European kerosene market.”\textsuperscript{116} In 1890, Great Britain imported 787,529 barrels of kerosene from Russia and 1,357,122 barrels from the U.S.; by 1893, American imports had grown 60\%, to 2,209,619 barrels; while Russian imports, by contrast, fell 5.6\%, to 743,094 barrels.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{114} Alekperov, \textit{Oil of Russia}, 134.

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 133.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
Russia was not only limited to European markets; by the turn of the century it was shipping significant amounts of oil to other destinations. In 1897, 59% of Russian exports went to Europe, and 39% went to Asia.\(^{118}\) In 1900, European markets received 6.3 million barrels of Russian oil through the Black Sea. Asia, principally China, received 7.3 million barrels via the Suez Canal.\(^{119}\) By the 1890s, Marcus Samuel’s Shell transportation company began transporting Russian oil and openly challenged Standard Oil and other American companies on global markets.\(^{120}\)

Consequently, the Russian government continued its policy of supporting local oil industries, especially Branobel, as a domestic response to increasing pressure from Rockefeller and Standard Oil in European markets.\(^{121}\) This included a continual line of credit of 2 million rubles at 7.5% interest, starting in 1883 and continuing “through the first decade after 1900.”\(^{122}\) Ultimately, an increase in the efficiency of international shipping, principally developed by Shell Transportation then Royal Dutch Shell, would allow Baku’s industry to compete on an international scale with Standard Oil.\(^{123}\)

Infrastructure played a crucial role in Baku’s development. While plans for a Baku-Batumi pipeline had been floated since the 1870s, lobbying by smaller companies for a more


\(^{119}\) Yergin, *The Prize*, 66-68, 115. Oil exports through the Suez were initially dominated by the Rothschild family through oil tankers controlled by Marcus Samuel. By 1900, the Rothschild Family and Samuel’s Shell transportation company controlled over half of Russian oil exports.

\(^{120}\) Ibid.

\(^{121}\) Fursenko, *The Battle for Oil*, 10-12.

\(^{122}\) Ibid., *The Battle for Oil*, 12.

\(^{123}\) Yergin, *The Prize*, 67.
restrictive supply continually delayed the project.\textsuperscript{124} Although a rail line linked Baku to Batumi since 1883, the lack of a major pipeline limited the industry’s ability to reach European markets. By 1906, after decades of delays and disagreement between the major oil companies in Baku, the Baku-Batumi kerosene pipeline was finally completed. The pipeline opened a route for kerosene that crossed Transcaucasia, and, by doing so, created an immediate connection between Baku and the Black Sea. This route also opened up the Mediterranean, a route that previously had been unviable. Prior to the pipeline, kerosene and other products would either have to be sent by train north into the heart of the Russian Empire or shipped across the Caspian Sea to Astrakhan to reach markets in the Russian Empire or Europe.\textsuperscript{125}

The pipeline, while it would not eliminate these alternative routes, would instead add an additional route for kerosene that was vastly more cost and time efficient.\textsuperscript{126} In addition, the pipeline helped promote the expansion of fractional refinement of crude in Baku, thereby providing a ready conduit for more efficient profit-taking by allowing companies in Baku to flood European markets directly with refined kerosene.

For petroleum producers, many heavily invested in kerosene production, this expansion of infrastructure opened up a more direct route to the Black Sea and, by extension, major international markets in the Black Sea, the Mediterranean, parts of the Danube, and eventually Asia.\textsuperscript{127} The construction of the pipeline allowed for massive efficiencies in transport and for

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{124} McKay, “Baku Oil and Transcaucasian Pipelines,” 604-608.
\item \textsuperscript{125} Movsumzade, “The Beginning of Petroleum Transportation in Russia,” 158, 161.
\item \textsuperscript{126} McKay, “Baku Oil and Transcaucasian Pipelines,” 609.
\item \textsuperscript{127} By the 1880s, almost all of the oil-producing needs of the Austro-Hungarian Empire were being supplied by fields in Galicia.
\end{itemize}
increases in supply from Baku to meet growing demand in Europe and Asia.  

This expansion would only be further enhanced as naval and merchant marine vessels switched from coal to oil-powered boilers. In addition, the partial construction of the pipeline to Khashuri coincided with a period when production surged dramatically, from 207.2 million poods in 1887 to 706.3 million poods in 1901, which in turn created an expansion in exports, from 43.9 million poods in 1887 to 95.1 million poods in 1900. This expansion was likely due to increased supply efficiency, because fields that were previously accessible but not accessed were increasingly utilized.

The pipeline provided a cost-effective method for companies invested in Baku to export kerosene to the Black Sea and thus provided access to European markets—which, until the First World War, had linked Baku with Western Europe. Therefore, through the creation of a pipeline, the government helped establish a sustainable energy corridor that connected Baku and therefore Transcaucasia to the market system of Europe, but it was also a corridor that could easily be cut off by the whims of any government that controlled the Dardanelles. This vulnerability would be demonstrated by the events of the First World War. Black Sea trade lanes,

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128 McKay, “Baku Oil and Transcaucasian Pipelines,” 609-610.


125 McKay, “Baku Oil and Transcaucasian Pipelines,” 612.
which had once accounted for 26.3 percent of total exports, including nearly half of petrochemical exports, were entirely cut off in 1915 by the Ottomans.  

By the turn of the century, as the oil industry was at its peak, Russian production continued to expand, swelled by French and British investments. In 1887, the Rothschild family, a major Parisian banking house, purchased the Caspian-Black Sea Commercial and Industrial Company for 1.5 million rubles and soon thereafter became a second major force in Baku’s oil industry, after Branobel, replacing the Baku Oil Company. By the 1890s, the Rothschild Company and Branobel regularly competed not only with each other but also with Standard Oil for access to European markets. Much of this competition was fierce; Branobel was forced to seek German financing due to being frozen out of Parisian credit markets. Furthermore, by 1896, British investment in the form of Shell Oil gained its own foothold in the Baku market, which, by 1900, was soon followed by a flood of British investment in Baku. During the winter of 1901-1902, Standard Oil attempted to gain entry in Russian markets, which was unsuccessful. However, the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904 and the subsequent outbreak out of the 1905 Revolution deeply undermined the advances the industry made in the previous decade and would set the stage for the stagnation that the industry would experience for the next fifteen years.

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132 Ronald Bobroff, Roads to Glory: Late Imperial Russia and the Turkish Straits (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 4.

133 Fursenko, The Battle for Oil, 17.

134 Tolf, Russian Rockefellers, 126-127.

135 Fursenko, The Battle for Oil, 53, 66.

136 Ibid., 98-99.
According to Alekperov, damage from the events of 1905 was extensive:

We have established that the ruffians systematically engaged in ruining wells by throwing various objects down the shafts. . . . The 1,429 burned production derricks had a daily June output of 920,924 poods [110,592 barrels] or 58.1% of the total daily output. . . . The cost of the burned derricks based on the above evaluation has been put at 12,066,000 rubles, in addition to which workshops valued at 1,757,500 rubles were burned and destroyed, as well as boiler rooms worth 1,141,400 rubles, housing worth 2,719,600 rubles, 5,896,861 poods [708,142 barrels] of oil reserves worth an average of 23 kopecks per pood, or 1,356,300 rubles. The total is 25,478,300 rubles . . . the oil industry currently needs capital of at least 40 million rubles.137

Due to these events, production fell precipitously from 10.7 million metric tons in 1904 to 7.4 million metric tons in 1905.138 Moreover, due to low industrial standards from 1907 to 1909, over 5,600 industrial accidents occurred to Baku’s workers: 11.2 injuries per 100 workers out of a total 50,000 workers in the industry.139 This damage and the overall danger of the industry itself would lead to continued tension between the management of Baku’s oil companies and its employees, as well as the unions and political parties that backed those workers.

137 Alekperov, *Oil of Russia*, 136.
139 Alekperov, *Oil of Russia*, 138.
4. The Urban Development of Modern Baku

Despite the considerable expansion of Baku’s oil industry during the late-nineteenth century and the complications of the 1905 Revolution, it was during the early twentieth-century that the full force of the world’s oil markets was finally felt by Baku. It was at this point that the development and then commercialization of the ICE would revolutionize early, mechanized warfare—a shift that would coincide with the pre-existing use of fuel oil and ICEs for civilian transportation. Petroleum would become essential for both military and commercial purposes, and this need would transform it from a useful industrial product to a strategic resource.

The eventual struggle over the resources of Baku was directly tied to application of investment in the infrastructure necessary to utilize the potential wealth under the city. It would mean the recruitment of a working population that was necessary to build and maintain that infrastructure and fully extract the potential resources that were hidden under the city—a population that would develop its own independent social, political, and security structures that would guide the fate of the city beyond the control of either the oil companies or the central government.

In this context, the economic, political, and social relations of Baku were guided by the artifice of the urban environment itself and its singular purpose of resource extraction. The manner of how the urban environment itself was constructed—in particular the lack of housing, the proximity of this housing to the fields, and the rapid changes in population—eventually inspired material conditions that would lead, in part, to labor disruptions and growing political
division. In this sense, the future political life of the city was tied to its economic development.

Material conditions of the city were not the only factor to affect the labor and social dynamics of Baku. By the late nineteenth century, reconfiguration of the city around its burgeoning oil industry also created the infrastructure for a growing intellectual environment through a considerable expansion of education and literacy. This included the creation of primary schools and many of the first secondary schools in the Eastern Caucasus. While Baku’s intellectual sphere would become Balkanized along linguistic lines between the Armenian, Azerbaijan, and Russian-speaking communities after 1900, it also was undoubtedly affected by the revolutionary awakening happening in the rest of the Russian Empire at the turn of the twentieth century. This awakening, in turn, would lead to the formation of an Azerbaijani self-determination movement in the city itself and cultivate a political culture that reflected much of the party politics of the rest of urbanized Russia.

For Azerbaijanis, Baku represented the first modern urban center in Northern Azerbaijan, and its growth helped establish an educated class of ethnic Azerbaijani intellectuals with the first expressions of Azerbaijani language for mass consumption. By the 1870s, the first newspapers in Azerbaijani were formed, and by the early 1900s, publications had expanded to include a large number of political newspapers, such as Molla-Nesreddin, Təraqqiq, Fuyuzat, and Israd. In

———. ARDTA, f. 798, op.1, d. 655. This is exemplified by demands by Branobel’s workers for subsidized housing and higher salaries.

141 This included both a robust Menshevik and Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, as well as the Socialist Revolutionary Party.

addition, by the 1900s, many political parties formed around the newly constructed ethnic identities in Baku. The development of an infrastructure for education in and around Baku was a powerful force in its social maturation, and greatly accelerated literacy in the city.\footnote{In particular, the establishment of the Baku Polytechnicum in 1887 would mark a critical turning point for education in Baku by providing not only its first institution of higher education but also a ready source of engineers for the local oil industry.}

This intellectual and political development was not detached from the consolidation of ethnic identity in the rest of Transcaucasia; rather, it was part of an intellectual and political awakening happening across the rest of the Russian Empire. In addition to newspapers in Azerbaijani, Baku had multiple Russian language and Armenian newspapers, with political leanings ranging from Bolshevik sympathetic papers, such as \textit{Bakinskii Rabochii} [Baku Workers], to more liberal-leaning papers, such as \textit{Baku}. Baku not only became a cosmopolitan urban center; it brought together different ethnic groups in a single space and created the conditions for parties rooted in ethnic particularism. As shown by the growth of the RSDLP (Russian Social Democratic Labor Party), there were also inter-ethnic political coalitions that stretched across the barrier of ethnic identity and which further complicated the political environment of Baku during 1917 and 1918.

Due to the circumstances, the formation of identity and the rise of a class of educated politicians, intellectuals, and activists in Baku were, in reality, unpredictable. While many of the mechanics that brought these processes together were fundamentally economic in origin, they were autonomous from the industry that brought people to the city in the first place. While the newspapers and parties that would form the lifeblood of political life in Baku were in part generated by the material conditions that led to the creation of city itself, they were uncontrollable by either political parties or the imperial government, especially after the 1905
revolution. Eventually, a wide variety of parties across the political spectrum (alongside growing dissent in Tsarist Russia) would splinter local politics in Baku. Divergent political philosophies along with broad divisions over identity would, in turn, precipitate the splintering of political cooperation in Baku among the city’s working class.\(^\text{144}\)

While much of the major impetus of the oil industry that would create modern Baku originated from a variety of both foreign and Russian national interests, the singularly robust nature of the interests of the Nobel family in the region would have long-term repercussions for much of the population. Branobel itself would dictate much of the future of the industry in Baku. Moreover, when workers regularly negotiated with Branobel for wage increases and subsidized housing, they were dealing with a company that had enough resources to outwait their demands. This is especially the case after 1908, when a decline in oil prices caused mass dysfunction across the industry as companies (including Branobel) continued to cut back on investment.\(^\text{145}\)

From 1904 to 1907, prices for basic food stuffs surged 30% for flour, 36% for meat, and 72% for potatoes, adding additional pressure on workers who not only struggled to house themselves but feed themselves as well.\(^\text{146}\)


\(^{145}\) Ronald Suny, “A Journeyman for the Revolution: Stalin and the Labour Movement in Baku, June 1907 – May 1908,” *Soviet Studies* 23, no. 3 (1972): 391-392. International prices fell from $0.72 (or $19 in 2013 dollars) a barrel in 1907 to $0.61 (or $15.44 in 2013 dollars) in 1910. This drop in prices coincided with a substantial increase in supply in the oil market from 1900 to 1910, particularly in the United States.

\(^{146}\) Yuri Larin, *Rabochie Neftyanogo Dela [Oil Worker Affairs]* (Moscow: F.I.A. Burch, 1909), 58.
The development of organized labor structures in Baku, including unions and *artels*, was necessary for workers to negotiate effectively with the wide variety of oil companies that dominated Baku. The development of these unions and other labor organizations would also mean the indirect formation of social structures outside of the industry, largely inspired by unmet demand for affordable housing. This was in part because much of the recruiting by the Nobel Brothers and other companies was limited in its long-term planning, especially for housing its rapidly expanded work force, including large numbers of new workers from Persia. Furthermore, long-term budget allowances by those companies allowed little flexibility in the construction of new housing. Branobel and other companies had to readjust their budgets to meet these new demands, but often these readjustments still did not meet the needs of their growing workforce. By 1916, the pressure for wages to match basic necessities increased during the First World War, and workers at Branobel demanded that their wages match at least that of soldiers: 65 rubles per month.148

After 1905, Branobel was forced to recognize the labor strife created by the labor mobility they depended on. While capital and labor mobility was fluid, the process of negotiating the effects of that labor fluidity continued to be an issue at the heart of much of the social turmoil occurring in Baku at the turn of the century. Consequently, as an outgrowth of this tension, regular labor disturbances, many of them supported by the Marxist Dashnak party and RSDLP, would be a continual matter of concern for the private enterprises that worked the fields and for labor negotiations by the Nobel Brothers and other major companies heavily invested in Baku. In

147 An *artel* is a traditional Russian worker cooperative.

due course, after the fall of oil prices in 1908, stagnant wages would become a decisive factor for the future of the city as labor strife led to further radicalization.\footnote{ARDTA, f. 798, op.1, d. 545, l. 34.}

Evidence of this impact is illustrated by the continual labor disputes and protests during the period as well as the increasingly strained negotiations by Branobel and other companies with their increasingly organized workers.\footnote{Ibid., f. 798, op.1, d. 512, l. 3. These demands included a 15-hour maximum work-day and fur coats for watchmen during the winter.} These negotiations would often fail because of a lack of common ground, either by reluctance on the part of the companies to greatly increase their costs of production by offering higher wages and affordable housing or by the workers themselves after being radicalized, making negotiations impossible. By 1906, the increased radicalization of the workers, according to Branobel, helped to continue to stifle negotiations.\footnote{Ibid., f. 798, op.1, d. 545, l. 34.} Nevertheless, despite the repeated labor strikes of this period, production continued even as shallow fields were fully exploited and overall supply declined. However, as construction slowed, due to a combination of already completed infrastructure and steadily declining oil supply, private demand for workers plummeted. Furthermore, workers were placed under an increasing amount of economic pressure as a saturated labor market (especially after the 1908 oil crash) reduced their negotiating position with major enterprises.\footnote{Rice, “Party Rivalry in the Caucasus,” 242.} These negotiations did not bring a resolution to the workers’ growing anger at the substandard quality of living in the “Black City” of Baku.

The eventual outcome of this process would lead to enormous increases in both production and the expansion of its primary method of transit. However, it also further
complicated how the entire labor system of Baku would function as both prices and production plateaued after 1901. By the 1900s, the population of Baku exploded as a working force from across the Russian Empire and Persia converged on it.\textsuperscript{153} Nevertheless, by looking at comparable statistics during the late nineteenth century and more detailed ones available during the early twentieth century, it is fair to say that, in the span of several decades, Baku had become evidently cosmopolitan in terms of ethnicity.\textsuperscript{154}

**Table 1.4: Baku Census, 1886-1913\textsuperscript{155}**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Azerbaijanis</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Armenians</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Russian</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>86,611</td>
<td>37,530</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>24,490</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>21,390</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>111,904</td>
<td>40,341</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>19,099</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>37,399</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>155,876</td>
<td>44,257</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26,151</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>59,955</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>214,672</td>
<td>45,962</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>41,680</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>76,288</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The arrival of a large and varied working population did not necessarily lead to significant long-term urban planning; major drilling and refining companies, which numbered in the dozens, hired workers for their own needs from a growing pool of migrants from a variety of different locations. These migrants, in turn, would routinely struggle to find adequate housing near the fields, and jobs would be in constant shortage as construction continually lagged behind

\textsuperscript{153} Tscentral’nyi statisticheskii komitet [Central Statistical Committee], *Pervaia vseobshchaia perepis’* [First General Census], Table 13.

\textsuperscript{154} Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, 32.

\textsuperscript{155} Tscentral’nyi statisticheskii komitet [Central Statistical Committee], *Pervaia vseobshchaia perepis’* [First General Census], Table 13. Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, 32.
labor demand through the turn of the century. While Branobel would eventually begin subsidizing the construction of their workers’ housing, there still remained significant housing shortages.

Moreover, the industry itself recruited almost entirely from men, and while it initially consisted of mostly single men before 1900, as Baku grew, these economic migrants also included significant numbers of married men. These married men were often separated from their families due to the chaotic and often dangerous environment that made up industrialized Baku, and, like much of the present-day developing world, they would monetarily support their families away from home. Due to this arrangement, the city’s demographics reflected this gender imbalance in migrant workers, and Baku was inundated with ostensibly “single” male workers. This also correlated with the rise of vices, such as increased alcohol consumption and prostitution, including large numbers of both Christian and (more rarely) Muslim prostitutes.

By the early twentieth century, the city had, by then, taken on the character of a more traditional urban setting, and it contained more of a mixed population, including an increasing number of workers with their own families. This demographic reconfiguration was likely due to increasing numbers of older workers, which usually correlated with higher pay levels and

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156 ARDTA, f. 798, op.1, d. 504 & 512. These files include a compilation of worker demands to Branobel from 1905 to 1906.

157 Ibid., f. 798, op.1, d. 512, l.3


159 Robert D. Crews, For Prophet and Tsar (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 64.

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therefore more economic stability. Eventually, by the 1910s, as more families moved to and formed within Baku, the city took on the character of a more traditional city. Moreover, the actual physical structure of Baku also changed during this period, and a modern central-business district grew up northeast of the old Persianate city. Surrounding this new central district stood newly constructed, one to two story wooden and brick structures that would make up worker housing in new dormitory districts. Beyond these housing districts were the oil fields themselves, which often directly abutted residential areas.

5. Environmental Effects

The continued expansion of the industry had real environmental costs to the residents of Baku and the ecology of areas surrounding the fields. Much of the worker housing was surrounded by the derricks and factories that made up the industry’s production infrastructure, and, unavoidably, raw crude and solvents would routinely leak into the grounds surrounding the fields. Furthermore, the air was clouded with particulate matter from burn off from refining plants or oil fires. As in most of the Russian Empire (if not most of the industrial world of that period), the oil industry had barely any environmental regulations, and while environmental data is unavailable from this period, there were undoubtedly extensive environmental effects from both Baku’s drilling and its extensive number of petrochemical factories. From eyewitness reports recorded at that time, the close proximity of the industry with the population, sometimes

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160 Stopani, Neftepromyshlennyi rabochii [Oil Workers], 28-29.
only several hundred feet apart, had a dramatically deleterious effect through soil, air, and water contamination.\footnote{161}

The rapid expansion of industry in such a compact area, especially one such as the oil industry, had massive environmental and ecological repercussions.\footnote{162} The first “eco-disaster film” in history could be said to be a short film shot in 1896 by the Lumièr brothers showing the immense devastation caused by a localized oil fire on the outskirts of Baku.\footnote{163} The film, which showed a hellish landscape filled with “rising flames and smoke” clouding the towering oil derricks that made up much of the countryside surrounding the city, communicated to the audience of that era not only the impressive engineering feat that was Baku and its fields, but the profound environmental dangers associated with the industry.\footnote{164}

Apart from the impressive scale of the conflagration, the fire itself is framed as a relatively ordinary event by Abraham V.W. Jackson in his memoirs:

A pall of smoke hangs its heavy drapery over the ‘Black Town’ in the oil section on the eastern and northern outskirts of the city. Forests of wooden and iron pyramidal towers serrate the horizon as one looks over the petroleum belt of Balakhany, Sabunchy, and Romany to the north, or over Bibi-Eibat (Bibi-Heybat) on the south. At times lurid flames burst into the sky if a conflagration takes place in one of these inflammable sources, and

\begin{flushright}
\footnote{161} Abraham V. W. Jackson, \textit{From Constantinople to the Home of Omar Khayyam} (Piscataway, New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2002 [1911]), 24-28. Santiago, in \textit{The Ecology of Oil}, 123-133, documents similar high levels of ground, water, and air pollution existing in the fields surrounding Tampico, Mexico.\footnote{162} Almost the entirety of Baku’s oil industry was located within ten miles of the city center.\footnote{163} Robin Murray and Joseph K Heumann, “The First Eco-Disaster Film?” \textit{Film Quarterly} 59, no. 3 (2006): 26.\footnote{164} Ibid.\end{flushright}
then there is danger that the titan torch may destroy everything in its radius, engulfing it in a veritable holocaust of flame.\textsuperscript{165}

Undoubtedly, oil fires were a frequent event in the industry during that period, and the acrid smoke formed by them affected the overall air quality of the surrounding area. In addition, since the fields were all located within a couple of kilometers of central Baku and directly bordered processing plants and the workers within them, the city’s inhabitants were routinely affected by smoke emitted from the fires.\textsuperscript{166} Today, we know that such oil fires not only cause an irritating if not dangerous smoke, but they release dangerous amounts of toxic gases and industrial contaminants in their ash. While the health effects of prolonged smoke inhalation may take years to become fully present, it is without doubt that major portions of the population of Baku must have been affected, considering the proximity of the fires and the fields to the city itself.

The environmental conditions of the industry were, as expected, extremely hazardous, with little attempt to minimize its damage; this included not only outbreaks of fire but the daily saturation of the water table with raw crude as well as tar from previously refined petrochemicals. As damaging as this process was, contemporary observers rarely acknowledged or were able to acknowledge its effect. The general expectation from that period was that, if the water was still drinkable, there were little other possible dangers.\textsuperscript{167} These expectations are most likely based on a lack of knowledge of what long-term exposure to contaminated water would have on the population and its wellbeing. Contemporary Azerbaijan is still widely criticized for ongoing environmental and health hazards from its oil and gas industry over a century later,

\textsuperscript{165} Jackson, \textit{From Constantinople}, 26.

\textsuperscript{166} Murray and Heumann, “The First Eco-Disaster,” 43.

\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., 45-46.
especially the possibility of elevated rates of cancer and respiratory diseases.\textsuperscript{168} For the more vulnerable parts of the population, these impacts may have greatly affected their quality of life, and likely their long-term life expectancy as well.

Our scientific knowledge of the ultimate effects that oil production and refining has on populations has increased—as has our ability to identify the long-term medical and psychological effects of environmental devastation. However, the long-term social impact of these issues can be more difficult to fully assess. While we have some knowledge of many of the spontaneous circumstances of violence and destruction that occurred in Baku, a true medical survey of the population does exist. Even if full causality between catastrophic ecological effect and civic unrest is difficult to prove, visual and anecdotal evidence frame our understanding of how an industry can (if not must) affect its surroundings.

6. Ethnicity

Beyond environmental dangers, the economic, social, and political structures that developed within the city by the early twentieth century became stressed by a combination of interlocking factors. First, there was a massive demographic shift in the city itself as other ethnicities—specifically Armenians and Russians—moved into Baku. These migrants quickly overcame (demographically) the original, largely Azerbaijani natives who had made up the majority of the population of the walled old city dating from antiquity.\textsuperscript{169} While Azerbaijanis themselves did not comprise the entire pre-industrialized population of Baku, the arrival of


\textsuperscript{169} “Rospis’ gorodam” [List of Cities], 305-307.
masses of workers from Iran and from across the rest of Transcaucasia and the Russian Empire over time led to deepening social and political fissures, especially between the Azerbaijani and Armenian population. This rift may have been initially caused by ethnic pogroms occurring in the Ottoman Empire in the mid-1890s that pitted the two ethnic communities against each other as news of the violence spread to Baku.  

In turn, this demographic shift would significantly influence the political makeup of Baku, specifically the rising influence of the socialist and ethnically Armenian Dashnak party and the growing strength of the radical RSDLP. By 1905, the likelihood of mass violence only increased as the rapidly building political and economic pressures in Baku co-aligned with its citizens’ unhappiness with the political state of the Russian Empire. As the lines hardened between workers and their employers across the Russian Empire, it was inevitable there would be a fundamental breakdown in the delicate balance between industrial prosperity and growing resentment that had also been building in Baku.

Looking at the degree of violence that affected Baku, it is hard not to see the danger this would present to the oil industry. During the 1905 revolution, for instance, violence, primarily between the Armenian and Azerbaijani populations, raged across Baku, damaging some of the industry, including wells that had been set ablaze during the fighting.  

According to Luigi Villari, an Italian traveler and historian present during the aftermath, “On entering the first of these a most appalling scene of destruction met my eyes. Out of the derricks of Bibi Eybat,  

170 Jäckh Ernst, *Der aufsteigende Halbmond: auf dem Weg zum Deutschtürkischen Bündnis* [Ascending Crescent: on the Way to the German-Turkish Alliance] (Stuttgart and Berlin: Deutsche Verlags-anstalt, 1916), 139.

had been destroyed, and the majority of the other buildings were heaps of black ruins.” As riots surged across the city, roaming mobs from the “Black City” fought each other in the streets. The ultimate result of this violence was an impressive number of causalities from multiple segments of the population. By February 1905, over 400 Armenians and Azerbaijanis died in the fighting.

It was at this point that the full extent of the industry’s influence on the social and political dynamics of the region became more noticeable. The issue at stake, as they saw it (and perhaps felt most acutely by Alexander Stopani, a RSDLP—then Bolshevik-supporting—activist), was the daily exploitation of workers—as well as the massive rents that were being collected from the fields by private enterprises in Baku. While by 1906 the industry had expanded to 50,000 workers out of a population of over 155,000, the process of drilling and refining in Baku remained dangerous and exhausting work, and as construction and production slowed during a sharp downturn of oil prices in 1908-1909, the ability of the workers to present a united front against their employees withered away. Moreover, the risks of—and exploitation by—the industry were significant enough that they spurred the collection of robust statistical surveys of households by Stopani and others. In this data, certain obvious issues are increasingly prevalent: significant differences in pay versus profit-taking, large numbers of work-related accidents, and increasing divergences in pay based on ethnicity.

172 Ibid., 205-206.
173 Ibid., 203.
174 Rice, “Party Rivalry in the Caucasus,” 242-243. A major consequence of falling prices was near complete dismantlement of the UOW, a major setback for the Bolshevik faction of the RSDLP.
175 Stopani, *Neftepromyshlennyi rabochii* [Oil Workers], 28-29.
In consideration of these facts, there is little doubt that the spread of unionism among the
workers of Baku and the rising political participation of workers in the oil industry would have a
profound impact on how different communities interacted. Looking at employment statistics
from across the industry in 1908, it is clear that the wide variety of ethnic make-up of the
working class in this pre-revolutionary period would have clear consequences for the rapid
reorganization of politics in the city, especially because there was considerable divergence of
party politics based on the question of ethnic identity, as shown by the rise of the Himmät,
Azerbaijan nationalist Müsavat, and Dashnak parties, respectively.\(^{176}\) There remained the open
question of how those radicalized workers would fit into the future social structure of the city
itself.

Industrialization also had indirect effects on the political process, leading to mass
migration of workers from a variety of localities but also increasingly radicalizing them due to
poor working conditions, low pay, and high housing and living expenses. Connecting this
radicalization with increasing violence, though, requires some consideration of labor politics,
specifically because the intervening issue of identity routinely cuts between otherwise similar
groups of workers. While there may be common complaints across ethnic divides, in Baku this
did not necessarily mean there was common cause between unions aligned with political parties.

The outcome of this dissension was a hardening of political blocs based largely around
ethnicity, and, from 1905 onward, the city had become increasingly fractionalized on an ethnic
and political basis, especially between the Azerbaijani and the Armenian populations. At times,

\(^{176}\) Ibid., 4-5. Of 2,244 workers surveyed by Stopani, 902 (40.2%) came from European
destinations; a similar number, 912 (40.6%), came from portions of Transcaucasia (including Baku); and
412 (18.8%) came from international destinations, primarily Northern Persia.
these interests aligned themselves: for example, recruitment of Armenian workers into leftist, ethnically Armenian-focused parties, such as the Dashnaks, which in turn spurred the development of Azerbaijani-aligned party organizations, such as the Himmät and Mūsavat Party.

This process saw the most dramatic fissure before 1918, during the events of 1905, when violence spread across the streets of Baku.¹⁷⁷ Baku was far from alone in this sort of violence. Ukraine experienced similar strife, especially in its pogroms against Jewish residents in Odessa and Yuzovka/Donetsk, and similar pogroms occurred across the rest of European portions of the Russian Empire. However, the violent events of 1905 were not an aberration in the case of Baku, but one of a series of outlets of anger that surged across the Russian Empire during the same period.¹⁷⁸ As history would eventually play itself out, the ultimate result of inter-ethnic violence in Baku would have a much broader part to play in the economic and political life of Baku—specifically in its future perceptions of both its economic and geopolitical value. Although there was considerable loss of life in Odessa and other cities across the Ukraine and the rest of the Russian Empire, in Baku, the consequences of this violence would play itself out in a far more critical fashion in terms of material and geopolitical weight, especially during the events of the Russian Civil War.

The events of 1905 in Baku itself and across Russia hardened the ethnic and political divides that had already been forming, in part due to the expansion of urban centers caused by the end of serfdom. That this tension was fueled by the mass migration of former serfs from the rest of the Russian Empire, a situation further complicated by the forced movement of Jews

¹⁷⁷ Swietochowski, Russian Azerbaijan, 39-41.

during the pogroms of Alexander III from across Russia to western and on average more industrialized portions of the Russian Empire, specifically Poland and Eastern Ukraine. These mass movements provided a ready supply of workers for an already saturated industry. As a percentage of the population, this movement in the rest of the Empire was not nearly as large as that in Baku itself, which grew multiple times in the space of decades.

7. Baku in a Comparative Context

This progressively expansive multiethnic brew would be a key facet of Baku, and Baku in many ways resembled the other multicultural cities of the Russian Empire. Indeed, the cities of Donetsk or Yuzovka in Eastern Ukraine provide a useful comparison by which to measure Baku against other industrial centers in the rest of the Empire during that time, for they also experienced similar pressures. Yuzovka, at the turn of the twentieth century, was, like Baku, a relatively multicultural city highly dependent on a single major industry: coal. In the case of Yuzovka, the relative dominance of ethnic Russians and Ukrainians easily overshadowed the city’s Jewish population, demographically, which comprised only 11.5% of its population.\(^\text{179}\)

The Jewish population of Yuzovka was far more easily overwhelmed by their opponents than either the Armenian or the Azerbaijani population was in Baku. This is likely because Russians and Russian-speaking Ukrainians made up such a vast majority of the population in Yuzovka.

When anti-Semitic riots broke out in central Yuzovka in fall of 1905, the Jewish population of the city had nowhere to turn. In the midst of this outbreak of chaos, a pogrom was devastating the city’s Jewish ghetto. This event was contemporaneous with rioting in Baku—and

\(^{179}\) Kuromiya, *Freedom and Terror in the Donbas*, 45.
to a similar degree, both in its physical and human devastation.\(^{180}\) However, in comparison to Baku, the Jews of Yuzovka, unlike the natives of Transcaucasia living in Baku, were never able to form an independent political faction or muster strongly-armed supporters to back them when riots broke out. In terms of sheer numbers and political influence, the Jews of Yuzovka were significantly more isolated than the Azerbaijanis, Armenians, and Georgians of Baku—all of whom had a neighboring ethnic homeland to call upon.

This difference in relative demographics is a clear point of contrast between the nature of the riots in both cities and much of the industrial strife that occurred around that period in Ukraine and the Central portions of Russia. In the case of Baku, there was no true ethnic majority, and while both Armenian and Azerbaijani rioters contested control over the same urban space, neither one could claim complete ownership in the way that Russian speakers could in Yuzovka. In comparison, the majority of Yuzovka’s population was Slavic and Orthodox Christian, and the Jewish population was such a smaller minority (between 10-11% of the population) that it had no ability to effectively resist the pogroms targeted against it.

There are parallels between the two cities, both in the often-chaotic industrialized conditions of each city during 1905 and the violence that correlated with those conditions. According to Kuromiya, “in 1905 many of the participants in both strikes and uprisings and pogroms were [also] workers;” furthermore, the ethnic and religious divisions that had struck during Yuzovka in 1905 would make an indelible impression on the city—which, like the violence in Baku, was difficult to recover from.\(^{181}\) Ultimately, there is a commonality in both the


\(^{181}\) Kuromiya, *Freedom and Terror in the Donbas*, 62.
strain of industrialization and the mass outlet of violence and unrest that 1905 represented that could be found in both cities. It was in relatively small, commodity-focused cities and industrial areas that this unrest was most likely felt the strongest, especially in cities that had seen recent large movements of ethnically diverse migrant workers and a considerable expansion of population. This was especially the case for Baku in comparison to other industrializing Russian cities.

8. Conclusion

With common outbreaks of violence across the Empire throughout 1917, the central government in Petrograd became progressively estranged from the rapidly evolving political and social environment in Baku and other cities in Transcaucasia. For all intents and purposes, this detachment was based on territorial distance as well as the rapidly diverging political cultures and demographics of Baku. Baku was situated on the frontier of the Russian Empire, and much of the territory immediately surrounding it in the Eastern Caucasus remained relatively underdeveloped compared to Baku, which was more isolated than most of the other industrialized portions of the Empire.

The political culture of Baku itself was not completely detached from the social and political zeitgeist in the core of the Empire and other urbanized portions of Transcaucasia. Transcaucasia, much like the European portions of the Russian Empire, had a growing and distinct urban-rural divide that would be exemplified in future political divides between those in the city of Baku and those in the rural populations of Baku’s hinterlands—those populations,
according to Bruce Grant, whose “long-standing rural concerns were not only not being addressed . . . they rarely registered unless [the concerns] were communicated by rebellion.”

Alongside this urban-rural division, the fundamental shifts in ethnic and political identity that took place in Baku were highly localized in their nature. This physical detachment would highlight the difficulty the Tsar and his government would have in securing and stabilizing the critical fringe of his Russian Empire while, simultaneously, revolutionary fervor was building outside his own door. If the Tsar or the Provisional Government could not hold Petrograd, it is natural to assume their authority in Baku and the rest of Transcaucasia would crumble at an even faster rate.

However, Baku was better positioned in terms of geography and industrial infrastructure than many other cities in the rest of the Russian Empire during the war and its direct aftermath. While the eventual chaos to come would stretch that infrastructure to the limit across 1918, the need for the oil industry to stay active in Baku was too important for the enterprises invested in the industry and the governments that controlled it, including the Bolsheviks, the Centro-Caspian Directorate, and (after September) the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan. Through the war and its aftermath, Baku’s oil industry only completely stalled twice, in March and September of 1918. Nevertheless, the sustainability of the industry was threatened by the bubbling pressures of factional politics and the lack of civil society uniting the city.

While Baku as an economic entity functioned efficiently through much of the early twentieth century, and enjoyed a blossoming and increasingly westernized cultural life in its center as well, this lifestyle and the infrastructure that supported it were built on critically

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unstable social and political foundations. By 1917, it was clear that political life would become increasingly radicalized and would maintain the escalating tempo of disharmony it had before the war. This radicalization would be reflected in both continued worker unrest and political infighting among major parties. Furthermore, this radicalization would reflect contemporary political movements in the rest of the Russian Empire and lead to heightened ethnic tensions in Baku, which did not have a dominant identity or political party that would force a consensus.  

Of course, even before the war started, the stage had largely been set for much of the internal turmoil that would come during the late war and post-war period. Unrest in Baku after the war can not only be connected to broad divergences in wages and/or the overall difficulty of the working conditions themselves, but to the aforementioned interlocking factors that guided Baku’s political development. Nevertheless, a strict material link does not fully explain the entire situation in Baku, even when compared with other industrial cities in the Russian Empire and the periodic violence that broke out within them. In Baku, there were a variety of cultural, political, and geopolitical factors that were distinctive to the city itself. These included a combination of its ethnic and religious diversity of the city, the radical and diverse nature of its politics, as well as the strategic potential of the oil under the city. More importantly, there are distinct social differences in the case of Baku, primarily the degree of ethnic pluralism and the relatively mobile nature of its workforce.

Together, these elements produced a unique if not potentially volatile situation; however, the nature of the oil industry itself only allowed limited flexibility in addressing either the circumstances of the working population or its direct effects on the city. The economic necessities of the oil industry required companies to keep costs low, including wages, and

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minimize the amount of spending on worker facilities, such as housing, in order to allow companies to maximize profits from their ventures. Ultimately, while it was logical for enterprises to lower costs and maximize profit taking, the result of these decisions proved to be unpredictable, and it can be argued that they may have contributed considerably to political division within the city.

In particular, Branobel fought bitterly with unions over the issue of affordable housing, while the issue of wages went largely unaddressed. In turn, while some effort was made to address these complaints, local politics in Baku continued to only further radicalize after 1905, and with this radicalization came a greater gulf between the demands of workers and their representatives in local political parties or unions and the industry itself. In particular, the RSDLP gained politically because there was an abundant lack of consensus between workers and their employers. Consequently, the possibility after 1905 of a long-term negotiated settlement only continued to diminish.

As in much of the rest of the Russian Empire, there were minimal labor protections in Baku, and despite remedial efforts offered by private enterprises, there was little success in their attempts to de-radicalize Baku’s working class through negotiation, as shown by attempts by Branobel to defuse worker unrest. This outcome was due in part to increasing radicalization

184 ARDTA, f. 798, op.1, d. 512, l.3. As shown in recently accessed Branobel files on worker housing, Branobel put a priority on minimizing costs.

185 Ibid. This is particularly apparent by the lack of common ground between the demands of the RSDLP and Branobel on the issues of wages and housing.

186 Ibid., f. 798, op.1, d. 514.

187 Ibid., f. 798, op.1, d. 655.

that was happening inside the city, but it was also deeply influenced by the increasing strength of the RSDLP and its more radical political factions in the rest of the Russian Empire. These parallels were not enough to satisfy the increasingly radicalized political factions in the city, especially the RSDLP, which was seen as a genuine threat to not only Branobel’s operations but to all other major private enterprises in the city.

Despite the reported threat presented by the RSDLP, neither Branobel nor other manufacturers were able to fully stop ongoing labor disturbances happening in the city or throughout the rest of the Russian Empire. The resolution to this outcome would not only lead to the eventual outbreak of further ethnic violence but the strengthening of the revolutionary left, especially its most extreme wing: the Bolshevik faction of the RSDLP among Baku’s workers.\(^{189}\) This was only one form of radicalization; both the rise of the Armenian Dashnak Socialists in Yerevan and the local Azerbaijani Himmät Party would make major inroads with unions during the period and accrue their own bases of support.\(^{190}\)

Between the city’s organic (if not often haphazard) physical construction, apparent differences in compensation between groups and workers, the vast ecological damage occurring in the city, and the inability of companies to pacify their increasingly radicalized work forces, the stage would be set by 1914 for a period of far greater political uncertainty, especially after mass strikes broke out between 1912-1913.\(^ {191}\) Furthermore, political rifts continued to grow inside the city, and deepening tensions became increasingly visible on the city’s streets from 1905 to 1914,

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\(^{189}\) Ibid.


\(^{191}\) ARDTA, f.798, op.1, d.1573, l.63.
culminating in explosive violence after February 1917. After the July Days in 1917, as is shown in Ronald Suny’s *Baku Commune*, this dissention led to an open split between the Bolsheviks and the other Marxist parties, including the Mensheviks, and set the stage for further political splintering after the October Revolution.¹⁹²

Ultimately, the resulting violence was the outcome of a set of complex processes that were very difficult to control by any state, and it is impossible to realistically speculate as to whether there was any way to avoid the violence the city would experience. It is clear, however, that the development of Baku’s oil industry and the political and social structures that grew out of it were man-made, and there was a series of choices made over time by a variety of individuals and groups, among them the intelligentsia and various political leaders in the city, that would lead to the formation of the crisis. While history is not made up of fated events, and populations are not railroaded into predetermined destinies, there was a certain momentum in these events that guided Baku to its ultimate future.

These various stressors and factors worked together in order to create a fertile environment for escalating division and increasingly extreme political positions. These forces would set the stage for the escalating battlefield the city would become, as well as help establish a fertile setting for the Russian Empire, the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan, and the Soviet Union to develop differing strategies in order to wrangle control over Baku’s oil industry. In addition, they would spur these governments at the same time to develop further strategies in order to solidify their hold on Baku as well as provide motives for other foreign powers, among

them the Ottomans, the British, and finally the Soviets, to utilize their influence in the city—if not their military might—in order to steer a favorable geopolitical outcome for themselves.
Chapter Two: Descent and Recovery: Baku’s Oil Industry – 1906-1927

1. Introduction

As shown previously, when historian and travel-writer Abraham V.W. Jackson first journeyed to Baku in 1910, he experienced a city where “Oil is in the air one breathes, in one’s nostrils, in one’s eyes, in the water of the morning bath . . . in one’s starched linen—everywhere. . . . The very dust of the streets is impregnated by the petroleum with which they are sprinkled.” At this juncture, Baku’s fate was irrevocably intertwined with the commodity that created it: petroleum. By 1900, Baku and its environs represented 50% of total global crude production and across the late-nineteenth century represented the core of petroleum production outside the Western Hemisphere. At that time, Baku was a boomtown at a crossroads; its development had spurred immense industrial development around its urban core but at the same time had attracted an ethnically and religiously diverse workforce that had reshaped the city’s demographics. Through the violence of the 1905 Revolution and its aftermath, Baku continued to be, at its heart, the epicenter of oil production for the Russian Empire. The accelerated decline of oil production through the First World War and the Russian Civil War would force both resident governments and the privately-owned enterprises they governed to economically adapt to the rapidly changing political and social circumstances of the era. State responses of the period, ranging from subsidization of private industry to nationalization, would not only have far-reaching financial implications for both local private and governmental actors, but they would

193 Jackson, From Constantinople, 25.

194 Kostornichenko, Inostrannyi kapital [International Capital], 30-36. See also Goldman, The Enigma of Soviet Petroleum, 14-15. According to Goldman, production in Russia exceeded that of the United States from 1898 to 1901.

195 Goldman, The Enigma of Soviet Petroleum, 19-21. This is especially true in the case of the Soviets after the founding of Azneft in 1920.
lead to long-term shifts in the structure of the global oil market that would be felt across the rest of the twentieth century.

In order to fully analyze this effect, this chapter explores the relationship of state intervention and oil production by investigating the policies of three successive governments in Baku (Imperial Russia, the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan, and the Soviet Union) as they attempted to spur oil production in the city. Each successive state tried to balance state intervention versus complicating factors, such as active foreign intervention by neighboring hostile powers and growing ethnic and social divisions in the city. In part, this chapter will focus on the struggles of the Tsarist government to find a balance between price control and a laissez faire economic policy, the difficulty of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan in its attempts to balance stability and revenue generation, and the problems the Soviets encountered attempting to negotiate foreign concessions in order to promote further growth.\(^{196}\)

A further purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the commonality in motivation by each state regarding economic intervention and each state’s approaches in its policy toward Baku’s oil fields. While these interventions could be framed as a form of “internal colonization,” especially under the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, all three governments moved forward based on goals that were not bound by ideology but were instead centered on practical considerations that cut across any ideological boundary. Furthermore, the historical circumstance of Baku during this period has contemporaneous parallels outside the former Russian Empire, especially revolutionary and post-revolutionary Mexico. Through highlighting this comparative relationship, this chapter will not only emphasize the broader historical parallels between state

\(^{196}\) RGAE, f. 270, op. 1, d. 8, l. 50-55. Concession policy was directly controlled through Moscow.
intervention in Baku and in Mexico but also the commonality in each state’s methods of harnessing the economic power of the oil industries under their control.

In order to conduct this project, I have acquired archival resources on the relationship between the Soviet state and Baku from the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), material on the Soviet Caucasian Bureau from Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), and state planning data from the Russian State Archive of the Economy (RGAE) to explore the tangled history of state intervention inside Baku. These resources, along with further research conducted at the National Archives of Azerbaijan, have given me the opportunity to apply original archival research to more fully illustrate and provide greater context to the events.

This pool of archival material will provide a new and much needed perspective on the relationship between Baku’s oil and state intervention that will further illustrate the internal mechanics that compelled both the Democratic Republic and the Soviet Union to strongly prioritize oil production. While production statistics and sources regarding Soviet negotiations with Western oil companies are already widely available, it is critical to further analyze the mechanics of these negotiations alongside the context of the development of Baku’s broader oil industry.

In comparison to other historical literature on Baku itself (foremost Ronald Suny’s *Baku Commune* and Swietochowski’s *Russian Azerbaijan*), the focus of this chapter will be on the economic and industrial ramifications of the First World War and the Russian Civil War and its aftermath on the industry itself, rather than the broader political processes in the city occurring around just the Russian Civil War. I will attempt to move beyond a political history of the city during this period and narrow my focus on primarily a comparative economic relationship of
successive states and the oil industry. In comparison to histories that focused more generally on the Russian oil industry itself, such as Vagit Alekperov’s *Oil of Russia* or A.A. Fursenko’s *The Battle for Oil*, my focus is less on the rivalry of private interests for access to Baku’s fields and more on the relative responses by individual regimes to both private demands and their own self-interest. Furthermore, Alekperov in *Oil of Russia* provides a strong argument for the centrality of the oil industry to Russian industrialization.  

While attempts to regain losses were made after 1905, a crash in prices in 1908 further slowed growth in the industry. While the 1906 auction proved successful, these land sales were soon thereafter directly halted by the Duma. This limited the ability of oil companies, including Branobel, to exploit new fields and would force production stagnation after an initial recovery of the industry after the events of 1905 due to a lack of hydrological drilling necessary to reach deeper deposits. In 1906, the older fields produced 7 million tons of oil, 9.36 million tons in 1907, and only a further 9.53 million tons in 1908.

The dramatic increase in production during the 1890s created fundamental supply issues for the industry. After 1900, the industry would be forced to continually exploit new wells in order to avoid supply shortfalls due to “chaotic and sloppy drilling” that would complicate distribution—which, according to Daniel Yergin, “led to deterioration in production capacity and irreversible damage in the fields around Baku, hastening exhaustion.”

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197 Alekperov, *Oil of Russia*, 128-133.
198 Ibid., 140-141.
199 Yergin, *The Prize*, 131-133.
200 Alekperov, *Oil of Russia*, 145.
201 Yergin, *The Prize*, 132.
had initially feared, this process almost certainly benefited the larger producers: Nobel, Shell, and Lomonssoff (among others), all of whom had the capital present to make increasing investments in infrastructure that smaller firms did not.\textsuperscript{202} Furthermore, more efficient supply routes benefited firms with the capital to make major investments in drilling and who would, in turn, flood the market and undercut their rivals. As crude prices steadily fell after 1904, larger firms were better prepared for a shortfall in profits per unit by utilizing increasing supply to make up for lower prices.\textsuperscript{203}

Nevertheless, beyond transportation subsidies, the Tsarist government at times did have influence on the development of the infrastructure in and around Baku, even with limited revenue sources for state investment. The most significant example of this form of intervention was the negotiation during the development of the Baku-Batumi pipeline itself. Through supporting the creation of a pipeline, the government helped establish a sustainable energy corridor that connected Baku and Transcaucasia to the market system of Europe, but it was also a corridor that could easily be cut off by the whims of any government that controlled the Dardanelles. This vulnerability would be demonstrated by the events of the First World War. Black Sea trade lanes had once accounted for 26.3\% of total exports, including nearly half of petrochemical exports.\textsuperscript{204}

As the industry was forced to focus on already partially depleted fields, it entered a period of relatively inert levels of production. In 1912, the Rothschild family sold its remaining

\textsuperscript{202} McKay, “Baku Oil and Transcaucasian Pipelines,” 612.

\textsuperscript{203} From 1899 to 1910, international prices fell from $1.29 ($36 in 2013 prices) to $0.61 ($15.44 in 2013 prices).

\textsuperscript{204} Bobroff, Roads to Glory, 4.
fields, most likely due to a lack of new investment opportunities. Their interests were bought by Royal Dutch Shell. In response, most of the small- and medium-sized Russian enterprises, which included A. I Mantashev & Co., G.M. Lianozov Sons, the Caspian Partnership, and the Neft Petroleum Products Corporation, merged to form the Russian General Oil Corporation, headquartered in London. Despite this concentration of enterprises, production remained unaffected and generally fell from 10.3 to 9.6 million tons between 1913 and 1917 as the industry was stymied by lack of investment and price controls caused by the First World War.205

Other industrial groups owned by Russian interests, such as the Russian Society Oil Group and the Lomonossoff group, accounted for much of the rest of production in and around Baku itself. Over time, this share of production continued to shift, especially during the revolutionary period from 1917 to 1918. Nevertheless, much of the industry until 1900 would still be split among a variety of small local companies alongside major foreign producers. According to William Post, by 1918 there were as many as thirty major oil producers in Baku producing over 10,000 poods (163,000 kilograms) of oil a month.206

By the First World War, significant foreign investment in Russia had been successful in fully developing the fields in and around Baku and the rest of the Absheron peninsula; however, these profits did not flow back to the state.207 The central government never saw a significant amount of revenue from Baku’s industries; almost the entirety of Russian taxes through the First World War were still primarily consumption taxes, in particular alcohol taxes that had once

205 Alekperov, *Oil of Russia*, 151.

206 Post, “A Resume of Events,” Appendix IV. A Pood is 16.3 Kilograms.

207 ARDTA, f. 798, op. 3, d. 3867, l. 225-356.
made up a quarter of state revenue.\textsuperscript{208} While petroleum production increased dramatically before 1900, this did not lead to an appreciable increase in state revenue beyond the possibility of increased consumption by Baku’s workers.\textsuperscript{209} In addition, petroleum transportation was often given preferential treatment by the state because “[railroad] rates were manipulated” by the Russian government “to promote the export of certain products,” such as petroleum.\textsuperscript{210} While there had previously been an excise tax on oil since 1888, this tax was too little to meaningfully affect state revenue.\textsuperscript{211} In essence, the central government could not rely on excise taxes from the industry as revenue that could be turned back into state investment. Nevertheless, besides labor turmoil, infrastructure improvements would continue to occur because the industry as a whole was able to achieve enough of a profit to invest in further private infrastructure development.

Baku’s industry did not exist without significant competitors. It faced serious competition in terms of production, most clearly from fields in the United States and, in particular, wells situated in Pennsylvania, Texas, and California. By 1914, Baku’s proportion of the global industry had fallen to 15\% of production (or roughly 8.5 million metric tons a year) while North American oil production only continued to expand. However, nowhere else in Europe was oil produced in such substantial quantities as in Baku—including the then-declining


\textsuperscript{210} Kelly, “Railroad Development,” 909, 914.

\textsuperscript{211} Yanni Kotsonis, \textit{States of Obligation: Taxes and Citizenship in the Russian Empire and Early Soviet Republic} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 76.
fields in Galicia and, after 1910, Romania. However, Galicia would be the closest example of a comparable European oil-producing region.

Romanian oil production would take significantly longer to accelerate to the same levels as other major oil-producing regions of the period. While the Romanian oil industry was initially founded in 1840 near Lucascesti, it would only find a stable footing when the center of production moved to Ploiești in the mid-1850s. Romanian production levels would remain relatively low across the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century compared to Baku or Galicia. By 1880, the Romania industry was only producing 94,000 tons a year, and only 134,185 tons a year by 1898. The industry took a positive turn in 1895 when the Romanian government passed a benchmark mining law that tied subsoil rights with surface ownership; this act opened the industry for further foreign investment in subsequent years. By 1900, six different Dutch companies, including Royal Dutch Petroleum, had invested in Romanian production.

Romanian production would continue to expand after the end of the First World War. By 1918, Romanian production had expanded to a million metric tons, and by 1927, oil production reached 3.1 million metric tons. This massive expansion may have been based in part on a

212 RGAE, f. 4372, op. 5, d. 34, l. 4 and f. 4372, op. 5, d. 34, l. 76. Also, see Frank’s Oil Empire, 182-186, 262. Romanian production would only reach comparable levels by the mid to late 1920s.

213 Pearton, Oil and the Romanian State, 9.

214 Ibid. In comparison, oil production in Baku had reached nearly 8 million tons by 1898.

215 Ibid., 18-20.

216 Jonker and van Zanden, in A History of Royal Dutch Shell, 80-81.

217 DeGolyer and MacNaughton, Twentieth Century Petroleum Statistics (Dallas: DeGolyer and MacNaughton, 1999), 8.
restriction of European supply during the First World War and the Russian Civil War due to the relative decline of both industries in Galicia and Baku across that same period. In addition, healthy influxes of capital from Standard Oil and Royal Dutch-Shell in 1919 allowed the industry to expand further across the early 1920s. Although increased intervention by the Romanian state regarding mining laws in 1924 and 1929 complicated foreign investment, the Romanian oil industry would remain significantly larger than any other European oil industry during the 1930s and 1940s, with the exception of Baku. The trajectory of Russian oil production across the first quarter of the twentieth century would be more complex.

218 Pearton, *Oil and the Romanian State*, 113, 125, 143.
Table 2.1: Russian Oil Production, 1901-1932 (in Thousands of Metric Tons)\textsuperscript{219}

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<td>1912</td>
<td>9,293</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>12,542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>9,205</td>
<td>1929</td>
<td>14,021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>9,172</td>
<td>1930</td>
<td>17,205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>9,438</td>
<td>1931</td>
<td>23,161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>9,968</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>22,310</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In contrast to Romanian production, production in Baku continued to decline as its fields were continuously depleted until the mid-1920s.\textsuperscript{220} Consequently, major realignment in production occurred during the first two decades of the twentieth century. In total, the production of Baku’s enterprises fell from a high of 671,500,000 Pds (poods) (11.5 million metric tons) in 1901 to 480,900,000 Pds (8 million tons) in 1906, a 30% decline over six years. Furthermore, by 1918, it had fallen even further, to 3.7 million metric tons, a decline of 68% since 1901.\textsuperscript{221} This reduced production was effectively the first major supply collapse of an oil-producing center of

\textsuperscript{219} Altshuler, \textit{Neftianaia promyshlennost’} [Oil Production], 11-41.

\textsuperscript{220} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{221} Ibid.
Baku’s size; it significantly surpassed the earlier decline of the Pennsylvanian fields and left a yawning gap in the broader oil market in Russia.

Table 2.2: Russian Oil Exports, 1901-1932 (In Thousands of Metric Tons)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1901</th>
<th>1917</th>
<th>n/a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>1,559</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>1.716</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>1,784</td>
<td>1919</td>
<td>.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>1,837</td>
<td>1920</td>
<td>.085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>945</td>
<td>1921</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>661</td>
<td>1922</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>773</td>
<td>1923</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>797</td>
<td>1924</td>
<td>712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>796</td>
<td>1925</td>
<td>1,372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>859</td>
<td>1926</td>
<td>2,086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>855</td>
<td>1927</td>
<td>2,782</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>839</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>984</td>
<td>1929</td>
<td>3,859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>1930</td>
<td>4,713</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>1931</td>
<td>5,225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>6,117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total petroleum exports equally languished, from 1,559 metric tons in 1907 to 529 metric tons by 1914 (before the war)—and declined considerably more by 1918.\(^{223}\) The industry experienced a continuous decline over the period that was reflected in both production totals and shares of Baku’s production of total exports. This decline was likely due in part to a lag in technological investments in Baku’s fields compared to those of the United States, as well as the

\(^{222}\) Oil production statistics from the First Five-Year Plan (1928-1932) show a dramatic increase in production, far exceeding any levels the fields in Baku had previously produced. See Goldman, *The Enigma of Soviet Petroleum*, 14-15. The Data for 1927 includes production from January to September, 1928. Data for 1928 only includes production from October to December, 1928.

\(^{223}\) Ibid.
inability of the oil industry in Baku to access funding for modern technology, including rotary drills. This technological gap was then exacerbated by the growing chaos of the late war and early revolutionary period as the industry stopped meaningful exports and production fell significantly when the Dardenelles were cut off in 1915.

As production began to level out and then decline, private sector investment steadily declined as well, and the industry gradually was thrown into a crisis. While production continued, the war effort and its demand for manpower (plus the lack of reliable access to foreign markets) put unaccustomed financial pressures on the oil industry. In addition, during the war, Russia became increasingly isolated from Western Europe and the rest of the Entente, which would place it in a dramatically inferior position compared to the United States, a country at peace and with vast access to international capital. While production surged in North America, it continued to decline in Baku due to limited market and capital access. Nevertheless, while production did decline as a whole, it did not necessarily decline for every major producer of oil during the later period of the war.\textsuperscript{224}

In Baku itself, the damage of the 1905 riots to the physical infrastructure of the oil industry was rectified relatively quickly, and production stabilized across the industry fairly rapidly after a short dip that year.\textsuperscript{225} Industrial strife progressively reflected widening ethnic and political division between labor and political organizations and a steady radicalization of their membership after the breakup of the Union of Oil Workers (UOW) in 1907.\textsuperscript{226} Ultimately, this political divergence would become a permanent feature of life in Baku, especially as unions and

\textsuperscript{224} Post, “A Resume of Events,” Appendix 11-12.

\textsuperscript{225} Ibid., Appendix XIIa. Production fell from 10,762 metric tons of petroleum to 7,468 from 1904 to 1905 but rose back to 8,540 tons by 1907.

\textsuperscript{226} Rice, “Party Rivalry in the Caucasus,” 241-243.
their memberships gradually became strongly correlated based on ethnic identity. Over time, as will be shown in Chapter Four, this would eventually evolve into more hardened political identities near 1917.

Therefore, the legacy of rapid industrialization would radically shift both the demographics of the city as well as the increased labor pressures resulting from rising competition amongst its workforce. While working conditions after 1905 remained more or less unchanged in their complexity from before the revolution, political circumstances had markedly shifted how these economic pressures would be expressed—especially as a larger number of workers progressively competed for a smaller number of jobs, and at the same time politics in Baku and the rest of the Empire became more divisive, especially after 1908, as strike activity led by the RSDLP increased.

A testament to this degree of competition was that the average age of workers in 1908 was generally well into adulthood, which suggested that, by 1908, the workforce had become more permanent in nature and reliant far more on skill and technical expertise than youthful energy. There was a fairly broad divergence in working ages between ethnicities. However, Russians and other Europeans, on average, ranged from 31.6 to 37.5 years old (32.7 mean average). They were generally old enough to develop more advanced skills and to become adept at the technical expertise needed by skilled workers. Other ethnicities were substantially younger, on average: 28.8 for Kazan Tatars, 28.3 for Persians, 27.8 for Armenians, 27.2 for Lezgini, 26.4 for Azerbaijanis, and 24.7 for Georgians. This divergence in age may in part

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227 Stopani, *Nefepromyshlennyi rabochii* [Oil Workers], 28.
help explain the differences in wages and family life, for a larger percentage of the total European working force was old enough to have their own families.

Table 2.3: “Budgeted” Oil Workers from Alexandr Stopani’s 1909 Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Number of Workers</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>717</td>
<td>31.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenian</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>22.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgian</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tatar/Azerbaijani</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>7.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Caucasian</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lezgini</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persian</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2244</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in this survey of 2,244 employed workers budgeted by oil companies, 717 (31.9%) were reported to be Russian, which likely included others Slavic Europeans; 503 (22.45%) were reported Armenians; 40 (1.8%) were Georgians; 165 (7.35%) were Caucasus Tatars” or Azerbaijanis; 254 (11.3%) were other Caucasian, most likely Chechen or Dagestani; 139 (6.2%) were Lezgini or Laz; 393 (17.5%) were” Persians,” which included ethnic Azerbaijanis from northern Persia; and another thirty-three ethnicities were represented in small numbers. There are clearly some surprising results from the survey, specifically the relatively high numbers of Persians, Lezgini, and Crimean Tatars versus the local number of native

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228 Ibid., 5. Stopani’s statistics are primarily based on a survey of workers from 1908 to 1909 while he was employed with Baku’s Union of Petroleum Industry workers. The main focus of the survey was the overall well-being of the workers, including wages and daily-consumption habits rather than their ethnicity or religion.

229 Ibid.
Azerbaijanis. Despite the relatively small number of Azerbaijanis from the Russian Caucasus, other major ethnicities, including Russians and Armenians, generally correlated with state census data of Baku from the period.

By 1913, the workforce in Baku had taken on an even more geographically mixed character. Of those 2,244 workers surveyed by Stopani, 902 (40.2%) came from European portions of the Russian Empire; a similar number, 912 (40.6%), came from the portions of Transcaucasia (including Baku) controlled by the Russian Empire; and 412 (18.8%) came from international destinations. Moreover, presumably based on origin, the majority of international workers still came from Northern Persia. Consequently, Baku, just before the First World War, had absorbed a large workforce from not only the Russian Empire but from Persia as well, and the geographically-mixed nature of this workforce at this juncture almost certainly would be reflected in the political process in Baku, in which European (almost entirely Slavic) workers and Caucasian workers would, together, make up the vast majority of the workforce. Ultimately, the local politics of the city would therefore have to revolve around the ethnic identities and demands of this diverse workforce.

Data from 1913 shows there was a surprising divergence in the number of workers with families based on ethnicity. Russians and other European workers usually had a higher percentage of families: 60.1%. Other ethnic groups had a significantly lower percentage. For example, only 12% of Armenian and Georgian workers had families with them, while Kazan

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230 Ibid., 4.

231 Ibid., 17.
Tatars and Lezgini families were even lower: 10.9% and 10.1%, respectively.\(^{232}\) Persian workers and Tatar workers with families comprised an even smaller percentage of the population: 5.1% and 3.5%, respectively. The reasons for these differences is uncertain; it could reflect how the polls were conducted or that Russian and other European workers simply felt more secure about bringing their families with them. These statistics illustrate that higher degree of employment continuity that was also correlated with higher wages. The result of this divergence was a considerable difference in home life, which reflected a longer-term access to housing and, in general, a longer-lasting connection to the city.\(^{233}\)

In any event, this divergence in family size and age amongst ethnic groups correlated with differences in total income of individual workers. When grouped together, Russian and other European workers reportedly earned, on average, an annual income of 543.7 rubles versus 416 to 336.7 for other ethnic groups.\(^{234}\) Individual pay was more complicated: Russian workers routinely were paid 400.57 rubles annually (significantly less than the average of other European workers) versus 444.69 for Georgians, 371.90 for Armenians, 341.36 for Lezgini, 369.31 for Kazan Tatars, 338.63 for Persians, and 323.76 for Azerbaijanis.\(^{235}\) Thus, looking at a fuller picture of individual pay, the divergence is not nearly extreme enough to suggest that it was based on ethnicity. While, on average, Russians were paid higher than Muslim workers, their pay still largely fell between Christian Georgian and Armenian workers who were more likely to take administrative positions. Due to these differences, any narrative focusing on a distinct ethnic

\(^{232}\) Ibid.

\(^{233}\) Ibid., 24.

\(^{234}\) Ibid., 17.

\(^{235}\) Ibid.
advantage for Russian and East Slavic workers is, in reality, deeply undermined by the complex pecking order between the different ethnicities in Baku. Moreover, data on the worker wages collected by Stopani belies some traditional assumptions regarding the strictly hierarchical nature of commodity production based on ethnicity.

While the relationship between ethnic identity and wages was complex, differences in age and pay did lead to considerable divergence in the domestic lives of workers and their families. Because Baku was heavily reliant on a migrant labor force, and the labor supply was highly flexible, especially for unskilled laborers, wages usually followed skill and experience. It is clearly evident that more experienced workers—and especially those with better skills—could accrue higher wages, regardless of ethnicity. Therefore, older age correlated with higher pay more than ethnicity did. In aggregate, however, there was still evident disparity of wages between workers of different ethnicities.

Due to the connection of skill and age with wages, it is plainly evident that certain divisions existed among ethnic demographic groups in Baku despite similarity in religious identity. As the city grew and the dimensions of its population shifted, the increasingly cosmopolitan nature of Baku became more obvious, and while it is foolish to accept a single snapshot from the period, it is possible to get a rough idea of the size of these demographic changes. Examining Baku’s census data from 1897, it is evident that a multitude of changes in population had occurred; the city had increasingly become Russian and Armenian, communities that also had higher on-average wages.236 From that point on, there is a consistency in the ethnic makeup of the population, and while the proportions of the population would eventually

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236 Tscentral’nyi statisticheskii komitet [Central Statistical Committee], Pervaia vseobshchaia perepis’ [First General Census], Table 13.
stabilize, it would be the continued and persistent stresses placed on the relations between these
groups that would spur greater tensions between them.

The takeaway from this development is that Baku’s demographics progressively became
a multivariate “ethnic stew” rather than a melting pot of different cultures. While there were
workers representing a wide variety of cultures and ethnicities in the city, no group grew large
enough to become a true majority of the population—or even a strong enough plurality to force
assimilation.\footnote{Ibid.} While Russian (and by extension European) culture was dominant both culturally
and linguistically, this form of cultural domination had very clear limits: Armenians,
Azerbaijanis, and Georgians all still retained their own ethnic, cultural, and religious orientation.
According to Audrey Altstadt, “Baku was not a melting pot and each community struggled for its
own benefit.”\footnote{Altstadt, \textit{The Azerbaijani Turks}, 28.}

By 1913, the ethnic and linguistic makeup of Baku’s work force had grown increasingly
complex and continued to remain deeply politically divided.\footnote{Ibid., 31-33.} Russian remained a language of
broad usage, especially in record-keeping and business; the communities of Baku communicated
with each other in an increasingly broad constellation of languages, spanning vastly different
language families of the Russian Empire.\footnote{Ibid., 33-34.} While Russian may have continued to dominate
linguistically in the public sphere in Baku, and many non-Russians continued to speak Russian,
there was a clearly delineated limit to this assimilation. Russian-speaking Armenians or
Azerbaijanis would more often than not still be tied to their religious and ethnic identities.
2. Baku’s Oil Industry during the First World War and the Russian Civil War

As the war dragged on, it caused considerable shifts in the relative levels of oil production between major producers. The Nobel Brothers, in 1916 alone, accounted for 1.36 million tons of production, and their group in total represented 1.96 million tons, or roughly 25% of total production. But, by 1917, the group total had fallen to 1.37 million tons (or 22%). This was a modest difference on paper but nevertheless represented a substantial yearly change compared to the relative position of other companies.\textsuperscript{241} The second largest group of producers in Baku, the Russian Society Oil group, also experienced a noticeable change before the revolution, from 1.16 million tons in 1916 to 1.02 in 1917. In comparison, the Lomonossoff group, the third largest producer, actually increased its nominal production, from 1.13 million tons in 1916 to 1.23 million tons in 1917. Finally, the Shell group saw a relatively modest decline in comparison, from 773 thousand tons in 1916 to 681 thousand tons in 1917, hovering around 10% of production.\textsuperscript{242} Nevertheless, the wide variance in production totals complicates what would be a traditional assumption that all oil groups would see a decline during a period of dramatically increased economic pressure. While most of the industry did see a decline, the relative experience of the Lomonossoff group and its gain in production shows that individual firms could nevertheless thrive in this environment, even if most could not.

A possible explanation for this divergence was the ability of differing individual industrial groups to manage labor disturbances, especially work stoppages and strikes. Poor labor relations may have compounded the effect political struggles would have on resulting production.

\textsuperscript{241} Ibid., Appendix 8c and 12.

\textsuperscript{242} Ibid.
numbers. A prime example of the effect of these circumstances was the difficulty experienced by Branoble itself, and its contentious relationship with its workers and their unions. While obviously Branobel was not unique in these labor struggles, the primacy and visibility of these struggles between Branobel and its workforce highlights the depth of labor strife and its potential effect on producers.

In terms of trade, oil itself represented only a modest portion of exports of the empire compared to agricultural commodities, such as grain and, to a lesser extent, metals, such as iron. While the Russian Empire, unlike the Soviet Union, did not rely on oil or gas as a major export commodity, the infrastructure constructed in Baku would satisfy much of Soviet domestic production into the 1950s.

Despite the decline in exports, oil remained important to the war effort during the First World War and precipitated the first and only major direct intervention of the Tsarist government into the industry. The war increasingly pressured Russia’s economy, and wartime demand suddenly spiked; however, supply only mildly increased, from 9.1 million tons in 1914 to 9.9 million tons in 1916, while prices skyrocketed, from 42.2 kopeks per pood to a free floating price of 68.7 kopeks per pood by 1917. Higher prices correlated with higher demand, but, with only minimally increased supply, the Tsarist government was forced to intervene to secure public and private access to oil at an affordable price. By December 31st, 1915, the government introduced

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243 ARDTA, f. 798, op. 1, d. 485, d. 504, d. 545, d. 655, d. 2003, and d. 2048.


price controls at 45 kopeks per pood, but in the end refused to engage in partial nationalization of the industry.\textsuperscript{247} Nevertheless, the First World War brought the first true major intervention of the state in order to satisfy its self-interests in Baku’s oil industry.

The efficacy of this approach was limited. While official (or “white”) prices were in fact lowered a considerable extent from what they had been previously, increasingly grey market prices accrued a premium over the “white” price for oil in Russian markets.\textsuperscript{248} While the supply of affordable oil to the government for transportation and critical industry mildly increased when the market was focused on the war effort, it was insufficient to fully fuel the entire wartime economy, in part due to the industry’s restricted access to manpower and to insufficient sources of public or private capital investment. Due to a combination of factors, there remained an imbalance between need, price, and supply.\textsuperscript{249} Fuel oil had made up most of the production in Baku since the 1890s, although alongside fuel oil, sizeable amounts of kerosene and small but increasing amounts of benzene and machine oils were also being constantly produced.\textsuperscript{250} The prime result of this imbalance was that the imperial government was not actually able to appreciably increase its access to oil due to the failure of price controls to provide petroleum products at the price the government desired. Thus, by the time of the February Revolution, this

\textsuperscript{247} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{248} Suny, The Baku Commune, 63. In this context, a grey market price means oil sold by legitimate producers at a higher rate than the sanctioned government price.

\textsuperscript{249} Ibid., 63.

\textsuperscript{250} Fursenko, The Battle for Oil, 11.
limited supply became a growing issue for the Russian economy; supplies dwindled to small and medium industries while the government struggled in its wartime goals.\(^{251}\)

Due to these challenges, the future of the oil industry increasingly became uncertain after the February Revolution as the monarchy dissolved and the Provisional Government’s grasp on the far-reaching areas of the empire was tenuous at best. Adding to this uncertainty, the growing division among the local parties of Baku, especially the ethnically-Azerbaijani parties and the Provisional Government in Petrograd, increased the possibility of greatly heightened political discord.\(^{252}\) During 1917, as oil production continued to drop, the problems of the industry were compounded by growing social instability, including increasing numbers of mass demonstrations and strikes as the prices of food continued to rise and supply stocks dwindled in Baku. In addition, while the February Revolution unleashed a flurry of revolutionary activity that helped broaden the range of local politics, especially on the left, it also enhanced ethnic division as political parties became aligned along ethnic lines. This was especially the case in Baku, and was exemplified by the growth of the Azerbaijani Müsavatist and Himmät Parties and the Armenian Dashnaks.\(^{253}\)

By October 1917, as political chaos increasingly gripped Baku, production fell to less than 4 million tons per year.\(^{254}\) The future of the oil industry effectively came under the control of various political factions (including Mensheviks, Bolsheviks, and other ethnic parties) that

\(^{251}\) RGIA, f. 1458, op. 1, d. 1731, l. 202-235. This also included larger enterprises, such as Branobel.


\(^{253}\) Ibid., 86-89.

\(^{254}\) Altshuler, *Neftianaia promyshlennost’* [Oil Production], 11-41.
filled the gaping political void left by the fall of the Tsar and the collapse of the Provisional Government. Eventually, by March 1918, the Bolsheviks and their Dashnak allies temporally emerged victorious over the other factions.255

The October Revolution would permanently alter the relationship between the Russian state and the industries it governed. While the Provisional Government had relatively weak control over the remains of the empire—especially its fringes, such as Baku—the rise of the Bolsheviks would precipitate a dramatic shift in attitude toward state intervention in the economy. As early as December 1917, less than two months after the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks, in agreement with the Russian Union of Engineers and other trade groups, had asserted the need for management of the oil industry through “centralized district and regional committees” that would be run, in theory, “with broad participation of the workers” in the oil industry in order to help “defend workers in their fight . . . for working conditions.”256 In this context, after the October Revolution and the establishment of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), the Communist Party saw itself as the natural representative of the workers and their interests as part of the oil industry.

Nevertheless, as early as 1918, the language by Soviets officials in the Central Oil Committee (Glavkoneft) shifted from revolutionary language centered on working class issues to a progressively more standard bureaucratic one focused largely on the routine of administration, especially an ongoing debate over centralization of the oil industry.257 The minutes of meetings

255 RGASPI, f. 70, op. 3, d. 4, l. 38-46.

256 RGAE, f. 6880, op. 1, d. 19, l. 1. These and other records from Glavkoneft would lay out future Soviet plans for Baku’s industry with the assumption that Baku would eventually fall under the control of the RSFSR.

257 RGAE, f. 6880, op. 1, d. 4, l. 20-21.
of the Central Committee of Glavkoneft tended to focus more on the everyday considerations of the administration of the oil industry—especially the desire to extract an optimal amount of revenue from it.\footnote{Ibid., f. 6880, op. 1, d. 19, l. 2-10.} The overall focus of the meetings turned from tearing down the functions of the former imperial state to building the new structures needed to administrate what was very clearly a key industry for the fledgling Soviet state.

At this juncture, the Soviets effectively could control only a portion of the major cities in Russia itself, and while their influence in Baku was quite limited, the local Bolsheviks had managed to garner some influence over the political process in Baku (in the Municipal Duma) and on the city’s streets.\footnote{Suny, The Baku Commune, 191-193.} The Soviets remained unable to effectively administer Baku independently until after March 1918, at which time they were able to gather enough institutional support alongside the Dashnaks to take direct control of the city. By April 1918, the Central Committee itself attempted to control the affairs of the petroleum industry from Moscow through their cadres in Baku. It was at this point that the Party largely bypassed the workers and their unions in order to prioritize the expansion of the industry. This change represented the broad shift from what was a basically grassroots and largely ad hoc revolutionary government to a centralized bureaucratic one, which nevertheless was still formally supposed to represent the needs of the “worker-peasant state.”\footnote{RGAE, f. 6880. op. 1, d. l, l. 27-93.}

By July 1918, the Glavkoneft’s central committee cited continued production in Baku as critical to its interests and demanded that any “suspension of production due to nationalization
must be avoided in every way possible.”\textsuperscript{261} The committee’s overt actions to manage production are clear through its continued attempts to administrate the oil industry from Moscow across mid-1918.\textsuperscript{262} Baku’s oil represented something far greater than simply another industry to be administered; it represented an industry vital to national interests and the long-term survival of the RSFSR.

Therefore, while the Soviets had achieved some of their goals in nationalizing production on an administrative level in the rest of the RSFSR, the isolation of Baku from their nearest area of control, Astrakhan, and their relatively limited public support in Baku itself kept local Bolshevik control relatively short-lived until late July 1918. In a debriefing years later, Stepan Shaumian, the leader of the infamous “26 Baku commissars” noted that the Bolsheviks had a difficult time finding local support, especially from the “mostly Muslim peasantry” due to the increasing “anti-Soviet” attitudes.\textsuperscript{263} As soon as the Bolsheviks took power, this inability to engage with the Muslim Azerbaijanis would cost them dearly in terms of recruitment.\textsuperscript{264} While the Bolsheviks in Baku were desperate to consolidate control, without additional manpower, they had considerable difficulty in conducting the street-by-street fighting they needed to maintain order. As the conflict worsened in Central Baku, Bolshevik control over the situation slowly

\textsuperscript{261} Ibid., f. 6880, op. 1, d. 4, l. 14.

\textsuperscript{262} Ibid., f. 6880, op. 1, d. 4, l. 1.

\textsuperscript{263} The 26 Baku commissars were made up of the local Bolshevik leadership who were executed in Astrakhan shortly after the retreat of the Bolsheviks from the city. [Don’t you need an actual citation here since you were quoting Shaumian, and we need to know where you got that quote?]

\textsuperscript{264} RGASPI, f. 70, op. 3, d. 4, l. 74.
weakened because the Dashnaks were unable to effectively engage with Azerbaijani Muslims, and Bolshevik forces lacked the numbers they would need to hold the city on their own.\textsuperscript{265}

By August 1918, control of Baku’s environs was wrested from the Bolsheviks and their allies and briefly replaced by the Trans-Caspian Directorate, a provisional government backed by the British. While oil output declined to some degree, according to Branobel numbers, it nevertheless remained relatively stable during this period.\textsuperscript{266} The control of the Directorate over Baku itself remained tenuous at best, and by September 3\textsuperscript{rd} the Ottoman Army and their Azerbaijani nationalist allies had reached the gates of Baku. As Ottoman-Azerbaijani took the city, the resulting (largely ethnically-inspired) conflict over the next week between the remaining Armenian population and advancing Turkish and Azerbaijani forces would be transformative of not only Baku as a populated environment but the ability of private enterprises to extract crude from the fields surrounding Baku. At this point, production bottomed out as facilities closed for much of September while the city was thrown into chaos.\textsuperscript{267}

Once it fully solidified itself after taking Baku, the newly established Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan (ADR) at first flirted with the idea of continuing petroleum nationalization that the Bolsheviks had started earlier, in 1918.\textsuperscript{268} Foremost, the government saw oil production as a potential source of desperately needed revenue, in part due to an increasing

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{265} Ibid., f. 70, op. 3, d. 4, l. 77, 78.
\textsuperscript{266} RGIA, f. 1458, op. 1, d. 1634.
\textsuperscript{267} Ibid., f. 1458, op. 1, d. 1731, l. 231.
\textsuperscript{268} ARDA, f. 24, op. 1, d. 110, l. 72-73. The ADR kept consistent records of its planning, which were subsequently held by the Soviets until 1992.
\end{flushright}
expansion of states during the First World War.\textsuperscript{269} According to Peter Holquist, by the First World War, Russia, “lacking a preexisting civil society . . . [had] ‘amalgamated’ the emergence of technologies of public intervention with statist wartime mobilization.”\textsuperscript{270} Documented communication between Branobel and the government specifically illustrates the emphasis that the Azerbaijani Republic was putting on long-term projections for future revenue growth.\textsuperscript{271} It is readily apparent that the primary hope of the Azerbaijani government for nationalization was for the state to utilize oil resources as a source of long-term state revenue. This would allow the fledgling state the more reliable source of income it needed, especially in light of the state’s military needs as the war turned against its ally, the Ottoman Empire.\textsuperscript{272}

With the Armistice of Mudros on October 30\textsuperscript{th}, 1918, and with a lack of support by the Ottomans, the ADR began to reverse course and distance itself from state intervention in the industry, a trend that continued through the re-occupation of Baku by British forces into 1919.\textsuperscript{273} This shift was most likely caused by increased international isolation of the ADR and the needs of the government to reach a compromise with the British government and international companies—all of whom were increasingly hostile to the idea of nationalization.\textsuperscript{274} Nevertheless, despite moving away from nationalization, the ADR still needed to secure a revenue source

\textsuperscript{269} Holquist, \textit{Making War}, 20-21, 30-32.

\textsuperscript{270} Ibid., 21.

\textsuperscript{271} ARDA, f. 24, op. 1, d. 287, l. 3-7.

\textsuperscript{272} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{273} Ibid., f. 24, op. 1, d. 160, l. 2.

\textsuperscript{274} ARDTA, f. 798, op. 1, d. 2148, l.7-11, 19. These companies included Branobel.
through taxation even if the industry itself remained in private hands.\textsuperscript{275} The oil industry and industries that supported it were responsible for almost the entirety of industrial production in Baku, and therefore increased production was absolutely essential to the survival of the inchoate Azerbaijani state—especially since it was heavily reliant on tax revenues from private oil operations. Even if the government itself did not control the companies, it still needed them to remain profitable enough in private hands to suitably tax.\textsuperscript{276}

Although production began to recover by 1919 to just a bit over 4 million tons, as the situation stabilized, it remained weak until the arrival of the Soviets in 1920.\textsuperscript{277} While the ADR had been politically open to foreign investment and refrained from nationalization, production growth was slow to materialize, in part due to a lack of foreign investment and a lack of security in and around the city itself. Nevertheless, the Baku-Batumi pipeline continued to operate, and the ADR could rely on supply routes through British-occupied Georgia and Iran. In this milieu, the ethnic heterogeneity of the city, coupled with continued lack of political unity, led to constant instability through 1919. Foremost, the diverse ethnic composition of Baku clashed directly with the centralized nationalist state that the ADR attempted to establish. This dilemma caused increasing ethnic division among the Azerbaijani and Armenian communities across this period as well as subsequent sporadic violence. As Michael J. Smith documented in “Anatomy of a

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
  \item \textsuperscript{275} ARDA, f. 24, op. 1, d. 110, l. 184.
  \item \textsuperscript{276} Ibid., f. 1, op. 1 d. 16, l. 4.
  \item \textsuperscript{277} Altshuler, \textit{Neftianaia promyshlennost’} [Oil Production], 11-41.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Rumor,” this would have dramatic economic consequences as the city remained politically unstable and insecure.278

By 1920, after years of revolution, civil war, and restrained if not non-existent infrastructure development, Baku as a whole accounted for only 4.4% of total global oil production.279 In terms of domestic output, when the Soviets took Baku in 1920, it only accounted for 42% of Tsarist-era production in 1914 or (3.9 million tons). This was a slight decrease from 1919. While Baku’s relative strength versus its overseas competition weakened considerably, it nevertheless continued to dominate Russian oil production.280

Both the Russian Empire and its successor states had presided over a massive drop in total production across a twenty-year period, and this fact would affect how individual governments reacted to the industrial indicators inside Baku. Nevertheless, the explicit interests of each government continued to center around the possibility of a potential increase in production in Baku rather than maintaining its current rate. Each government was certain of the direct economic benefits for private enterprise as well as the state itself.281 While Baku would seemingly be less of an economic prize as a result of this continuous decline in production, the various governments (especially the Soviets) that occupied Baku during the Russian Civil War all held higher expectations of its future output than the amount they were realistically able to

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279 RGAE, f. 4372, op. 5, d. 34, l.4, and RGAE, f. 4372, op. 5, d. 34, l. 76.

280 Ibid., f. 4372, op. 11, d. 15, l. 115-116. Also see Alekperov, *Oil of Russia*, 154-155.

281 Ibid.
produce in the near future. Furthermore, the expectation of expanded production did not meet the reality of years of under-investment and technological stagnation the fields had suffered, especially from 1914 to 1920. As production declined and the potential for exports continued to drop, the reality of the situation forced successive governments to consider increasing intervention in Baku’s oil market.

3. Oil Production during the Early Soviet Period

After they occupied Azerbaijan in April 1920, the Soviet government quickly re-seized control over all the oil fields and the petrochemical industry in Baku, which was almost completely intact. This action demonstrates some early continuity in initial Azerbaijani and Soviet approaches to the industry. Unlike the ADR, the Soviets did not shy away from returning to full nationalization, and within months a mass consolidation occurred across the industry. As this nationalization grew increasingly complex, the industry was completely re-organized, and separate private companies were merged into a single Soviet-controlled entity: Azneft.

By late 1920, Azneft, directed by the enterprising 36-year-old Aleksandr Serebrovskii, was responsible for almost the entire oil production of Baku. Serebrovskii, born in 1884 in Ufa, was the son of Paul Petrovich Serebrovskii, a former member of Narodnaya Volya, the revolutionary socialist organization responsible for the assassination of Alexander II. Initially, in his adult life, Aleksandr followed in his father’s foot-steps. By 1903, Alexandr had joined the RDSLP and largely continued to be loyal to the party after receiving a degree in mechanical

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282 GARF, f. 6764, op. 1, d. 94, l. 12-16.

283 The Soviets were greatly assisted by the fact that the ADR did not have significant enough forces to halt Soviet advances, thus fighting was nearly non-existent.

284 RGAE, f. 6880, op. 1, d. 4, l. 16-21.
engineering in 1911 from the Higher Technical School in Brussels. According to Leon Trotsky, later, in 1930, Serebrovskii had been initially skeptical of the Bolsheviks before the October Revolution, but “After our victory in October, I induced Serebrovskii to join in the Soviet work. Soviet service brought him, as it did so many others, into the Communist party. At present, he is a member of Stalin’s Central Committee of the party, and one of the mainstays of the regime.”

By April 1920, Alexandr was entrusted by the Central Committee of the RSFSR to take command over Baku’s oil industry, and soon afterward Serebrovskii joined the Central Committee of the Azerbaijan Communist Party (AKb), and by 1922 he joined the All-Russian Communist Party Central Executive Committee.

While Azneft still directly answered to Moscow, the process of administration required increasingly local autonomy. As the 1920s progressed, Serebrovski and Azneft were able to secure further local control; however, their control was subject to long-term directives from Moscow, and Azneft was expected to abide by long-term Soviet planning. A key example of these directives included foreign agreements negotiated by the Central Committee on Concessions. These agreements were absolutely necessary for re-tooling and for investment in the industry; moreover, they were negotiated with only marginal input from Azneft.

Multiple planning agencies, including Glavkoneft and engineering unions, had enormous expectations for production in Baku. Planning from the early 1920s calculated that capital investment would lead to a tripling of production, primarily assisted by exterior interjections of

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286 RGAE, f. 6880, op. 1, d. 151, l.1.

287 GARF, f. 8350, op. 1, d. 941, l. 68. The Central Committee on Concessions, the committee responsible for granting concessions to foreign enterprises, would dominant negotiations with foreign enterprises during the early 1920s.
capital from either private individuals in the TSFSR and the RSFSR, or from foreign investors through concessions.\textsuperscript{288} This need for capital investment to rebuild the industry dovetailed with other Soviet efforts at accruing foreign capital from abroad.\textsuperscript{289}

\textbf{1922 Azneft Map of Baku and its surrounding Oil Fields}

\textsuperscript{288} Ibíd., f. 6764, op. 1, d. 93, l. 2-7 and f. 6764, op. 1, d. 93, l. 6-11.

\textsuperscript{289} Yergin, \textit{The Prize}, 239-241.
This development may be considered surprising considering not only the anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist focus of Soviet ideology, but the hostility of foreign powers, exemplified by their continued interventions during the Russian Civil War. However, the immediacy of Soviet victory, along with the signing of the Anglo-Soviet trade agreement in 1921, renewed interest by American and other foreign investors of concessions across Soviet territory, including the infamous negotiations with Washington Vanderlip in 1920 and Sinclair Oil’s initial negotiation of a near-monopoly of petroleum production in mid-1921. Shortly after the end of the Russian Civil War, routine negotiations quickly began over foreign investment into the now Soviet-controlled industry.291 By the end of 1922, there were growing signs of foreign investment and technical assistance from Western interests, such as the engineering firm Barnsdall International, run by the flamboyant Henry Mason Day, and potential support from oil giant, Royal Dutch Shell.292

In particular, Soviet negotiations with Barnsdall in 1923 had the appreciable effect of bringing dozens of American engineers and technicians over to revive the Soviet oil industry, introducing new technologies such as rotary drills, necessary for the drilling of larger and deeper wells, in addition to other technical improvements that the industry had needed for almost a decade.293 The time that Barnsdall actually spent in Baku was admittedly short, a matter of months; nevertheless, his improvements turned out to be extremely successful, and the Soviets

290 GARF, f. 6764, op. 1, d. 94, l. 73.

291 RGAE, f. 413, op. 2, d. 1451, l. 2, 17, and RGASPI, f. 16, op. 3, d. 365, l. 2. This includes negotiations by Standard Oil of New Jersey and Royal Dutch Shell.

292 GARF, f. 8350, op. 1, d. 941, l. 14-16. The Central Committee on Concessions was open with any foreign enterprise that could either provide capital investment or technological access.

soon were able to reproduce many of the technological innovations brought by Barnsdall.\textsuperscript{294} The Soviet-Barnsdall relationship illustrates the conditional nature of Soviet cooperation with foreign companies. They were permitted as long as they produced improvements or investments the Soviets could not otherwise obtain. Despite the brief nature of the relationship, this strategy produced clear results for the Soviets, and production would dramatically recover across the 1920s.

In comparison, the Sinclair Exploration Corporation’s negotiation with the Soviet government reflects some of the serious pitfalls of Soviet efforts to recruit foreign capital. The negotiations, which went from mid-1921 to late-1923, were an attempt to secure a monopoly of total Soviet oil production by Sinclair. The contract would be structured, in its initial proposal, as a joint private-public company where the board would be run “by an equal number of directors of the mixed company, 4 nominated and selected by Russian interests and 4 selected by American interests.”\textsuperscript{295} Consequently, after operations were up and running, revenue from the concession was to be split in half between Harry Sinclair and his investors, and the Soviets. Later Soviet proposals rejected this plan; instead, they demanded that the first “15\% of the profits should be paid [directly] to government” and a mixed company “shall next deduct 25\% of the remaining sum.”\textsuperscript{296} Afterwards, the Soviets requested that remaining profits should be split evenly between the investors and the government, giving the government a significantly larger share of the profits.

\textsuperscript{294} Steve Levine, \textit{The Oil and the Glory: The Pursuit of Empire and Fortune on the Caspian Sea} (New York: Random House, 2007), 224.

\textsuperscript{295} GARF, f. 8350, op. 1, d. 941, l. 96.

\textsuperscript{296} Ibid., f. 8350, op. 1, d. 941, l. 98, 113.
In a preliminary contract submitted in July 1923, Sinclair surrendered on the issue of profits, but Soviet demands for loan assurances further complicated planning, specifically since Sinclair oil could not find backing from prominent commercial banking interests in New York. Without a loan guarantee, the project became redundant since the Soviets had no appetite for a concession that did not lead to direct access to hard or foreign currency. Moreover, Sinclair found himself mired in legal difficulties regarding his relationship with the Harding administration, and he came under increasing legal scrutiny back in the U.S.

By December 19\textsuperscript{th}, 1923, Sinclair Oil concluded:

In order to promote the recently improved relations between the two countries and with a view of building up the credit of your government here it is suggested that the initial loan be as moderate an amount as the government can conveniently accept . . . In the judgment of the bankers this procedure will best develop the favorable opinions of the public towards Russia and best up build its credit and will at the same time obviate the unfavorable impression which might be created by an attempt to float a large public issue at a moment when sentiment favorable to the Russian government was being molded and at a time when large issues of any European securities are unfavorably regarded by the American public.

Soon afterwards, the Soviets silently shelved the plan, most likely because the Soviets’ need for hard currency simply could not be met by the plan, and therefore a primary goal of the project

\footnote{297} {Ibid., f. 8350, op. 1, d. 941, l. 110.}


\footnote{299} {Ibid.}
immediately became untenable. A possible reason for the complete collapse of negotiations is explained by the Soviet Union’s desperate need for available credit to support the importation of manufactured products and industrial goods and its continued difficulty accessing traditional Western credit markets compared to its expansive needs for hard currency. Soviet negotiators simply were not interested in further mediation that did not fill that immediate need.  

Nevertheless, the Soviets remained dedicated to acquiring technical assistance from the West, even if political circumstance limited their ability to do so.

Sinclair’s attempt for a concession over timbering and oil rights in Southern Sakhalin met a similar fate. Although the concession agreement between Sinclair and the Soviets had been signed in 1923, the plan itself quickly fell apart after more than cursory investigation. Once it became clear that Southern Sakhalin remained firmly under Japanese control (a piece of territory they had acquired and retained after the Russo-Japanese War), there was absolutely no way for the project to move forward, although Sinclair Oil did try to defend this agreement in the Soviet legal system. By 1927, the Soviets had lost interest in the plan, and attempts by Sinclair to save it had failed. Ultimately, the Soviet court system released a judgment that ended the agreement in favor of the state but reimbursed 200,000 rubles of Sinclair’s initial deposit. The judgment effectively ended Sinclair’s largely disastrous attempt at securing a piece of the Soviet oil industry.

Eventually an agreement was made between Anglo-American enterprises in order to distribute oil from Russia. As Joan Hoff Wilson writes in *American Business and Foreign*

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300 GARF, f. 8350, op. 1, d. 941, l. 1, 5, 43.

301 Ibid., f. 8350, op. 1, d. 25, l. 7.
Policy, during 1928, a private truce was signed between Jersey Standard, Royal Dutch-Shell, and Socony-Vacuum, and the following year the Anglo-American Company (representing Jersey Standard, Royal Dutch-Shell, and Anglo-Persian) signed a three-year contract with Russian Oil Products, Ltd. It guaranteed the Soviets 12.5 percent of the British oil market in return for allowing Anglo-American to buy ‘considerable quantities’ (estimated at $20 million annually) of Russian oil at 5 percent below its market price. This decision, in effect, gave the Anglo-American Company a monopoly over Soviet distribution but allowed the Soviets to retain direct control while re-entering Western markets. The Soviets were forced to negotiate with Anglo-American and accept sub-market prices in order to be allowed market access.

Ultimately, strategies by Imperial Russia, the ADR, and the Soviet Union were often malleable in the face of reduced or unaffordable oil production, and negotiations with private oil companies often involved each government negotiating a strategy that theoretically would maximize their access to the fruits of production. Initial attempts at intervention by the imperial governments did have a semi-appreciable effect of maintaining supply at a controlled price point. As Russia rapidly destabilized during the February and October Revolutions and the Russian Civil War, the industry lacked capital investment and necessary technical improvements to explore and exploit new fields. This would be a growing problem for the successor governments that attempted to administer Baku. The Azerbaijani government, first by attempting to nationalize the industry, then backing away from nationalization, had a relatively marginal effect on changing the trajectory of production during the republic’s brief existence.

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In comparison, it seems that only under the Soviets—who, through the application of military force, maintained a flexible and expansive strategy of state intervention and private concessions—was there long-term recovery of production in Baku. Of course, this was only achieved post-1920, after years of declining supply, and it took seven years to come to fruition. This strategy would have its own costs, and while production would comparatively surge, the Soviets would have to provide considerable amounts of state capital due to a lack of interest by private investors. Production would then take years to reach its pre-war level.

Eventually, by 1927, production did finally reach pre-war levels. Although most of this oil was exported for hard currency and agricultural supplies, the Soviets had planned for domestic industrial consumption to meet and then exceed pre-war levels across the late 1920s and early 1930s. Ultimately, Gosplan did not foresee the considerable challenges the industry would face in drafting their 10-year forecast in 1921. In reality, Gosplan did not meet the 310% increase in production it had hoped for through steady growth of international concessions.

One important point to consider in terms of the recovery is that, while oil assets in themselves were initially of modest use to the Soviets compared to their value as an export commodity, increased capacity opened the possibility for greater internal utilization of oil at a later date. Once an emphasis on crash industrialization began after 1927, the ample domestic oil resources available to the Soviet Union resulted in sufficient oil supply without the need for

303 RGAE, f. 4372, op. 11, d. 15, l. 115-116.

304 Altshuler, Neftianaia promyshlennost’ [Oil Production], 11-41.

305 GARF, f. 6764, op. 1, d. 94.

306 bid., f. 6764, op. 1, d. 94, l. 17, 18, 114. Gosplan is a shortening for State Planning Commission.
significant importation.  

The situation of the industry was complicated; the increasing diplomatic isolation reduced the chance of conducting the same sort of cooperative deals with foreign investors the Soviets had previously hoped to enter into. Although the Soviets could export significant amounts of oil, as previously shown, at the same time the industry remained isolated from foreign investment, especially American and British investment. Furthermore, while Soviets would attempt to recruit foreign engineers to assist them in their efforts, from the mid-1920s through the mid-1930s, the Soviet Union during the Stalinist period moved away from direct cooperation with foreign enterprises. This is a likely contributing factor to the shortage of petrochemical engineers in the USSR during that time.

4. Comparison between Baku and Tampico, Mexico

Taking these factors into consideration, it is useful to look at comparable examples to Baku at this time—specifically its most direct competitor during the early 1920s: oil production in the Gulf of Mexico. In this sense, Mexico is especially useful for comparative analysis due to the similar viability of its oil production, comparable periods of revolutionary violence and civil war, and its eventual nationalization of its oil industry in 1938 under the National Revolutionary Party (PNR). In addition, Mexico, due to its often economically and diplomatically complex relationship with the United States (like the Soviet Union), faced considerable post-war economic and political challenges, especially when dealing with its industrialized trade partners. Also, during the 1920s, both existed on the periphery of the industrialized world, and although

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307 Alekperov, *Oil of Russia*, 222.

308 RGASPI, f. 80, op. 7, d. 29, l. 1, 3, 4, 5.

309 Ibid., f. 80, op. 7, d. 29, l. 9.

310 Santiago, *The Ecology of Oil*, 291-300. The PNR was subsequently succeeded by the Party of the Mexican Revolution (PRM) in 1938 and then the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in 1946.
each country had very different economic and political structures, both nations would struggle to cope with reconciling their political goals with oil exportation and economic reconstruction.

By the later years of the First World War, the decline in oil production in Baku opened an enormous vacuum of supply on international markets that needed to be filled by other sources. As shown previously, the First World War and the Russian Civil War produced a sustained contraction of production in Baku that was correlated with growing chaos both in the city and the rest of Russia. Nevertheless, until 1921, unfulfilled demand for oil continued to swell in the United States and Europe because global supply was unable keep up with reduced production in Baku during the First World War. Furthermore, there was a growing disconnection between international supply and demand. This interplay between the growing needs of industrialized states and limited supply would force investment strategies to develop outside existing major oil-producing regions. Once this supply restraint had been solved, the industry soon after experienced an oil glut during the 1920s and 1930s, and oil prices fell accordingly.

Maria Del Mar Rubio, in “The Role of Mexico in the First World Oil Shortage,” addresses the outcome of this production gap, especially during the period between 1918 and 1921. Decreased production in Baku was replaced by increased production from fields along the Gulf of Mexico, specifically around the gulf city of Tuxpan. In her words, “The shrinkage of Russian production [indicated] that Mexico was to produce more than half the oil outside the

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312 Yergin, The Prize, 242-244. Oil prices fell from their height of $3 (or $35 in 2013 valuation) in 1920 to a range of $1.40 to $1.80 ($20-$25 in 2013 prices) during the 1920s, and as low $0.65 ($10 in 2013 prices) during the Great Depression.
U.S. from 1919 to 1923.” By 1921, the oil production in the United States and Mexico had accounted for 80% of the world’s production. Throughout the turmoil of this period, Baku had become a relatively minor producer compared to its position only twenty years earlier; this juxtaposition represented a seismic shift in production flows from the Eastern to Western Hemisphere.

This dynamic change in the relative scale of global production would have significant influences beyond Baku, but it would not change the politics surrounding the control of Baku and its environs. The desperation of those powers competing for control of Baku outweighed any fluctuations in local supply, and the expectations by both the Azerbaijani government and the Soviets of greatly expanded production after the Russian Civil War dampened any misgivings by either state. While supply increased dramatically in both Mexico and in the United States as international prices spiked, prices would only remain high until they stabilized and then began to decline after 1921. Nevertheless, oil remained as economically necessary for industrialized oil importers as previously, and, even as Baku and its fields were increasingly sidelined in international commerce, the Soviets pushed to greatly increase oil output in order to compete in an ever-expanding international market.

Therefore, increased Mexican production replaced the shortfall in global production left by disrupted production from Russia, especially Baku. Despite significant increases in relative local supply in Mexican fields, there was a time lag between American investment in the

313 Ibid.
315 GARF, f. 6764, op. 1, d. 94, l. 12-16.
industry and the ability for those fields to meet demand; therefore, the prices increasing from 1917 to 1920 was likely attributable (in part, at least) to this lag.\footnote{Ibid.} In this context, the relative decline of oil production in Baku and the increasing supply in Mexico provides a compelling example of how what was once a nascent global energy market was able to recover from disrupted energy flows due to sudden bursts of investment on the other side of the world. In the context of this crisis, a broad, aggregated supply of petroleum was able to fluidly shift between Mexico and Baku relatively quickly, and in the space of months, between 1920-1921, a price equilibrium was reached as decline of supply in one region was met with increased supply in the other.\footnote{Ibid. Prices fell from $3.07 (or $36 a barrel in 2013 prices) in 1920 to $1.73 a barrel (or $22 in 2014 prices) in 1921.} The surge in pricing during 1919-1920 showed there was a measurable lag in this process before a newer and lower price equilibrium could be reached.

Due to this decline of supply and rapid increase of demand, the First World War and its aftermath created, in essence, the world’s first global energy supply shock. As supply was sapped in Transcaucasia due to waves of warfare and underinvestment, rapid international investment led to an increase in supply in more stable regions, exemplified by the expansion of the Potrero del Llano and Ebano fields in Mexico.\footnote{Santiago, \textit{The Ecology of Oil}, 100-112.} While the political and ethnic issues of Baku were local, their international effect would be counterbalanced economically by the movement of capital from the United States and the United Kingdom to fields in Mexico.\footnote{Rubio, “Role of Mexico,” 6-8.}

Even beyond this economic relationship, a useful comparison can be made of comparable political developments in both states through roughly the same period. Prior to the Mexican oil
boom, both Mexico and the Russian Empire were struck by multi-staged revolutions beginning in 1910 and 1917, respectively—which were both the result of fomented unrest and led to bitter civil wars that left both countries economically damaged and desperate to harness whatever resources were left on the territory they were able to control.\textsuperscript{321} In this case, both the post-war Mexican government and the Soviets retained control of prominent oil industries that were vital to their national interests, although nationalization brought political tension between the post-revolutionary governments and private foreign companies. Although the period from 1917 to 1920 was marked by massive social revolution and civil war that surged across the entire space of the former Russian Empire, by 1917, Mexico had ratified a new constitution, although full stability did not return until 1920.

In the context of the period, economic development in both states depended on social stability as well as capital investment. The comparably greater amount of stability in Mexico helped create an environment that promoted significantly increased oil production as well as foreign investment and an environment that allowed workers to regularly come to work without threat of open violence. Therefore, while Mexico greatly expanded its domestic production as supply in Baku declined, the political undercurrents surrounding both fields changed. Furthermore, as the supply of crude shifted, so did the raw strategic value of the fields in Baku as compared to their once dominant position in the market; nevertheless, the struggle over them

\textsuperscript{321} Jonathan C. Brown, \textit{Oil and Revolution in Mexico} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 219, 227-234. Also Altstadt, \textit{The Azerbaijani Turks}, 111-113. In particular, the Mexican government pursued a route focused on taxation and negotiation rather than complete nationalization, although underground resources, including oil, were proclaimed property of the state under Article 26 of the Mexican Constitution of 1917.
would still follow along economic and geopolitical lines as the Soviets sought to retain control of those fields.  

The value of petroleum and the rise of revolutionary left-wing governments also created other political issues. Mexico’s relations with industrialized powers, especially the United States, were also complicated by the revolutionary politics that emerged during the aftermath of the Mexican Civil War with the return of subsurface oil to state ownership and the nationalization of the industry in 1938. Ultimately, in diplomatic terms, revolution and nationalization had similar results for the Mexican government as it did for the Soviets, most chiefly growing diplomatic tensions with their potential international partners. While Mexico was not nearly as diplomatically and politically isolated as the Soviet Union during this period, Mexico did have to contend with the additional complication that the United States was directly on its border, and the government had to take into consideration the significant amount of domestic political influence in Mexico that American and British capital brought with it. In addition, there was further complication with the United States military intervention in Mexico during its civil war, which only helped to exacerbate political tensions and enhance distrust between the United States and Mexico. The aftermath of this conflict was marked at times by a frosty political and economic relationship between the two countries, and relations were only strained further as American oil companies, including Standard Oil, demanded full compensation from the Mexican government after nationalization.

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323 Rubio, “Role of Mexico,” 7. Mexican Eagle, a British company, was the largest single producer in Mexico.

324 Yergin, *The Prize*, 277-278.
The Mexican Revolution was not so far reaching in its ideology as the Russian Revolution and, during its aftermath, Mexico saw fewer structural changes to its economy. There are nevertheless further post-revolutionary parallels to be found in both states. Foremost, both Soviet Russia and Mexico sought direct nationalization over the petroleum industry as a state-owned commodity in order to balance the needs of increasing industrialization in what were still largely agricultural economies. While Mexican nationalization occurred eighteen years after the Soviets’ control over Baku, it nevertheless rivaled its near totality of state control and was as economically essential to the Mexican government as nationalization was to the Soviets. Nationalization of oil production not only bought additional revenue to each state; it also allowed them supply their burgeoning domestic market for petroleum.

Unlike the Soviet-style nationalization, Mexican nationalization was guided not only by central government policies but also by the politics of the oil workers themselves, many of whom supported nationalization. Nationalization in this context in Mexico was not only a populist measure that was not widely supported by the public and oil workers, but it was also a process that lent the government further credibility as a post-revolutionary force capable of sustainable reform during a period of renewed vigor among workers and their unions during the mid-1930s. This is in contrast to Baku, where workers and their state-sponsored unions were progressively distanced from decision-making after the Soviet occupation of Azerbaijan, and nationalization occurred with little public input.  

325 For the Soviets and the Central Committee, nationalization fit well under the ideological considerations of a “worker-peasant state” and as a natural

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325 GARF, f. 6764, op. 1, d. 93, l. 1-15. As Myrna Santiago shows in The Ecology of Oil, the nationalization of the oil industry in Mexico in 1938 ultimately led to workers and unions having limited ability to steer PEMEX, although oil workers through STRPM were able to obtain three out of nine positions on the PEMEX board, 350.
culmination of the priority of the Communist Party of the RSFSR and its subordinate, the Communist Party of the Transcaucasian Soviet Socialist Republic, to dominate the “commanding heights” of essential industries.326

Despite this key ideological difference, there remains a similar reaction between both the Soviet and Mexican post-revolutionary regimes toward accessing further control over their oil and petrochemical industries, especially as both governments utilized their monopoly as a means of harnessing their resources to expand the domestic supply of oil and as a method of subsidizing continued government investment. Specifically in the case of Baku, in all three instances of major shifts in governance (from the Tsarist government to the ADR and then to the Union Soviet), each government experienced a very similar crisis that required a suitable response of either subsidization or nationalization. Ultimately, each government struggled to calibrate the right balance between state and private ownership in order to meet its direct needs of state revenue.

Nevertheless, it is important to take into consideration not only the connection between political imperatives and economic necessity in Baku, but how closely tied state directives were to the further material interests of the Soviet state. When the economic interests of the state were squarely affected by the possibility of reduced production, there was a rapid thaw in ideology regarding Soviet attitudes towards foreign investors when it made financial sense for them to do so.327 Furthermore, the Communist Party was required to shift its ideological directives to more


327 This would be illustrated by the desire for further Western concessions during the negotiations for the Treaty of Genoa in 1922.
pragmatic concerns, and it is not surprising that the shift to the NEP required foreign cooperation and thus a softening of Soviet methodology regarding foreign investment. According to William Rosenberg in his introduction to *Russia in the NEP*, the NEP “proved to be a breathing space” because “a complex and variegated society needed to move more slowly toward these goals in order to cope with the profound consequences of revolutionary upheaval.” This did not mean the Soviet leadership gave up on their revolutionary objectives but that the turmoil of the Russian Civil War had put them into such a delicate economic position that opening the oil industry to both foreign investment and technology had become an undeniable priority.

Moreover, special attention should be paid to the timing of these discussions, which started in the fall of 1919, contemporaneous with the expansion of military control by the Soviets in Russia itself. While the Soviets’ initial efforts to negotiate concessions were often unsuccessful, the complexity and size of negotiations rapidly grew in the space of months, and many ventures, including Soviet cooperation with Barnsdall, eventually proved fruitful for both parties. While the Soviets never formally gave a concession to one of the “majors,” such as Royal Dutch Shell or Standard Oil of New Jersey, these companies eventually bought oil from the Soviets (thus Azneft) directly.

Mexico also had to bend its ideological leanings as well in order to meet its economic needs. While, by the Second World War, PEMEX remained under strict state ownership, its

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329 Ibid., 3.

330 GARF, f. 8350, op.1, d. 941, l. 6.

leadership faced the same dilemma as the Soviet leadership, for it was forced to ask for foreign assistance to introduce the technological improvements needed in order to promote further development. Although Mexico faced considerable resistance by Standard Oil, Mexico was also able, over time, to re-establish a working relationship with the U.S. government during the Second World War under the Good Neighbor Policy, which also restricted any aid to Mexico’s domestic oil industry. 332

Therefore, in the context of the necessity of foreign cooperation, it is remarkable that appeals for foreign assistance by the Soviets had occurred quite early after the revolution and were still in progress during periods of some of the heaviest fighting of the Russian Civil War. By 1919, a period during which the United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan had forces intervening in Russia (largely in hopes in containing the advances of the Red Army), the Soviets had already begun to issues appeals for financial assistance from private investors from the United States and the United Kingdom. 333 Two very different relationships formed during this period: an explicitly adversarial one between the nascent Soviet state and the former allies of the Russian Empire from the First World War, and a relatively open relationship between the state and a growing number of investors and private companies, initially including the Vanderlip group.

The nature of communications between the Soviet Union with first the Vanderlip group and then Sinclair Oil reveals the Soviet leadership’s belief that political division in the West was

332 Clayton Koppes, “The Good Neighbor Policy and the Nationalization of Mexican Oil: A Reinterpretation,” The Journal of American History 69, No.1 (June., 1982), 78-79. While there was an attempt to provide a $150 million dollar loan to PEMEX by 1944, this was shut down by President Roosevelt.

333 GARF, f. 8350, op.1, d. 941, l. 1-6.
advantageous to its position and that selective cooperation was to the new regime’s benefit. One of the major criteria for the success of Vanderlip’s proposal was to convince the Harding administration to relax sanctions and eventually offer some form of recognition to the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{334} The Soviets, in part, may very well have sought communication and cooperation for Western companies simply because private companies could be reliable political actors outside the scope of the foreign policy of their governments. In addition, these negotiations happened quite rapidly after the fall of the nascent communist state in Hungary and the nucleus of a Marxist state in Bavaria in 1919. This indicates that the practices of the Soviet state were able to shift rapidly in the space of months (if not weeks) between the ultimate failure of revolutionary activity in Central Europe and the thawing of relations with foreign private investors. This was likely an outcome of “Brest tactics,” playing western powers or enterprises against each other or “paying them off” in order to buy the RSFSR more time.\textsuperscript{335}

Beyond geopolitical considerations, nationalization in Baku involved a broad change in ownership that directly affected how workers would relate to the oil industry and the amount of leverage workers would now have versus their employers. After 1920, oil workers and other employees, rather than negotiating with a myriad of private companies and their management, would negotiate with state-owned enterprises—in particular, Azneft—and a profound divergence of interest occurred between the state, state enterprises, state-sponsored unions, and the workers themselves. Workers, rather than relying on a number of political organizations, parties, and unions that existed before 1920, and especially after 1917, could now only channel their

\textsuperscript{334} Ibid., f. 8350, op.1, d. 941, l. 110.

grievances through official state channels, and if those grievances were ignored, they had nowhere else to turn.\footnote{RGASPI, f.64, op.1, d. 17, l.237. In particular, while Azneft was knowledgeable of shortages of basic goods among its workers, workers had no independent outlet for their demands.} Obviously, despite the victory of the Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP), there is a clear irony here in that a political party that once had supported multiple worker strikes and helped organize considerable labor unrest in the name of workers’ rights in Baku had now created a situation in which state and worker interests, especially on issues of housing and pay, were now increasingly divergent.\footnote{Santiago, \textit{The Ecology of Oil}, 239-240.} The domination of the state had, if anything dramatically increased the inequalities in the power relationship between the workers and their employers.

The Soviet system and its coercive nature, especially after 1927, effectively thwarted any possibility for organized opposition from workers. The arrival of Soviet forces, including internal security forces and the rapid expansion of the Cheka, eliminated any remaining political opposition that had not been previously eradicated in the multiple handovers of the city from 1917 to 1920. Due to a powerful internal security system, there was no longer any effective, allowed resistance to ultimatums from the central government—although the Soviets would struggle with the security situation in rural Azerbaijan across the mid-1920s. While Soviet rule would bring stability, it would also pose a significant cost to the population, leading to an utter dismantling of any trace of political plurality in Baku.\footnote{Swietochowski, \textit{Russian Azerbaijan}, 357.} Furthermore, the death of any active political opposition had a profound impact on the population of Baku itself but would also be
part of a shift that would affect millions of people whose lives in Azerbaijan were inextricably connected to the Soviet State.

5. Conclusion

The culmination of this process was that Baku remained the prime oil source for the Soviet Union and was indispensable for the economy as a whole until into the late 1940s. Nevertheless, the Soviet economy was not as heavily reliant on oil as it would be during its later years, and oil production made up only a relatively limited portion of total exports. While oil production was important, it was one among many other critical commodities—such as coal, iron ore, and timber—that were necessary for the Soviet economy. Although oil remained a key priority in the complex structure of economic planning by Gosplan, it was only one of a multitude of natural resources needed by the Soviet state. As the industrial gap between the Soviets and the United States slowly closed, so did the eventual shift in priorities to other commodities, including an increasing emphasis on coal production in order to feed the Soviet steel industry and to provide cheap electricity.

Despite some key successes in oil production in comparison to other industries in the Soviet Union, the oil industry in Baku generally recovered more slowly from its pre-war high. One key reason for this is simply the reliance of the industry on specialized technologies, especially for the drilling and exploration of new wells. From 1914 to 1923, critical technical advancements were being made outside the Soviet Union—particularly in the United States—

339 Alekperov, Oil of Russia, 225.

that would dramatically increase the efficiency of production.\textsuperscript{341} In particular, major advancements in pressurized crude extraction and drill bits had revolutionized the industry outside the former Soviet Union while Baku’s fields faced relative under-investment and technological stagnation.

Of course, the former Russian Empire had undergone seven years of war; the United States, by virtue of its industrial strength and relative peace, had made massive technical strides that simply could not be matched in the former Russian Empire, especially during their Civil War. While some foreign assistance after the Civil War and into the 1920s helped close this gap and allowed the Soviets to re-tool to some degree, the difficulty in negotiations and the relatively limited time period of these negotiations hampered the Soviets in getting fair market prices for their oil, even while total exports expanded.\textsuperscript{342}

The industry in Baku took time to recover to its pre-war capacity. Additional growth in the 1920s continued beyond the 1914 baseline after its initial recovery during the mid-twenties. Even though by 1927 post-war production had reached pre-war levels, afterwards the Soviets could only rely on increased output from new drilling methods because much of the work of recovery of older fields had already been accomplished.\textsuperscript{343} Soviet drilling initially had to deal with fields that, for the most part, had seen their best days behind them; over time, additional drilling gradually expanded production.

\textsuperscript{341} GARF, f. 8350, op.1, d. 941, l. 110, and f. 8350, op. 1, d. 25, l. 7. The Central Committee on Concessions was well aware of technological advances (especially in drilling) occurring in the United States.

\textsuperscript{342} Yergin, \textit{The Prize}, 239-241.

\textsuperscript{343} Kostornichenko, \textit{Inostrannyi capital} [International Capital], 343.
Table 2.4: Output of Major Producers, 1918-1927 (in Thousands of Barrels)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>Mexico</th>
<th>Russia/USSR</th>
<th>Poland/Galicia</th>
<th>Persia</th>
<th>Venezuela</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>355,928</td>
<td>63,828</td>
<td>27,168</td>
<td>6,032</td>
<td>8,623</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>378,367</td>
<td>87,073</td>
<td>31,752</td>
<td>6,096</td>
<td>10,139</td>
<td>425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>442,929</td>
<td>157,069</td>
<td>25,430</td>
<td>5,607</td>
<td>12,230</td>
<td>1,433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>472,183</td>
<td>193,398</td>
<td>28,968</td>
<td>5,167</td>
<td>16,673</td>
<td>2,201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>557,531</td>
<td>182,278</td>
<td>35,692</td>
<td>5,227</td>
<td>22,247</td>
<td>4,201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>732,407</td>
<td>149,585</td>
<td>39,147</td>
<td>5,402</td>
<td>25,230</td>
<td>9,042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>713,940</td>
<td>139,678</td>
<td>45,355</td>
<td>5,627</td>
<td>32,373</td>
<td>19,687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>763,743</td>
<td>115,515</td>
<td>52,448</td>
<td>5,960</td>
<td>35,038</td>
<td>36,911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>770,874</td>
<td>90,421</td>
<td>64,311</td>
<td>5,844</td>
<td>35,842</td>
<td>63,134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>901,129</td>
<td>64,121</td>
<td>77,018</td>
<td>5,342</td>
<td>39,688</td>
<td>105,749</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In comparison, U.S. production would continue to increase from 1918 to 1927, making the U.S. by far the largest producer in world by the 1920s. Moreover, from 1918 to 1921, Mexican production would triple, further centralizing production in North America. In contrast, Polish production in Galicia would largely continue to stagnant while Anglo-Persian production in Iran would quadruple in size and Venezuelan production would overtake Soviet production by 1927. The ultimate outcome of these developments is that, in general, production would be much further concentrated in North America while Transcaucasia and the Middle East would take a much more distant second place in terms of production.

Even after decades, the oil industry in Azerbaijan would continue to be a less visible part of the world’s total production. In 2016, Azerbaijan accounted for less than 3% of world production. Despite the overall downward trend in oil production from 1900 through the 1920s,

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\[^{344}\text{DeGolyer and MacNaughton,} Twentieth Century Petroleum Statistics, 5, 8, 9.\]

\[^{345}\text{Ibid.}\]

\[^{346}\text{Ibid.}\]
state institutions continued to expand output (decrease space) in order to extract as much value as possible from capital investment. Moreover, the Soviets formed an economic environment that had continued to lend itself to unfettered expansion fueled by crash industrialization, and while oil was de-emphasized to some extent versus other commodities, it proved to still be a necessary industrial and trade good.

Although the Soviet Union until the late 1920s was progressively able to meet and then exceed war-time production by balancing foreign technical expertise and capital investment, Stalin’s break with the NEP (New Economic Policy) and a more guarded foreign policy added additional complexity to any attempt at recruiting technical expertise from abroad. By the mid-1920s, a reliable supply of technical experts would depend on ideological voluntarism and Soviet-German cooperation. In addition, an emphasis on investment continued to be placed on other commodities, such as iron and coal, despite earlier (and far rosier) projections by the Soviets for possibly far higher sustained oil and petrochemical growth, such as doubling 1920 production by the mid-1930s.347 Despite these challenges, however, production would continue to slowly grow across the 1930s, and production capacity in Baku, before the advent of the Second World War, would be as much as 60% higher than it was in 1920.348

Ultimately, the key factor limiting Baku’s long-term total production capacity largely came down to the issue of how much oil was left in the ground versus optimistic Soviet expectations of oil as a key industrial export and a reliable commodity of exchange for industrial machinery and other imports. The Soviets, by continuing to look at investment in Baku as a

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347 GARF, f. 6764, op. 1, d. 93, l. 1-15. This includes an expansion of lubricant production necessary for heavy industrialization.

source of cheap domestic oil and a way to accrue hard currency from abroad, wedded themselves to a mindset that often prioritized short-term investment rather than longer-term alternative strategies.\textsuperscript{349}

Before the First World War, Baku had seen steadily reduced production as old fields around the city were exploited at a quicker rate than new ones could be drilled. With the technical assistance of Western companies, especially Barnsdall oil, production recovered (to an extent) as new fields were drilled, and eventually, by the mid-twenties, this decline was mitigated. This process explains why, while the industry saw some growth during the 1920s and continued growth into 1930, despite this success, its relative share of global production declined as production surged elsewhere, especially in North America.\textsuperscript{350} As the United States, Iran, and Venezuela increasingly provided larger supplies of oil, their success only further diminished Baku’s position in the international market. Nevertheless, this process took a considerable amount of time, and the eventual result of the transition to American and Venezuelan oil would only become readily apparent later, across the 1920s.

Global supply was remarkably elastic during this period, and as demand steadily rose, the ability to meet demand was consistently met by rising supply in North America. Moreover, this global shift effectively minimized the risk of an actual supply shock, and total production of oil did not shrink during this period due to certain circumstantial factors of un-assessed oil capacity, technological change, and relative geopolitical stability. American and British oil companies

\textsuperscript{349} A situation further exemplified in Loren Graham’s \textit{Ghost of the Executed Engineer: Technology and the Fall of the Soviet Union} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996). Graham’s work explores engineer Peter Palchinsky and his struggle against the short-term technical mindset of Soviet industrial strategies during the First Five-Year plan.

were simply able to readily counter events inside the former Russian Empire by refocusing their investments elsewhere; however, in so doing, they dramatically shifted the relative economic value of fields in Baku.

This fact may have been a lesson that helped solidify much of the diversity and the ability of adaptation of our current energy systems. In this sense, from that period onward, there were more and more possibilities for alternative supply sources outside of Azerbaijan, and today there continues to be a myriad of choices. The years of the Russian Civil War in Azerbaijan in part influenced this shift, and as global supplies moved to meet a reduction of supply due to a political and in many ways a geopolitical contest in Baku, civil turmoil helped to force a system of compensation for political and economic unrest with alternative supply sources for oil.

The oil industry would never again be centralized in a single location such as it was in Baku at the turn of the century. Even considering the continued domination of drilling in the present-day Persian Gulf, currently there are a multitude of alternatives for the production of crude, from the delta of the Niger River to Western Siberia. Diversity in production locations was a necessity for the rise of the industry from relative obscurity into one of the foundations of the modern world, providing sources of petroleum supply that would allow refiners and distributors of petrochemical products to shift their source of supply if a crisis arose in other centers of production. Because oil is a fungible good, the location of the source is not so important as having decent alternative sources of supply for transportation.

As discussed previously, a clear parallel can be seen between the actions of the PRI and previous governments in Mexico in attempting to harness the raw economic output from its oil industry with that of the Soviet Union. While initially production surged in Mexico until 1921,
an eventual decline in production, along with widespread grievances by labor unions representing workers in the fields, led to complete nationalization and centralization of the industry in the form of PEMEX, a direct corollary to the initial formation of Azneft. This similarity is not an accident but rather an illustration of how post-revolutionary states and the parties that controlled them had to continually justify their existence as a revolutionary force while fighting against significant foreign pressure—the United States being the largest political threat for Mexico while a broader group of Western capitalist countries were arrayed against the Soviet Union. The solution for Mexico and the Soviet Union regarding the issue of restricted revenue was nationalization. By nationalizing arguably a strategic and valuable industry in their countries, both governments found the most efficient method of extracting resources from their political monopoly. However, in the case of the Soviet Union, these resources became a valuable source of exports.

The methodology that both the Soviet state and previous governments would use to accomplish their domination of Baku (if not blatant exploitation of its resources) can be framed as a form of “internal colonization”; Baku was only valued in terms of its resources. At the same time, this framing does not fully explain what was at stake in Baku. While the resources of the city and much of its population were exploited and eventually harnessed under the mantle of an ideologically-bound mobilized state, this outcome was only a part of a broader struggle for the city. While major shifts in political control of Baku have been routinely framed in grander ideological or political terms by both former and present-day governments in the region, all three states nevertheless, at their heart, were guided by a refined and purposeful desire to utilize the value of Baku to simply reinforce themselves economically. Tsarist manipulation of prices, the ADR’s experimentation with nationalization, and Soviet willingness to open negotiations for
private concessions all show a common flexibility, but at their core they betray how the city and its population were truly valued by these three states. More than simply “internal colonization,” each state shared a symbiotic if not at times parasitic relationship with Baku that would leave a permanent impact on the development of the city, its ecology, and the long-term, inter-ethnic relationships of its residents.

This impact would have its own legacy of exploitation and division, a legacy that would be inseparable from the circumstances of the industry during the First World War and then the Russian Civil War, in which the resources of Baku were processed at a heavy cost in order to keep oil and its byproducts flowing. Ultimately, the multiple government responses that have been shown would lead to long term social, political, and economic consequences that have left a problematic legacy for present-day Azerbaijan, including a continual over-reliance on the oil industry for state revenue that continues to have negative consequences for the population of Baku nearly a century later.
Chapter Three: The Geopolitical Cauldron: Baku in an International Context – 1914-1923

1. Introduction

At the outbreak of the First World War, Baku was a city in the midst of upheaval. Its towering oil derricks represented an economic revolution that would be crucial to the establishment of the modern oil industry as we know it today—a revolution that remapped the geography of the energy industry. However, as its machinery pumped, the city was hit by repeated waves of ethnic violence and outright warfare across the early twentieth century. Baku was a city that was created by the industrial age yet struggled to grasp a stable hold of it. Beyond these factors, there was another piece of the puzzle that would explain the chaos that would sweep cross the city multiple times: Baku’s chief place in the geopolitical strategy of multiple regional and major powers during the period.

The impactful events of the First World War and its immediate aftermath would not only be reflected in the local politics of the city and the national movements that flourished across the rest of Transcaucasia, but in the greater geopolitical game that was being played amongst the great powers that sought domination over both the resources and strategic access gained by controlling Transcaucasia. From 1914 to 1920, the Ottomans, the British, the Russian Empire, and then the Soviets took part in a greater regional struggle that surrounded Baku, and they would fight hard-won battles for control

351 Suny, The Baku Commune, 218, 335. In particular, the “March Days” and the Battle of Baku in September 1918 were two of the most critical incidents of ethnic violence to hit the city.

352 NAUK (National Archives of the United Kingdom), CAB (War Cabinet of the United Kingdom) 24-44-91, 1 and 24-68-44, 1-2. The British Foreign Office was inordinately worried over loss of control of the Caucasus as being detrimental to the security of the British Empire, in particular British interests in Iran and India.
of the city. These struggles in many ways would guide the future of the city as powerfully as had the ethnic and religious divisions that were born inside of it during the late Tsarist period. Furthermore, the revolutionary period saw multiple battles happening simultaneously around the inner political struggle within the city itself.

In order to support this dissertation project, I have acquired archival resources from the State Archive of the Russian Federation, with special attention to resources on British influence in Transcaucasia from the Archive of October Revolution and White Movements, as well as material from the British Foreign Office and War Cabinet from National Archives of the United Kingdom. These resources, alongside documentation on the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan from the State Archive of Azerbaijan, have given me the ability to apply original archival research to provide greater context to the warfare and upheaval the city experienced from 1914 to 1920. In particular, archival evidence from the State Archive of the Russian Federation has provided a useful perspective on Soviet analysis of British movements in the region, while documentation from the British War Cabinet and Foreign Office has likewise given me the useful viewpoint of British analysis of events in the region. In addition, sources from the archive of the Hoover Institution, in particular eyewitness accounts from significant figures of the period, such as General Nikolai Baratov and American journalist Robert Pierpont, have allowed me to draw on personal perspectives regarding the geopolitical events unfolding around and then inside Baku.

These archival sources are necessary to illustrate the multiple points of view from regional powers (in particular, elements of both the British government and the leadership of the Soviets) toward the events in Baku, and they provide a necessary
context to the motivations behind the struggle between the two powers for control of the city. While it would be possible to analyze the geopolitical milieu surrounding Baku from sources other than British or Soviet perspectives, such a history would be dramatically limited in providing enough context of the relationship between the broader regional geopolitical struggle in which Baku was the object of multiple powers who were rigorous in their assertion of authority over the city.

Although the literature on the period, such as Ronald Suny’s *Baku Commune* and Tadeusz Swietochowsi’s *Russian Azerbaijan*, has covered elements of the geopolitical situation, Baku needs to be examined in both in a narrower regional context and also as a broader illustration of the long-standing historical territorial contests between major powers, especially the British, the Ottomans, the Russians, and then the Soviets. Furthermore, the purpose of this chapter is to fully illustrate the interconnectivity of geopolitical and ethnic conflicts, and then later political action, through using archival sources from primarily the Russian/Soviet as well British perspectives. In addition, compared to specific works on British foreign policy surrounding oil, such as Geoffrey Jones in *The State and the Emergence of British Oil*, or Soviet foreign policy in Transcaucasia, such as significant elements of Richard Debo’s *Survival and Consolidation*, this chapter will be geared primarily at the geopolitical situation surrounding Baku itself.

The First World War was not the first war, in a sense, that was multi-continental; colonial wars during the eighteenth century were often attached to European struggles, such as the Seven Year War, but it was the first war of its nature that would occur after the industrial revolution, where the needs of supplying the war itself would truly be felt.
globally on such a massive scale. The needs of industrialization required increasing access to commodities to conduct warfare in the modern era, as well as to feed domestic economies, especially of initially neutral countries, such as the United States.

In addition, the fact that the world had now become increasingly reliant on energy (specifically petroleum products, such as kerosene and fuel oil) to keep both its militaries and their economies functioning, made oil a strategic commodity, and Baku at the start of the First World War remained the largest supplier of benzene in Eurasia. Therefore, both in peace-time and in war, globalization truly affected Baku as much as any major global city in contemporary times, and the chaotic nature of the geopolitical situation of Europe and much of Eurasia only would enhance tensions to control it.

In this context, the rise of industrial energy extraction from petroleum and the local economy it helped spawn in Baku not only changed how people interacted with their immediate surroundings but how they would relate economically to countries outside of Transcaucasia. It is not simply the industrial revolution or the nature of allocation of capital that is important in order to understand this process; these factors existed alongside technological advancements that gave Baku’s industry a truly transcontinental reach. An increased demand for oil for uses in transportation coincided with an expansion of the initial phases of industrialization in the Russian Empire. While both the Ottoman and Russian Empires were not so reliant on oil consumption

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353 David Stevenson, *The First World War and International Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 1, 4-5. One can argue that many of the colonial wars of the 18th and 19th century were also global in nature, but it is industrialization and mobilization of manpower on such a colossal scale that made the First World War unique.

themselves, trade with industrialized states made a crucial difference in the balance of payments needed to import other goods.

Along with the philosophical and ideological counter-reactions that came with widening industrialization and the massive expansion of technology (which allowed for greater flexibility in warfare), there was an increase in the demand for these resources. While oil is not uniquely more important than any other commodity of import, the unique position of Baku, due to both its location and its primary industry, came to a head from 1914 to 1920 in a way that has happened in few other places in the world. Reactions to or from the oil industry could have happened in any other locality in which commodities were so vastly relied on. The attitudes of governments toward state intervention in Baku’s oil markets and their attempts at managing the political upheaval brought by ethnic and political identity formation of the period became linked with the broader geopolitical struggle that would interconnect all of these elements.

Baku had greater economic and geopolitical importance than most cities simply due its oil industry and its existence as a strategic “pawn” for the powers that surrounded it. More than just a city with an important oil industry, it was also still the largest city in the Eastern Caucasus and a key port city on the Caspian. Most importantly, Baku’s port was critical in order to move cargo across the Caspian and provided a crucial point of transportation access between the Caspian and the Black Sea, an advantage that was very apparent to the British government in 1918.\(^{355}\) In addition, while Baku’s primary strategic resource was oil, other production, including various solvents, fishing, and

\(^{355}\) NAUK, CAB 24-44-91, 1-3. In particular, the British War Cabinet was concerned about German movements into Central Asia.
manufacturing, meant it was an ideal base of operations for any army operating in the 
East Caucasus.356

In this context, Baku and Batumi, on the western coast of Georgia, existed as two 
links in a transportation system that connected Central Asia through Europe via the 
Caspian and Black Seas. Baku would still serve as a key part of a twentieth-century 
variant of the Silk Road, connecting Central Asia with Europe. Control of Baku was 
necessary in order to either secure or cut this emergent trade network, especially for the 
British Empire.357 The overlapping contests and crises that marked this period, in the end, 
are best illustrated as separate conflicts that eventually combined to create a period of 
intense warfare. Geopolitical machinations that would take years to fully reveal 
themselves were nevertheless connected by the very real economic dynamics happening 
inside Baku.

The strategic nature of Baku was created in the fluidity of this constructed 
geopolitical realm. The main powers that were vying for it (the Ottoman Empire, the 
British Empire, the Russian Imperial government, and the Soviets) all had their own 
vision of the manner in which Baku would actually be ruled after they conquered it. The 
results of the Tsarist and the brief Ottoman period have already been covered in the 
previous chapter, and the aftermath during the Soviet era will be addressed in the final 
chapter of this dissertation. British influence would not be felt in the number of their 
troops or in the duration of their stay but in their entry into Baku as a third force in the

356 “No.2” Bulletin d’Informations de l’Azerbaidjan (September 9, 1919), 8, and “No.6” 

357 NAUK, MUN [Ministry of Munitions] 4/6603, 2, 5-7. This is best illustrated by an 
appeal for further support of British interests in Baku by Richard Tweed, managing director of 
Baku Russian Petroleum Company Co. Ltd.
political circumstances of the city. As a result, they were able to negotiate with multiple sides as they saw fit. The British, by acting at times as detached negotiating party and at times as occupying force, attempted to maintain considerable influence in Baku and the rest of the ADR without directly administering it.

The goals of the British in this region have an historical lineage that go further back into the nineteenth century. In essence, their motives were closely tied with the defense of lines of communication and trade in India. In Ronald Hyam’s words, “effective defense [of the empire] meant thinking strategically. The very nature of strategic planning created a snowballing process of expansion.” The British struggle for Baku was not simply an immediate contemporary reaction but rather the extension of previous strategic issues influenced by Britain’s role in an increasingly globalized world. While these struggles at times overlapped chronologically, they nevertheless were influenced by very different goals that led to very different historical legacies.

2. The Ottoman-Russian Conflict

Beyond mere modern brinkmanship, the Ottoman versus Russian conflict can be seen as an effective continuation of a Muscovite (then Tsarist) struggle over the southern

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358 NAUK, CAB 24-44-91, 1-2. The British War Cabinet saw both the movement of the Central Powers into Transcaucasia in 1918 and the rise of the Bolsheviks as relatively equal threats.

359 ARDA, f.24, op.1, d.127, l.17-18. The Allied occupation authority was dependent on the ADR for fuel and supplies.

360 Ronald Hyam, Understanding the British Empire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 75.

361 Ibid.
Russian steppes and, eventually, Transcaucasia. Transcaucasia had already been an active front of warfare through the nineteenth century, as exemplified by the 1806-1812 and 1828-1829 Ottoman-Russian Wars, the Crimean War, and the 1878 Ottoman-Russian War, as well as the broader Russian-Ottoman rivalries that followed from these periods of combat. While the Russian-Ottoman rivalry in many ways stretched back to the initial expansion of Muscovy in the sixteenth century, by 1914 it remained an active point of friction.362

The first phase of this rivalry began with the southern expansion of Muscovy by its conquest of Astrakhan in 1556. Despite the conquest of Moscow by Crimean Tatar forces in 1571, Muscovy would only continue to push south-westwards towards the Crimean Khanate and southward toward the North Caucasian frontier across the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.363 This expansion continued with the conquest of the north Caucasus region across the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the consolidation of Russian control—not only of the North Caucasus, but Ukraine, Crimea, and Bessarabia. By the end of the eighteenth century, a series of expansions would consolidate Russian control across Iranian Transcaucasia, starting with the 1784 Treaty of Georgievsk between Russia and Georgia and the final annexation of Baku and Northern Azerbaijan from Persia in 1813 through the Treaty of Gulistan. The full consolidation of

362 It is evident that Transcaucasia was a constant point of contention between the Russian and Ottoman Empires across the nineteenth century. An argument can be made that the mountainous nature of Transcaucasia not only protected the region from both empires, but it forced both states to focus additional military strength to occupy the region.

Russian control over Transcaucasia would soon follow with the treaty of Turkmenchay in 1828 and largely establish the borders that would exist for much of the rest of the nineteenth and twentieth century.\textsuperscript{365}

Obviously, not all expansion southward by Russia at this point was against the Ottomans; Azerbaijan itself was a border region held initially by the Persians. However, this expansion was still part of a broader contest for influence—spurred by animosity between both states—that continued through the First World War. The expansion of Russia southward brought it into contact with border regions traditionally dominated by the Ottomans, and this advance reversed the territorial status quo of the early modern (if not medieval) period. The complexity of the alliance system of the First World War would renew this rivalry, in part due to the entangling alliances that would start the war in the first place.

This struggle started and largely continued outside the existence of immediate need for economic resources and predated the oil industry in Baku. For the most part, the Russo-Ottoman wars of the nineteenth century were primarily focused on the strategic control of territory, and the Russian advancement through the Balkans and Transcaucasia consistently focused on Pan-Slavic desires to liberate the Balkans while slowly whittling Ottoman strength in the region.\textsuperscript{366} While, by the 1878 war, some oil production was already occurring in Baku, the industry was still very much in its infancy, and oil had not

\textsuperscript{365} John Baddeley, \textit{The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus} (London: Longmans, Green and Co. 1908), 175-177.

\textsuperscript{366} Quintin Barry, \textit{War in the East: A Military History of the Russo-Turkish War 1877-78} (London: Helion and Company, 2012), 66-67. As Barry shows, there was some reluctance by Alexander II to enter the 1878 conflict; however, as the other great powers turned a blind eye to Russo-Ottoman affairs, war was almost assured.
become a strategic asset beyond relatively moderate use of kerosene for lighting. By 1914, Baku’s emerging oil industry added an additional if initially subtle strategic motive for this conflict: access to Baku’s crude and kerosene production as well moderate amounts of benzene and bunker fuel or fuel oil was needed by the navies of the period as well as heating.

In all likelihood, the Ottoman and Russian contest over Transcaucasia would have continued regardless of its utility oil, for it was generally guided by the necessity of geopolitical strategy in the region. Baku’s petroleum industry added an additional motive that made what would have been a localized conflict into a conflict that would have broader international influence. This connection helps illustrate the influence that commodities would have on other geopolitical struggles across the twentieth century, including the Second World War.

The ultimate failure of the Russian army to achieve its strategic objectives on multiple fronts, the collapse of the Tsarist Regime, and the consequent institutional and political weakness of the Provisional government very clearly weakened Russia’s hold over its borders, including those in Transcaucasia. By 1917, it was increasingly clear that the Russian army was losing its cohesion and effectiveness, and, as the army splintered, the Russian frontline had weakened considerably and “approached the final stages of disintegration” while Russian forces were pushed back deeper into Transcaucasia.368 As Allan Wildman portrays in The End of the Russian Imperial Army, by mid-1917,

367 Smele, The Russian Civil Wars, 63-64.
368 Ibid.
growing chaos amidst the Russian Army “reflected in most undiluted form the social stresses of the Revolution” and what he terms “the spontaneous psychology of soldier-peasant mass.” as cohesion broken down. Russian armies on multiple fronts steadily lost cohesion as the stresses of the February Revolution, coupled with the constant offensive pressures being put on Russian forces, forced them on to the defensive on almost every front—including, eventually, the once successful Caucasian front.

In this political vacuum, the local Soviet presence in Baku strengthened considerably as it took far greater control over the daily affairs of the city. While local autonomy increased, there existed fewer and fewer military resources on hand for forces loyal to the Provisional Government to adequately defend the Caucasian Front. Regardless, though, it would take nearly a year for the front itself to collapse, and while the Russian Army as a whole was on the verge of collapse by fall of 1917, local interests, especially ad hoc units of largely Armenian fighters, continued to resist the Ottoman advance after Russian units fell back. By the end of 1917, Ottoman forces had re-taken Ottoman territory in Eastern Anatolia but had made no major inroads into Russian territory past that point, despite the fracturing of Russian forces.

The signing of the Armistice of Erzincan on December 5th, 1917, and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on March 3rd, 1918, effectively ended active Russian involvement in Transcaucasia during the First World War. The outcome of these treaties was that

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370 Swietochowski, Russian Azerbaijan, 112-113.

territories that once were the governorates of Baku, Tiflis, Batumi, Kars, Poti, Yerevan, and Elisavetpol (which more or less contained modern-day Georgia), Armenia, and Azerbaijan broke free from Russia and independently formed a confederation: the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic (TDFR).\textsuperscript{372} However, as Ottoman pressure continued on the Transcaucasia front across the spring of 1918, the TDFR would rapidly destabilize, predictably splitting along ethnic lines by May, 1918.\textsuperscript{373} Further Ottoman successes would result in the treaty of Batumi in June, 1918, which would force the Armenian government in Shusha to surrender, ending any real opportunity for pan-Transcaucasian political unity to form and setting the stage for the ethnic conflicts that would mar the next two years.

As shown by Bolshevik documentation on refugees in Azerbaijan, the fall of the Armenian government in Shusha would lead to an increase in the number of refugees fleeing eastward from the Ottoman-held frontlines in Eastern Armenia into Azerbaijan and Baku.\textsuperscript{374} As Peter Gatrell suggests in \textit{A Whole Empire Walking}, “as many as 150,000” Armenians had returned to settlements they had fled during the genocide, and the aftermath of this period left the Armenians no choice but “to declare independence” during this period, “not as a hallmark of national strength, but as a sign of national isolation”—and, ultimately, desperation.\textsuperscript{375} This peace would not last, and, by August

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{372} Robert Pierpont, \textit{Blake Papers}, [Box 1], Hoover Institution Archives, 31. Robert Blake was an American scholar who traveled in Georgia from 1918 to 1920.
\item \textsuperscript{373} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{374} GARF. f. 3588, op. 1, d. 3, l. 34, 37, 46-56.
\item \textsuperscript{375} Peter Gatrell, \textit{A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia During World War} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 185.
\end{itemize}
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1918, six months after the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, Ottoman forces broke through Armenian-held lines around Yerevan and rushed to link up with Azeri nationalist forces in Ganja, then marched on Baku.\textsuperscript{376}

As the Ottomans advanced, there was a separate factional battle in Baku itself, guided in part by the factional violence of the broader Russian Civil War but also connected to the still unresolved nature of the First World War. As Peter Holquist states in \textit{Making War, Forging Revolution}, “The War and Revolution . . . were not discrete events but rather points along a common continuum,” and there is necessity in seeing the ties of the Russian Revolution and the Civil War as a “process rather than an event.”\textsuperscript{377} In this sense, both the political violence of the revolution and the aftermath of the First World War would help formulate a social process that would spur ethnic violence as the body politic of Baku was torn asunder.

Until March 1918, Baku had been relatively protected from active violence by the Russo-Ottoman peace process. However, the city rapidly destabilized across the winter of 1917 into 1918 as divisions between political factions in the city widened, especially between liberal and Marxist movements. It would take radicalization of factional politics in the spring of 1918 for the full effect of the war to finally impact the city. While Baku itself had avoided direct combat, a combination of lack of food supplies, pre-existing labor and ethnic tensions, and proxy conflicts would bring war

\textsuperscript{376} Gokay, “Battle for Baku,” 38-40.

\textsuperscript{377} Holquist, \textit{Making War}, 3.
directly into the heart of Baku. Moreover, the violence happening in the city would have tremendous consequences for the population; it perhaps would have an even greater effect on the rest of Transcaucasia, because the turmoil in Baku attracted the notice of the British Empire, who began taking more of an active interest in the region. This violence would have broader geopolitical consequences as the Ottoman-Russian conflict ended and the violence in Baku took on a more local dimension.

The Azerbaijan-Armenian conflict, as exemplified by violence between the two communities during “March Days,” created the chaos that would allow the local Bolshevik party and their cadres to seize control of the city. By March, 1918, ethnically-aligned Azerbaijani parties, the liberal-nationalist Müsavat, and the socialist-nationalist Himmät party provided the most political resistance to the Dashnaks. In an outpouring of violence from March 28th to April 1st, the Müsavatists and a portion of the Azerbaijani population were quickly beaten back into the countryside in a series of skirmishes that, according to Azerbaijan sources, left “more than 12,000 dead.” After this conflict, the Bolsheviks would be in a prime position to seize further control in Baku but were far removed from their traditional base of support in Central Russia and lacked the raw manpower needed to defend their claim over the city. Because of this, they would be

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forced to forge an alliance with the other major force in Baku, the Dashnaks, in order to control the city.\textsuperscript{380}

While a temporary alliance with Armenian Dashnaks would give the Bolsheviks nominal control of the city and effectively allow them to plan their next moves, they were also geographically isolated; their only connection to the rest of Bolshevik-held territory was across the Caspian Sea, in Astrakhan.\textsuperscript{381} Moreover, the lack of Bolshevik support in the countryside in Eastern Azerbaijan helped, in turn, to embolden Azerbaijani nationalists who had been pushed out of Baku, and they accrued greater strength in the countryside. This balance of forces in geopolitical terms meant that Moscow, in reality, had marginal influence over events happening in the region and would effectively still have relatively little control in a region that had been dominated by the Russian Empire for almost a century.

Control of the countryside by Azerbaijani nationalists would be bolstered by continued Ottoman pressure being placed on Eastern Armenia from the West across the late spring of 1918. The population in the hinterlands outside of Baku was majority Azerbaijani, with the exception of Nagorno-Karabakh, and a broader power vacuum in Eastern Transcaucasia left much of the countryside open to influence by the growing

\textsuperscript{380} RGASPI, f. 70, op. 3, d. 4, l. 38-46. This document contains a lengthy debriefing in the mid-1920s, in which Stepan Shaumian freely admits that Bolshevik forces in Baku were overwhelmingly reliant on Dashnak support in order to control the city.

\textsuperscript{381} GARF, f. 7695, op.1, d. 1, l. 29. Moreover, the Central Oil Committee was concerned that Caspian sea-lanes alone might not be enough to satisfy the fuel needs of the RSFSR.
Azerbaijani national movement. In turn, this movement would be further supported by the June 1918 arrival of the Ottoman Islamic Army of Transcaucasia into Azerbaijan.

In contrast, the Bolsheviks would have few forces to rely on to defend their own strategic interests in the city. By the end of July 1918, the Soviets were eventually able to send a cavalry force of 170 and an infantry force of 780 soldiers from Astrakhan, under the command of Georgii Petrov, to reinforce Bolshevik forces inside Baku. These actions would be unable to stop the general anti-Bolshevik uprising that occurred on July 26, 1918. Ultimately, the events of the ethnic struggles of spring and summer 1918 would be a testament to the continued military weakness of the Bolsheviks in and around the Caspian Sea region. With the capture of Astrakhan, Baku was effectively cut off from Soviet forces in Central Russia, and with little native support from the Azerbaijani population outside the city, the Bolsheviks struggled to maintain what little control they could inside the city until they were isolated and eventually overcome by their former allies, the Dashnaks.

The aftermath of the final collapse of Bolshevik control over the city, however, would continue on into near-legend during the Soviet period—namely the evacuation of twenty-six remaining Bolshevik commissars and their eventual capture and execution by (supposedly) the British after they had moved into Astrakhan the summer of 1918. This event would become a key part of Soviet mythologizing over the loss of Baku. From the Soviet perspective, the executed commissars would be martyrs, murdered amidst the

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struggle over Transcaucasia. While their deaths were political significant, especially as the story was retold by the Soviets, it would have relatively little impact on the fate of Baku itself.

3. The Arrival of the British and the Battle for Baku

By late July, 1918, the Bolsheviks had lost Baku, and in the broader strategic calculus of the Caspian region, the death of the commissars, in the end, initially meant little. Nevertheless, the divergence of the retelling of their deaths became part of the mythologizing of the events in August as a clear way of transforming what was a major defeat into martyrdom. Moreover, the trial and execution of the infamous twenty-six Baku commissars showed the strategy of this war of words; the circumstances of their execution were manipulated for broader political needs by both the Soviets and the British. The divergent retellings of the same events showed how similar these priorities were for both sides; the Soviets struggled to create a narrative to explain their deaths while the British attempted to downplay the event as much as possible.

It is difficult to come up with a definitive version of events during this period, for multiple explanations significantly diverge; however, it is possible to see where the two narratives parallel each other. It is not disputed that twenty-six commissars were arrested in Baku, transported to Astrakhan, and then executed by White Russian troops. It is in

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385 Ibid.

386 In particular, there is continued controversy as to whether British agent Reginald Teague-Jones had any connection with the deaths of the 26 Baku Commissars.
considerable dispute whether the executions were carried out under the orders of the British observers or if the British were even present during the execution. While the Soviet version of the events clearly points to British involvement in the execution, the British themselves denied active involvement. This raises questions concerning subjectivity in narrative-building by both the British and the Soviets.387 The broader historical divide over the commissars indicates not only the degree of continual political violence of the period but the considerable disagreement over events that were politicized to the point that they remain an issue of disagreement even today—in particular, from a Soviet perspective.

British perceptions of the events of Baku before July show biases of their own. For instance, a section of a report from Vice Consul Ranald MacDonell in Baku to London on April 24th, 1918, illustrates both the quality of British knowledge of conditions in Baku and parts of Bolshevik Russia during that spring and how the British perceived Bolsheviks during this period. For example, when responding to dire predictions of the state of Baku under Bolshevik rule by the British Foreign Office, MacDonell clarified earlier reports by stating, “I hear you have alarming reports that we have epidemics, starvation, and so on. Neither of these are correct; it is, of course, difficult to get food, but it can be obtained.”388 Furthermore, he added, “At the present

387 Richard K. Debo, “Prelude to Negotiations: The Problem of British Prisoners in Soviet Russia: November 1918 – July 1919,” Slavonic and East European Review 58, no. 1 (1980): 59. Debo illustrates that there was wide-spread fear amongst British authorities of reprisals by the Bolsheviks toward British prisoners who had been captured during the Russian Civil War, even if British authorities did not give the order for the execution of the commissars from Baku.

388 GARF, f. 4135, op. 1, d. 3, l. 6. These excerpts from MacDonell are from consul documents captured by the Soviets after they took Baku. The seizure of the documents most
time you need have no hesitation in advising English people to come to Astrakhan, as they can get away all right from here." Therefore, at least according to MacDonell, Baku was stable enough to continue to allow British businessmen to conduct their business there and to keep a consulate operational. His report is a useful illustration of how Western and, in this case, British perceptions of the quality of life in the former Russian Empire diverged significantly from expectations back in their home countries. In this instance, British diplomats were necessary conduits of information for presenting a more accurate picture of how life functioned.

MacDonell further comments on Baku, stating that, “Everything, of course, is in the hands of the Bolsheviks here, but the town at the time of writing is perfectly quiet.” During this period, the Bolsheviks took effective control of the city, but nevertheless at the same time the British consulate remained in operation and normal daily life in the city continued. In fact, the Bolsheviks’ rule may have contributed to the stability of Baku after the street battles of the March Days, compared to the expectations the British War Office held on February 28, 1918: “Civil war was imminent at Baku . . . banks had already been closed.” Other data from this period, including oil production output, shows that production from Branobel remained relatively unchanged even though the Soviets had planned for major nationalization of the industry. For the most part, life did continue likely occurred on April 27th, 1920, along with the capture and arrest of the Royal Navy detachment that had arrived from Enzeli.

389 Ibid.
390 Ibid.
391 NAUK, CAB 24-144-32, 5.
392 RGIA, f. 1458, op. 1, d. 1634.
on as normal, even during an extraordinary period of control under a revolutionary left-wing party.

Through the Russian Civil War, the British continued to have a long-standing presence in Baku and maintained a functioning consulate in the city through the February and October revolutions as well as through the turbulence of the spring and summer of 1918. Furthermore, British influence in Baku only increased with the withdrawal of Russia. The desire of the British to influence the city was motivated in part by the expanding need to offer resistance against Ottoman advances in Transcaucasia while the British themselves broke through Ottoman lines in Gaza and Palestine. Increased British influence helped contest their fear that the “collapse of Russia has opened to her more northerly routes to the East by the Black Sea, Caucasus and the Caspian” by the Germans and Ottomans. In the eyes of the British government, this would allow the Germans to expand control through Transcaucasia via Georgia and eventually into Central Asia, adding yet another unstable element to British efforts to maintain control over India. They feared the Germans would eventually secure “the northern flank of this line of advance [through Russia] and may even hope to develop a new ‘drang nach Osten’ which will place her eventually on the shores of the Pacific.”

While British influence in Baku continued, by July 1918 the Bolsheviks had difficulty maintaining their hold on the city. Moreover, alongside the weakening of

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393 NAUK, CAB 24-44-91, 2. In particular, the British War Cabinet’s fears of a German push to the East would complicate their defense of India.

394 Ibid.

395 Ibid.
Bolshevik control, various internal factions stood ready to take control over the city and its industries. The eventual victor in this struggle, the Central-Caspian directorship, quickly consolidated power after the Bolshevik withdrawal in late July. The Trans-Caspian dictatorship, rather than being a formal government, was in essence a ramshackle alliance of political forces: Dashnaks, Mensheviks, Liberals, and other political factions that refused to choose to side with either the Azerbaijani national movement, led by Mustafa Emin Razulzade, or the Bolsheviks. Ultimately, the Dictatorship existed as a place-holder between the abortive attempts by local Bolsheviks (led by Stepan Shaumian and backed by Moscow) to hold the city and the arrival of the first Azerbaijani forces in late August.

The result of this conflict was more than a contest between the Ottoman Empire and the self-appointed heir of the Russian Empire, and it opened up the far greater possibility of strategic competition between the Soviets and the British Empire. The British and Soviets were in potential rivalry at several critical points beyond their borders, despite the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk—specifically Northern Iran, Afghanistan, and the Dardanelles. This rivalry was further complicated by the collapse of the Russian Empire and an emerging power vacuum in the former Russian imperial space. In this setting, it is apparent that British influence in the region was reaching its limits as the British struggled to amass the forces necessary to secure strategic control over the Caspian Sea.396

By late August, 1918, the Central-Caspian dictatorship could barely stand the assault of allied Ottoman and Azerbaijani national forces. Moreover, the intervention of the British in August of 1918 with the so-called “Dunsterforce” complicated the situation even further by drawing British troops into an already tense political situation. The ostensible goal of this army was to secure Baku with the aim of eventually assuring further British control, primarily over its oil-producing region, the Absheron Peninsula.\(^{397}\) This circumstance was principally due to Baku’s proximity to Persia and the importance the Anglo-Persian Oil Company was to the emergent energy policy of the British Empire. The British entry into Baku was both a reinforcement of previous oil supply routes (Baku’s oil supply was potentially significant to Europe) as well as a defense of British influence inside the Middle East, Transcaucasia, and Central Asia.\(^{398}\)

At a meeting of the Royal Geographic Society, Lieutenant Coronel G.S.F. Napier, the former military attaché to the British Embassy in Tehran, laid out the future importance of Baku to overall British military interests in the region:

More recently the military operations of Sir William Marshall in the north for the expedition to Baku and Sir Percy Sykes and his South Persian Rifles for the establishment of order in the south, have led to the great improvement in communication which I have described above. In conclusion I would emphasize

\(^{397}\) Gokay, “Battle for Baku,” 38. Officially, British troops were sent to stymie Ottoman designs in the region. Furthermore, there is evidence that during the summer of the 1918 there was some cooperation between the Bolsheviks and the British to resist Ottoman advances, although this cooperation was undermined by British assistance of White and Anti-Bolshevik forces on other fronts.

\(^{398}\) NAUK, MUN 4/6603, 5-7. This is best illustrated by an appeal for further support of British interests in Baku by Richard Tweed, managing director of Baku Russian Petroleum Company Co. Ltd.
the extreme importance of maintaining and extending this road system for the development of our commerce and for the maintenance of order after the war. The country with its sharp fall from the plateau to the Mesopotamian plain lends itself better to the construction of motor roads than of railways, and in view of the great supplies of petrol at Ahwaz and at Baku it seems to me that the future of communication undoubtedly lies in motor transport.\textsuperscript{399}

Therefore, Baku not only provided territorial access to the rest of Transcaucasia and a point of control that facilitated British communications in the region, but it could act as a key supplier of oil that would allow the British to maintain strategic control of the region. Nevertheless, because Iran was an internationally recognized state and Azerbaijan was on the edge of declaring its own independence, British policy was forced to recognize that the political dynamics of the area had evolved beyond simple colonial conquest. The British still wanted to further their own explicit interests in the region, including energy resources, in part to maintain control of their own scattered colonial possessions.

Dunsterforce was limited in both size and material support, and at most numbered little more than two battalions when it faced a considerably larger Ottoman-Azerbaijan force, which, according to Artin Arslanian, grew to “6 thousand regulars and eight thousand irregulars” in early September.\textsuperscript{400} The British had intended these troops to support existing allied forces, most of which were affiliated with the Dasnaks and were already in Baku. However, the results were less than satisfactory for the British.


\textsuperscript{400} Arslanian, “Dunsterville’s Adventures,” 210.
According to a Dunskerforce war diary entry from August 31st that highlights the relatively impossible situation on the part of the British,

The present state of affairs in the defenses [of the city] is quite impossible. The Russian and Armenian Troops are quite unreliable and leave the line if shelled to the extent of only a few shells and bolt for the Town. This continually exposes the flanks of the very hard pressed British Troops here and . . . something [has be be] done to remember [the situation].  

Only days later, defensive lines in Baku folded; Dashnaks and their allies were in a near rout. British troops were forced to fight their way out of the city before the city itself fell. According to General Lionel Dunsterville himself, this withdrawal was necessary due to the relative collapse of local allied forces, which forced the British to withdraw so their own forces could be extracted. It had become obvious that the British effort at securing Baku had been a critical miscalculation.

Trying to maintain a foothold in the city proved fruitless for the British, and remaining British forces were evacuated in masse back to Persia. By all appearances, it looked like Britain’s endeavor to hold Baku had failed, and their larger designs in Transcaucasia were stymied for the time being. However, while Ottoman and allied forces were successful in Eastern Azerbaijan, the Ottomans were significantly less successful in other theatres. As German forces were pushed back into Belgium, and British troops, alongside their levies and Arab allies, encroached into Palestine and Syria,

401 Army HQ, India, “War Diaries, Persia 1918,” (31 August 1918). See also Arslanian’s “Dunsterville’s Adventures,” 208.

the Central Powers were soon forced on the defensive on multiple other fronts. By October, 1918, the grand hope of reestablishing Ottoman dominance of the Middle East and Transcaucasia had dwindled completely. While the Ottoman had been successful in using their advantage in Transcaucasia with diminishing organized resistance by Armenian forces, Transcaucasia was only a portion of the greater global struggle that had turned against both the Ottomans and the other Central Powers.

While the simultaneous struggle for Baku and Eastern Anatolia could be framed as a modest skirmish between a set of imperial powers and their allies that was primarily guided by a simple desire for territorial conquest, it was, in reality, far more complicated—especially for the population of the region trapped in the middle. Obviously, more was at stake for the powers that had invested considerable time and resources trying to take the city, and the ramifications of these events need to be looked at from both the perspective of the geopolitical consequences for the powers involved, including damage to the oil industry itself, and in terms of the daily lives of the population of the city. The aftermath of the events in early September was an immediate tragedy for thousands of residents of Baku, and the ultimate legacy of these events was a tremendous physical and emotional drain on the population. In addition, these events not only greatly enhanced ethnic friction that was already present in the region, but they greatly exacerbated ethnic hatred in Baku. Furthermore, the events in September also helped erode the position of the Soviets in the region, for both Ottoman-German and British interventions assured Soviet influence in Baku and the rest of Transcaucasia would be held in check.
Beyond the geopolitical strategies being played by the parties, there was the longer-term issue of historical memory. Until the nineteenth century, Azerbaijan and therefore Baku’s connection with Persia itself was rooted in a common history and religion. Foremost, the Azerbaijani population in both Russia and Iranian Azerbaijan shared a common linguistic, cultural, and religious heritage. Furthermore, the Azerbaijani national movement in northern Azerbaijan was also heavily influenced by the emergence of a constitutionally-focused nationalism in Iranian Azerbaijan, focused around Tabriz. These nationalists were brought even closer together when northern Iran was placed under Russian occupation during the Russian invasion of 1916, as clearly illustrated through documents and memoirs from General Nikolai Baratov, who directly led the expedition. Therefore, it is not surprising that there was active cooperation by nationalists on both sides, an alliance rooted in common culture and an emerging, common ethnic identity.

Russian Azerbaijan provided somewhat of a dilemma for Iran. While it is clear there existed a connection between two Azerbaijani nationalist movements in both countries, the political forces that moved them forward were in fact quite different in their intention. Specifically, while Azeri nationalists had effectively won their fight for an independent Azerbaijani-dominant state, and had turned their attention directly to administration, Azerbaijani Constitutionalists in Tabriz were still focused on further

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403 Nikolai Nikolaevich Baratov, “Bor'ba v Persii vo vremeni revoliutsii v Rossii [War in Persia during the Period of Revolution in Russia],” Nikolai Nikolaevich Baratov Papers, [Box 3], Hoover Institution Archives, Section 1.
gradual reform in Iran and were, for the most part, not interested in separatism.\footnote{Sayyed Hasan Taqizadeh, trans. Nikki Keddie, “The Background of the Constitutional Movement in Azerbaijan,” \textit{Middle East Journal} 14, no. 4 (1960): 456-458.} In addition, while the Ottomans themselves had labored to build Azerbaijani forces and were allied with them into a creditable force, Azerbaijani nationalism inside Persia itself did not necessarily have the same positive attitude towards Ottoman influence.

Ultimately, the Ottoman withdrawal only helped open the yawning political vacuum in Transcaucasia. Consequently, the Azerbaijani government at this juncture had a limited ability to control territory ostensibly under its control. While Baku was quite clearly jointly occupied, Azerbaijani national forces had been nearly reliant on Ottoman forces in the taking of Baku. The government itself had little formal experience in administrating a war-torn and ethnically-divided city.\footnote{Smith, “Anatomy of a Rumor,” 212-213, 216.} In addition, the Azerbaijani government had to deal with the fact that Baku still remained largely non-Azeri, including much of its countryside—especially Nagorno-Karabakh. While the Azerbaijani government struggled in order to find an adequate way of acquiring revenue from Baku’s oil industry, it also found itself in a complicated strategic situation as the Ottomans, by the end of October and despite the progress they had made in Transcaucasia, and were soon forced out of the war.\footnote{NAUK, CAB 24-145-30, 4. From archival material, it is clear that the British War Cabinet, until fall of 1918, was still concerned about Ottoman strength in the region as a broader danger to the interests of the British Empire.}

The armistice left the ADR in an uneasy existence with the arrival of an Allied occupation authority into Baku, led by the British. The Allied authority had limited
influence in the rest of the country while the Azerbaijani government was forced into a
difficult position; they continued to administer the country under an Allied occupation
but were not formally recognized by Britain or any other Western nation despite hope, in
early 1919, that Azerbaijan would gain formal recognition at the Paris Peace
Conference.\textsuperscript{407} For the time being, Baku was still considered only a portion of the
Russian Empire. The conference dragged on through 1919, and the chance for official de-
jure recognition grew increasingly remote. While the ultimate nature of this cohabitation
of Baku would have a stabilizing effect on Baku, it led to increasing fear by the Soviets
of British motives.

\textbf{4. Baku and the Great Game}

Considering the implications that British control of Baku would have for both the
city and the balance of power in the region, Britain’s quest for Baku can be seen, from a
Soviet perspective, as a further extension of an overall British policy: expansion of their
strategic control around the Black Sea and the Caucasus, specifically Tabriz,
Constantinople, and Odessa.\textsuperscript{408} British influence in the region had filled in the vacuum
left by both Russia and the Ottomans. Baku was at the very brittle edge of British control,
an edge that could be said to also include the Afghan-Indian frontier.

The British influence in Baku was further complicated by the legacy of the “Great
Game” that had been played against the Russian Empire across Persia and Central Asia

\textsuperscript{407} “Revendications” \textsuperscript{44].

\textsuperscript{408} GARF, f. 4135, op. 1, d. 10, l. 27, 30. This is indicated by telegrams intercepted or
captured by the Soviets that show a network of British military outposts across the Black Sea and
portions of Transcaucasia from 1918 into 1919.
during the nineteenth century. While the British were successfully able to advance in Baku, a position further north-east in Transcaucasia than they had achieved previously, British resources had consequently been exhausted by events of the First World War. The miniscule size of Dunsterforce is a testament to the imbalance of British resources devoted to the region versus the ambitions of the British War Office.

The fall of the Tsar and the resulting events of the revolutions and the Russian Civil War helped expand a significant power vacuum in not only Transcaucasia but along the Black Sea and in Central Asia. As the core regions of the former Russian Empire were wracked by full-scale warfare, the fringes of the empire were basically exposed to a widening power vacuum brought on by the increasing chaos that had struck Transcaucasia. By the end of 1918, British influence in Baku and Tebriz had offset Russian influence, and the occupation of Istanbul came with complete control over the Dardanelles and the continued dominance of the sea-lanes in the Mediterranean.\(^{409}\) In many ways, the British Empire’s influence in the region, which had been steadily gaining in strength across the nineteenth century, reached its height in 1918 and 1919, coinciding with the fact that Russian and Ottoman influence was understandably waning. From 1918 to 1920, Britain quickly filled in this power vacuum and soon replaced traditional Ottoman and Russian influence, considerably expanding its influence across Iran, Transcaucasia, and the Black Sea.\(^{410}\)

\(^{409}\) Ibid., f. 4135, op. 1, d. 10, l. 30. Telegrams captured by the Soviets indicate that Istanbul acted as an information hub for British operations in the region.

\(^{410}\) Ibid., f. 4135, op. 1, d. 10, l. 27, 60.
In conjunction with growing British influence around the Black Sea and the Middle East, the British attempted to expand into Central Asia, another traditional battleground between themselves and the Russian Empire. The brief Afghanistan-British War, from 1918 to 1919, serves to further illustrate the continued geopolitical chess match that had been quietly played between London, Petrograd, and eventually Moscow, for the timing of the war matched assertion of a revolutionary socialist presence in Bukhara and the eventual consolidation of Soviet control in Russian Central Asia.\textsuperscript{411} However, the inability of the British to make forward progress in Afghanistan returned the British-Afghan relationship to the antebellum status quo and also limited British attempts to accrue further influence in Central Asia, while their ambitions around the Caspian Sea were likewise curtailed.\textsuperscript{412}

From a Soviet perspective, a British entry into Baku along with British advances in Central Asia would only serve to advance British interests in the region at the cost of Soviet ones.\textsuperscript{413} In turn, this process would be marked by the stark ideological language used by the Soviets, who put this struggle in terms of a battle against “American-Anglo-French Imperialists,” with an emphasis on the British element in that “imperial” alliance.\textsuperscript{414} This Soviet-British contest over Transcaucasia would illustrate that, in many ways, this “great game” was still being played, just that this particular match would

\textsuperscript{411} Adeeb Khalid, “Central Asia between the Ottoman and the Soviet worlds,” \textit{Kritika} 12, no. 2 (2011): 460-467.

\textsuperscript{412} Ibid., 465.

\textsuperscript{413} RGASPI, f. 64, op. 1, d. 13, l. 2-3. The Soviet Central Caucasus Bureau (Kavburo) would regularly keep abreast of British operations along the Black Sea and Anatolia.

\textsuperscript{414} Ibid., f. 61, op. 1, d. 33, l. 6, 9-11.
happen to take place in Transcaucasia rather than further east. This implacable arrangement would delay a full Soviet-British rapprochement.

The Allied Control Commission in Baku, represented primarily by the British, had a mandate to stabilize the city and account for the tremendous damage that happened in September, 1918, and to solidify resources available to British authorities.\(^\text{415}\) The Allied mission was largely successful in its first task; they were able to account for most of the damages that had occurred. This catalog of over 10,000 complaints reported in detail the property that was stolen and who was accused of stealing it.\(^\text{416}\) However, this extensive list did not include the multiple instances of assault, rape, and even murder that occurred across the city. Almost certainly over 15,000 people died during early September in Baku, most of them ethnically Armenian.\(^\text{417}\)

However, property damage extended beyond the Armenian population. A letter written to the Polish consulate in Baku in October 1918 by a group of Polish expatriates illustrates how even high-profile foreigners were not excluded from the looting and that the chaos that struck the city was expansive.\(^\text{418}\) While little was actually done to recover lost goods, the recorded looting was both extensive and detailed by occupation authorities.\(^\text{419}\) British record-keeping was exact in recording the massive property damage

\(^\text{415}\) ARDA, f.24, op.1, d.127, l.4, 14. The ADR recorded that the British requested fuel supplies for their operations not only in Transcaucasia but in Persia as well.

\(^\text{416}\) GARF, f. 8209, op. 1, d. 3, l. 1-803. These figures were collected by the Allied Inspectorate of Baku.

\(^\text{417}\) NAUK, CAB 24-68-44, 1-2.

\(^\text{418}\) GARF, f. 8209, op. 1, d. 3, l. 104.

\(^\text{419}\) Ibid., f. 8209, op. 1, d. 3, l. 1-803.
that occurred during the Ottoman-Azerbaijani seizure of Baku. However, the uneasy nature of British-Azerbaijani relations also meant that Britain and its allies were also restricted in their ability to enforce formal repercussions on the ADR or its citizens.

5. The Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan

Buffeted by these challenges, the ADR struggled to exist. By early 1919, the British had withdrawn their remaining forces while Soviet forces continued to be on the offensive in Southern Russia and Ukraine. Even though, at that time, the ADR, at a basic level, was structurally secure, the challenges of interethnic violence (as demonstrated in the Armenian-Azerbaijani war) and the relative geographic isolation of the ADR put them in an increasingly untenable military and political position. Without a major benefactor, the ADR would quickly be swallowed by the growing antagonistic political forces around it and simply did not have the military strength on its own to resist an outright invasion by a larger power, as the spring 1920 events would soon show.

Although the Azerbaijani-British relationship had been tense, the departure of the British left another yawning void in the security of Transcaucasia.

In 1919, the government of Azerbaijan attempted to pursue a positive outcome at the Paris Peace Conference. From their proposal, it is obvious that they attempted to play on a combination of historical precedent, Wilsonian principals, and accusations of atrocities inflicted on them by the Armenians. This was done to make their case for both independence and the defense of their proposed borders in a post-war settlement. In
addition, they defended their right to self-determination by appealing to the Peace
Conference as victims in the struggle between themselves and Armenia.420

Unfortunately, the final outcome of the peace process for the Republic of
Azerbaijan was less than what they had hoped for. In January, 1920, the Paris Peace
Conference, in the end, did not recognize Azerbaijan as fully independent, although they
did extend de facto recognition and, in fact, assumed it was still a de jure part of the
territorial borders of Russia. This viewpoint was fully supported by the British, who still
had a commitment to prevent the breakup of the former Russian state.421 Moreover, the
ADR was soon caught in wars with Georgia and Armenia, which sapped the ADR of
more men and material.

At this time, Azerbaijan’s existence took a problematic turn in the framework of
the Allied post-war settlement. Azerbaijan’s former status as co-belligerent of the Central
Powers, and the possible threat of an alliance with Turkish National forces organizing in
Central Anatolia, pushed the victorious powers not to recognize Azerbaijan as a de jure
independent state.422 Ultimately, the allies had more to lose than gain from Azerbaijani
recognition. The conference ended a mere months before Azerbaijan was invaded by the
Soviets, and while the Azerbaijani had at least been recognized in some form, that
recognition resulted in no further military assistance to Azerbaijan.

420 Revendications” [Claims], 18-20.

421 Vilayet Quliyev, Azərbaycan Paris Sülh Konfransında (1918-1920) [Azerbaijan in the
Paris Peace Conference (1918-1920)] (Baku: Ozan, 2008), 74-75.

422 NAUK, CAB 24-68-45, 1-2. The British War Cabinet saw Azerbaijan National forces
as little more than a puppet force of the Ottomans.
Armenia, a government that was recognized by the Paris Conference and nominally backed by the Allied powers, was also put in an increasingly precarious position due to potential conflict with its neighbors. While the Central Powers and its proxies had lost the First World War, Turkish national and Azerbaijan forces that had survived the collapse of the Ottoman Empire remained vital military forces. Because Azerbaijan was unsuccessful in turning the Entente away from its support of Armenia, the ADR was put into the difficult position of trying to continue its current strategy without meaningful support from any strong regional allies beyond Turkish national forces, which were too weak at that point to have meaningful influence in Transcaucasia.423

The co-occupation of Baku Entente and Azerbaijani troops provided a degree of respite from the warfare that had raged across 1918. It also allowed Azerbaijan to begin its structural transformation into a more functional nation state. As Michael Smith claims in “Anatomy of a Rumor,” long-term stability was still an issue for the government, and actual control of the city by the ADR was relatively weak.424 This weakness would reflect a combination of the inability of the ADR to find a way to balance the ethnic nationalism with a territory that remained abundantly ethnically and politically heterogeneous and continued Bolshevik influence in the city.

Nevertheless, a British withdrawal was inevitable; not only did the British simply not have the resources to occupy Baku long-term without the cooperation of the


Azerbaijani government, but the dynamics of Transcaucasia itself, especially the brewing potential conflict with Armenian-Azerbaijani, only further complicated British planning until 1919. While the British had an interest in maintaining influence in Baku, they were reticent to apply direct administration to new territory. Through 1921 there was still hope, on the part of exiled White Russians, that Azerbaijan would eventually be rejoined with Russia.425

Part of British reasoning was based on the material burden placed on the British Empire during this period and the position of their forces. The British had suffered enormous losses, along with the other major belligerents—except for Japan and the United States, an enormous hit during the First World War in terms of manpower. This is exemplified by the fact that the British military had suffered nearly two million in causalities with another near million from commonwealth states. In addition, they had acquired new responsibilities based on Ottoman territory and German colonies and thereby inherited the legacy of both their internal and global conflicts that required increasing resources in order to stabilize.

Due to these factors, holding Baku was, in terms of resources, a very difficult task for the British to manage. While Baku would remain strategically vital to the British, especially considering their interests in Iraq and Iran, the British Empire would be stretched too thin to adequately hold it. In addition, the likely victory of Soviet forces in the rest of the former Russian Empire would weaken the position of the British in Baku and the rest of Transcaucasia and make their advances in Transcaucasia increasingly

425 “Address to the Representatives of the Powers at the Washington Conference,” The Russian National Union (December, 1921), 4.
untenable. Ultimately, they were forced to abandon Baku in order to solidify what control they could over Iran.

In this sense, the First World War had critically sapped British resources to their limits, and they had limited motives for continued intervention. The defeat of the Central Powers, including the Ottomans, had reduced the threat to British trading routes, and the Russian Civil War had become a conflict that British intervention could not win. Furthermore, the British Empire was already struggling with absorbing additional territory from mandates in Africa and the Middle East while reconciling the amount of resources and manpower that had been used up by the First World War. British motives in the region, at that time, were now closer to consolidation than further expansion. By 1919, British interest in continued intervention in the Russian Civil War in Transcaucasia, including Baku, withered in the face of hostile forces, as did any attempt at re-establishing private ownership of Baku’s oil fields. According Geoffrey Jones, “The British intervention in the Russian Civil War briefly made it seem possible that Shell’s position could be restored by force of arms,” but despite an attempt by Shell to purchase Branobel and consolidate its interests in Baku, “when the Foreign Office consistently declined to give any guarantees, the Syndicate [led by Shell] refused to purchase the Nobel company outright.” As both the British government and Shell lost interest in further endeavors in Baku, the power vacuum in Eastern Transcaucasia only continued to open.

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426 Jones, State and the Emergence of the British Oil Industry, 211.
At the same time, tension between Turkey and Armenia would have considerable consequences on the balance of power in the region, and the annexation of Western Armenia by Turkish Nationalist Forces under Mustafa Kemal would eventually cement a new political and ethnographical order in Transcaucasia. By early 1920, Turkish national forces had begun to move eastward into Armenian territory. While Azerbaijan forces had made relatively little headway westward into Armenian territory, the region remained embroiled in warfare, and it is unclear (from 1919 to 1920) exactly how much progress had been made in establishing any long-term peace in the region. As both local and foreign powers struggled to fully consolidate control over Azerbaijan and Baku, the balance of influence in the region remained fluid.

6. Turkish-Soviet Relations

After the withdrawal of the British from Baku, the Soviets were keenly aware of the implications of the rise of the Turkish National movement under Mustafa Kemal, and that skirmishing on the Western portions of Armenia would have significant consequences for their designs regarding Transcaucasia. In particular, the rise of a mobilizing national force in Turkey would provide a possible ally for the Soviets. By 1920, the Soviets, the British, and the Ottomans had all been either voluntarily or forcibly withdrawn from the region, and Transcaucasia was briefly left to its own devices. By early 1920, Armenia was pressed to hold on to territory, and Georgia and Azerbaijan were both left without benefactors. In short, by early 1920, there was simply no military force strong enough to challenge a Soviet return to the region, and, in this vacuum, the

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427 RGASPI, f. 61, op. 1, d. 206, l. 83. Members of the Kavburo would see Ataturk and his forces as a potential ally in the region.
Soviets saw a key opportunity for expansion. While it does not seem that Soviet intentions went beyond reconsolidation, it is clear there was a desire to expand Soviet control up to the former Russo-Ottoman border (with some small exceptions). A chief consideration for the Central Committee was retaking Baku’s oil industry and utilizing the resources for its own needs.\textsuperscript{428} A warning from the ADR to the Soviets “that [the vast stocks of oil vital to Soviet Russia] will be destroyed in the event of an attack or unsuitable peace terms” only spurred the Soviets to move more quickly to take the city.\textsuperscript{429}

Baku still remained an object of significant importance in this regional geopolitical contest, and as the Soviet Army marshaled its forces in Astrakhan and preparations were begun to improve its fighting capacity, the Soviets prepared themselves for a return to Transcaucasia.\textsuperscript{430} As will be shown in Chapter Five, due the gaping power vacuum that now existed, the Soviets were able to re-take Transcaucasia in short order and begin an expansive transformation of the region, including the many ways that civil society in Baku and the rest of Transcaucasia would function within the confines of Sovietization.

Of course, Soviet plans for Baku still conflicted to a significant degree with the goals of the Turkish national movement. Ottoman assistance to Azerbaijani nationalist forces had been increasingly influenced by Turkish revanchism, in particular salvaging what former Ottoman territory they could, justified by a variant of pan-Turkism, which

\textsuperscript{428} Debo, \textit{Survival and Consolidation}, 177.

\textsuperscript{429} Ibid., 180.

\textsuperscript{430} RGVA – Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi voennyi arkhiv [Russian State Military Archive], f. 195, op. 3, d. 232, l. 59, 61. In particular, it is very clear that the 11th Army was planning a major operation southward through much of early 1920.
remained strictly tied to ethnic nationalism. Nevertheless, there were clear disparities between Pan-Turkic and Pan-Turanic focused notions of ethnic identity and Soviet ideas of strictly defined nationality. Moreover, the broad nature of Azerbaijani nationalism and considerations of self-determination was very different from Soviet ideals of a restrained ethnic nationalism or nationality. Lenin’s ideas of nationality as historically contingent and subordinate to class identity left the ADR and its ethnically-focused form of nationalism relatively little room to find common ideological ground with the Soviets. In immediate geopolitics terms, Azerbaijani nationalism had an unstable position; the ADR was forced into alliances and confrontations that were implicitly hostile to its own national goals of ethnically based self-determination.

In contrast to the ADR, the Democratic Republic of Armenia was a deeply fragmented state, divided into two broad regions: “Western Armenia,” partitioned out of eastern Anatolia, and “Eastern Armenia,” made up of largely ethnically Armenian areas in the former Russian Empire around Yerevan. Nevertheless, by 1920, despite an attempt to unify these two regions into a single state, Armenia fragmented. The Armenians were gradually pushed out of Western Armenia, as they had been in 1918, and were increasingly left with a rump state of Eastern Armenia, located entirely inside the

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432 “‘No.2’ Bulletin D’Informations,” 2. This is more acutely shown by the ADR’s proclamations to the international press of ethnically-based legitimacy of the state based around Azerbaijani nationalism.

433 ARDA, f. 24, op.1, d.127, l. 5. Nevertheless, the ADR would be forced to cooperate with the British under the terms of the Allied occupation until June, 1919.

borders of the former Russian Empire. Ultimately, the inability of Armenia to secure its own borders from Turkish national advances left it completely vulnerable to eventual re-occupation. By the time of the Soviet occupation of Transcaucasia, Armenia was only able to give token sustained resistance.435

At the same time, Georgia, like its neighbors, also struggled to find a secure geopolitical position in the aftermath of the First World War. While a democratic socialist republic had formed under the local Georgian Menshevik Party, a development that could trace itself to the rise of a strong Georgian presence in local branches of the Russian Democratic Labor Party from the late nineteenth century onwards, there was little political common ground shared with the Bolsheviks.436 Georgia would be buffered from Ottoman advances across 1918, in part due to the Ottomans’ strategic alliance with the Germans. After 1919, it was like Azerbaijan was partially occupied by the British.437 Georgia would remain a third force in Transcaucasia, but by 1920, it had effectively been outflanked by Soviet advances through Azerbaijan and Armenia.438

By mid-1920, the fall of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan was followed by the quick and sudden expansion of Soviet control over Armenia and Georgia. This southern campaign would end any active resistance against Soviet rule, both in Transcaucasia and the rest of the former Russian Empire, from Western Ukraine to Western Siberia as well as Central Asia. Moreover, this campaign was facilitated by the

435 Smele, The Russian Civil Wars, 143-144.
437 Robert Pierpont Blake, [Tiflis, 2], Blake Papers, [Box 1], Hoover Institution Archives.
fact that both Armenia and Azerbaijan were caught in their own intractable conflicts with each other, which both distracted them and allowed the Soviets to push through Transcaucasia in a matter of months.439

As the Soviets eyed Transcaucasia, they also kept close track of events unfolding in Anatolia. Records from the Soviet Kavburo (the central Caucasian Bureau) show the extent to which the Soviets were keeping abreast of developments occurring in Turkey during this period, specifically the rise of the Turkish nationalist movement in Ankara and the increasing protests and political disturbances in Istanbul. The Soviets, specifically Kavburo, paid very close attention to Ataturk’s rhetoric, both to what was useful and what differed from Soviet discourses.

This included Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, (Sovnarkom) Nariman Narimanov. Narimanov, a prolific writer during the late Tsarist period and a member of the Himmät Party before he joined the Bolsheviks in 1919, was appointed to AzRevkom in 1920 before becoming the Chairman of Sovnarkom. According to Narimanov, “any movement [that opposes the entente] we must support ideologically, although Mustafa Kemal’s ideology has nothing in common with Communism.”440

While the British had largely withdrawn from Transcaucasia, their control of Istanbul, including the Dardanelles straits, allowed them to maintain their historical policy of restricting Russian (and now Soviet) access to the Black Sea. As indicated by reports from the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), there were initial fears that the


440 RGASPI, f. 64, op. 1, d. 13, l. 20.
Turkish-Soviet alliance could possibly challenge British interests in the region.\textsuperscript{441} Moreover, the Soviets at this time were also keeping track of British occupation forces in Istanbul. Further reports indicate that the Kavburo had expected increased unrest, especially due to the “strong influence of the Russian revolution” in the city.\textsuperscript{442}

According to Kavburo materials, there is little evidence to suggest that the Soviets hoped to remove the British from Istanbul by force. There was brief hope that the rise of leftist political parties in the Ottoman Empire would accomplish the job for them. The Kavburo had interest in the rise of leftist unionists, which, according to the Soviets, “were very popular among the workers.” They also noted that the influence of leftist political thought was still “very low,” and they lamented that the workers simply “don’t understand socialism.”\textsuperscript{443} Nevertheless, the central committee of the Kavburo was more optimistic about a possible alliance with Mustafa Kemal’s movement.\textsuperscript{444} The Soviets were positive about events in Ankara; they hoped the “friendship and comradery” between Ataturk’s national movement and the Soviets would be a “brilliant success,” and that eventually “state reforms in Anatolia” by Ataturk would reflect reforms conducted by the Soviets.\textsuperscript{445}


\textsuperscript{442} RGASPI, f. 61, op. 1, d. 206, l. 17. In particular, this file illustrates that Kavburo was being kept abreast of Soviet intelligence efforts.

\textsuperscript{443} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{444} RGASPI, f. 61, op. 1, d. 206, l. 18 & RGASPI, f. 64, op. 1, d. 13, l. 20.

\textsuperscript{445} RGASPI, f. 64, op. 1, d. 13, l. 20.
Turkish-Soviet co-operation was also assisted by the mutual idea of national mobilization and, at least in Soviet terminology, anti-imperialism. This idea was believed firmly, especially by people such as Sergei Kirov, who had been born into poverty in Vyatka in 1886 and actively took part in both the 1905 and October Revolutions before being sent to Azerbaijan in 1920.

According to Kirov, then the First Secretary of the Azerbaijan Communist Party, the Soviets’ liberation of Azerbaijan allowed “the workers of Azerbaijan . . . to hold high the victorious red banner of victory [signaling] to oppressed eastern nations freedom from oppression and exploitation.” Soviet hopes for both the rise of a left-wing force and an eventual alliance with the Turkish nationals speak not only of the ideological desires of the Soviets but also of a realpolitik motivation for seeking a relationship with a nation freshly born out of a past competitor. It is a testament to these motivations that the Soviets turned a blind eye to Turkish assaults on both Armenia and then Kurdish portions of Anatolia.

There exists a certain degree of logic to both the Soviets and the Turkish nationalists who had fought what could be termed “wars of reclamation” over the remains of their former empires. Not only was societal mobilization a common part of both their proclaimed ideologies, but, in a functional sense, both the Turkish national movement and the Soviets shared a common goal in re-establishing modern states out of the ashes of

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446 Ibid., f. 80, op. 5, d. 16, l. 2. In particular, these comments were made in a personal letter by Kirov to T. Latkinonov and T.Fars.

447 Ibid., f. 61, op. 1, d. 206, l. 83. While the Kavburo was aware of Turkish assaults in Kurdish regions, there was no active policy outlined in the document for intervention in the conflict.
ancient regimes. The age-old rivalry between the Ottoman Empire and Tsarist Russia would in some sense continue during the inter-war period, but the necessity of reconstruction and the relative weakness of both states would force compromise on both sides. Ultimately, re-conquering a political space in former imperial spheres of influence required recognition of the limits of further expansion for both sides.

The Soviet-Turkish relationship eventually blossomed further than political and strategic cooperation: both countries also slowly developed a working trade relationship after the solidification of their joint border. While the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire had been continuous strategic competitors, the Soviet Union and the new Turkish republic would have a far more benign relationship after the First World War. Nevertheless, while a trade relationship was forged between the two states, the actual amount of trade that occurred was relatively middling, and declined quickly across the 1920s.

According to Gosplan, the state economic planning bureau, Soviet-Turkish trade amounted to 21,019,466 gold-backed rubles from 1923 to 1924, made up of roughly 9,486,321 rubles in exports to Turkey from the Soviet Union and 11,533,145 rubles in imports. By 1924-1925, total trade had substantially decreased to 8,987,707 gold rubles, with a 33% decline in exports, to 6,349,606 rubles, and an even more significant decrease of 77% of imports, to 2,638,101 rubles. At that point, the Soviet Union

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449 RGAE, f. 413, op. 11, d. 177, l. 11. A “gold” ruble was worth .86 grams of gold, roughly $30-35 in terms of 2016 U.S. dollars. This file is a compilation of Gosplan trade statistics.
450 Ibid., f. 413, op. 11, d.177, l. 8-10.
amounted to only 2% of Turkey’s total exports. Considering that most Turkish exports involved agricultural products, especially citrus and other fruits in exchange for Soviet grain and petrochemical products (specifically kerosene), the relative decline in Soviet-Turkish trade most likely was related to the Soviet agricultural-industrial price scissor of the mid-1920s. More precisely, as agricultural prices fell and industrial prices rose in the Soviet Union, demand for Turkish agricultural imports fell faster than a Turkish demand for Soviet exports.

Despite these declines in trade, though, the Soviet Union and Turkey had a working trade relationship that would continue through much of the inter-war period. That said, despite some common ground between the Turkish nationalist movement and the Soviets, Kemal’s staunch anti-communist stance made any deeper alliance impossible. Ultimately, the fall of both the Ottoman and the Russian Empires fundamentally altered the relationship between the countries, and as each refused to press their claims further into each other’s territory, the long-standing contest of Transcaucasia finally came to an end. In the long-term, this would prove beneficial to both states, especially Turkey, which saw a period of peace on its eastern borders that gave it a respite in order to focus inwards. In addition, bilateral neutrality greatly assisted the

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451 Ibid., f. 413, op. 11, d. 177, l. 14.

452 In particular, as prices for agricultural goods declined in the Soviet Union due to the return of stability in rural areas, prices for industrial goods steadily increased due to a relative lack of domestic supply.

453 GARF, f. 413, op. 11, d. 177, l. 16, 22. Oil production was able to resume in relative short order after Soviet forces arrived in the city.
Soviets as well, providing a solidified border with a state that was at least willing to cooperate and trade with the Soviets to some degree.

While the fluidity of the geopolitical struggle surrounding the city and the violence that it helped spur clearly affected the ethnic demographics and stability of Baku itself, the city and its industry survived the ordeal largely intact.\textsuperscript{454} Baku remained a continually inhabited urban space that displayed surprising resilience despite the waves of violence that surged across it. Through 1917, Baku still functioned as an industrial center, even as the oil industry faced greatly reduced production capacity, as documented in Chapter Two.\textsuperscript{455} City life continued, stores stayed open, and, while bread and other foodstuffs came into shortage, the city itself never faced complete famine.\textsuperscript{456} This balance may have been a double-edged sword; for all the resilience of the city, it remained a key prize for the powers struggling to claim it.

This struggle was part of a broader contest of power between the combatants of the First World War, the Russian Civil War, and the aftermath of both conflicts. Baku, hit by various competing currents, changed hands from 1917 to 1920 at least five different times, and the resulting carnage would be disastrous for both the population and the hopeful victors. The Bolsheviks, the Azerbaijani nationalist forces, the Ottomans, and the British had all spent considerable resources and time trying to hold the city. Moreover, the mass population movements that occurred across this period would dramatically

\textsuperscript{454} Altshuler, \textit{Neftianaia promyshlennost’} [Oil Production], 11-41.

\textsuperscript{455} RGIA, f. 1458, op. 1, d. 1634. Branobel suffered greatly from the violence that was occurring during this period.

\textsuperscript{456} Suny, \textit{The Baku Commune}, 184-185.
remap the city, with its population decreasing as a result of this violence. The utility of the city to foreign powers did not explicitly change, even after the unrelenting violence of the period. Oil still flowed and remained the central focus of any government advancing on Baku.

Despite the ultimate success of the Soviets in consolidating control over Baku, there would still be issues with dramatically increasing the production needed to capitalize on the strategic investment the Soviets had placed on conquering it. As the Soviets solidified physical control over the city, there continued to be considerable competition among foreign powers and states over concession agreements with the Soviet State. As previously discussed, the active involvement of Washington Vanderlip, Barnsdall International, and the Sinclair Oil company, alongside Shell Oil and Standard Oil of New Jersey, were predicated on both the active involvement of foreign companies in the Soviet Union and, in the case of Sinclair Oil in particular, the extension of political recognition by the United States to the Soviet Union. In particular, especially in regards to Sinclair Oil, repeated attempts to negotiate were made by the Soviets not only to obtain loans but to receive, if not formal recognition by the United States, at least political goodwill from the Harding Administration.

Unfortunately for all the parties involved, as repeated scandals broke out in the United States and as both the Harding Administration and Sinclair were implicated in the infamous Tea Pot Dome scandal, any attempt to strike a deal over U.S. recognition of the

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457 GARF, f. 8350, op. 1, d. 941, l. 1, 5, 43. Political recognition by the United States remained at the heart of negotiations between the Central Committee on Concessions and Sinclair.
Soviet Union proved fruitless.\textsuperscript{458} As the investigation spread, a chill quickly arose over the business arrangement, since Sinclair Oil was no longer able to acquire the loans the Soviets desperately requested. While the Soviet need for those loans was apparent, the proposed deal between the parties also revealed a greater American and British desire for access to Baku’s vast oil reserves than previously assumed.\textsuperscript{459} In this sense, political priorities were secondary if not tertiary to the private and personal interests of individuals engaging in the venture. Both from the Soviet side and the American there was a clear determination to steer away from open ideological contests or ignore them in the name of political and financial cooperation, regardless of the circumstances surrounding the deals themselves.

While the various negotiations between Sinclair, Shell, Standard Oil, and the Soviets were not successful in the signing of major concession agreements, there was clearly a great deal of political and geopolitical flexibility between the involved parties as they struggled to reach an outcome that could at least mutually benefit themselves.\textsuperscript{460} Despite this flexibility, however, there remained a critical lack of necessary negotiating room needed to reach a comprehensive drilling agreement; as stated in Chapter Two, a distribution agreement was eventually reached between the two parties.\textsuperscript{461} The fact that this was even possible after such massive political and social upheaval speaks of the

\textsuperscript{458} GARF, f. 8350, op.1, d. 941, l. 110. See also Stratton, \textit{Tempest Over Teapot Dome}, 314-315.


\textsuperscript{460} Yergin, \textit{The Prize}, 240-244.

\textsuperscript{461} Wilson, \textit{American Business and Foreign Policy}, 196-197.
remarkable political flexibility of all actors in the face of extreme circumstance and the broader geopolitical contest that had recently taken place in Transcaucasia.

Nevertheless, despite the difficulty of cooperation between the Soviets and foreign powers, there were also potential rivalries between the foreign governments that were backing these deals. The most extreme example is shown in Washington Vanderlip’s telegrams between himself and the Soviets in 1920, in which he reveals overt paranoia regarding “spying by the British.”\(^\text{462}\) This paranoia eventually reached such an extent that Vanderlip started sending messages by long-distance courier just to avoid the possibility of his telegrams being intercepted in the U.K.

According to Vanderlip, spying was part of a parallel war occurring between different private actors hoping to re-enter the Russian market. While the Soviets were forced to be flexible enough to recruit foreign businesses, those businesses, in turn, actively competed against each other to maximize their concessions; however, the results of this competition were limited.\(^\text{463}\) While Vanderlip’s attempt at gaining a Soviet concession was in the end a fraud, the intense rivalry between American and European oil companies, as shown by the rushed and failed attempts by Royal Dutch Shell and Standard Oil to seek concessions, is not only a clear illustration of the degree of competition and distrust between them but also indicative of broader economic competition between Western states during the inter-war period. Shell and Standard Oil

\(^{462}\) GARF, f. 8350, op. 1, d. 941, l. 31. The Central Committee on Concessions kept a detailed record of negotiations and correspondence with Vanderlip.

\(^{463}\) RGASPI, f. 80, op. 7, d. 29, l. 1, 3-5. This is best illustrated by the struggle Azneft would have for further physical and human capital needed to rebuild Baku’s industry after 1920.
both made aggressive efforts to purchase Branobel even after its nationalization was *fait accompli*.\(^{464}\)

In many ways, a quiet transition occurred during this period regarding the dynamics of power surrounding Baku. The forces deciding the fate of the city shifted from the application of military power, a battle the Soviets had clearly won, to competition over more nuanced economic arrangements—arrangements that had the same rhetorical objective of keeping continued revenue streams coming from Baku regardless of the ideology of the government that controlled it. While the Soviet Union very clearly had a revolutionary outlook, even during the NEP, the move from outright violence to more peaceful competition illustrated a return to the pre-war status quo. After 1920, the fate of various economic interests in Baku would be decided in conference rooms, not on the battlefield.\(^{465}\)

### 7. Conclusion

The battle over Transcaucasia (and in particular Baku) from 1914 to 1920 had many of its roots originating in imperial contests from the eighteenth and nineteenth century, but this more modern struggle for territorial possession eventually was transformed, at least in part, by the growth of a progressively industrialized and globalized economy that had increasingly become reliant on oil. Transcaucasia, in this sense, was no longer what, in geopolitical terms, would be called “rugged borderland,” but it and along with Baku had become a strategic part of the energy network that then


\(^{465}\) RGASPI, f. 159, op. 2, d. 15, l. 58-66. This would most clearly be shown by Soviet attempts at securing further Western concessions during at the Treaty of Genoa.
industrialized world had increasingly become reliant upon. In this sense, the struggle for Transcaucasia began as formal imperial contests between established states, but both the radicalism and the smaller-scaled conflicts that fractured the region greatly complicated the ultimate legacy of the period. As individual republics and movements struggled over the remains of both the Ottoman and Russian Empires, these contests would have their own economic influence, especially in the petroleum market as Baku’s oil supply to global market was disrupted.

The intersecting wars of this period in Transcaucasia culminated in a new regional map that highlighted clear national boundaries and the establishment of robust mobilization states. Despite the stabilization of the region, there was the lingering dilemma of how to manage the numerous political, social, and demographic shifts that had occurred between 1914 and 1920. Across Transcaucasia, there would be a major readjustment of borders to fit the new reality of Soviet control. Kavburo and the TSFSR would establish new borders and reconstruct the nationality-based successor states of Transcaucasia into what would become a single political entity controlled by Moscow. In comparison, in Turkey, the Armenian Genocide and the subsequent population exchange between ethnic Turks in Greece and ethnic Greeks in the new Turkish state would redraw another demographic map, much as the Treaty of Mudros had redrawn the borders of what would become the new Turkish state.

In both cases, the emergence of mobilization states and the restructuring of state control in Transcaucasia would involve a clean break from the past of the long-standing imperial contests between the Ottomans and the Russian Empire; in short, it signaled the

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466 This includes but is not limited to the First World War, the Russian Civil War, and the Azerbaijan-Turkish-Armenian War.
end of two (centuries-old) ancient regimes. Despite this shift, however, there would continue to be Russian and then Soviet tension with British influence. The “Great Game” would not end with the fall of the Russian Empire but eventually morphed into a series of struggles that would continue through the inter-war period and then the Cold War, with the increasing involvement of the United States. Even the after the end of Cold War, the rivalry between the U.S. and Russia is in many ways still unresolved.

Beyond the geopolitical struggle itself, the growth of mobilization states would also mean a dramatic reconfiguration of the legitimacy that those states rested upon. In the case of Turkey, as the Ottoman state crumbled and its focus on religious legitimacy waned, Turkey moved to establish an ethnically-Turkish foundation of legitimacy in order to consolidate its state building process. This new foundation would require a dramatically different attitude toward social cohesion and foreign relations. Eventually, the new Turkish state would be inward looking, largely focused on developing internal legitimacy while at the same time cultivating a more non-interventionist tone outside its borders.

In comparison, the Soviets balanced their active Marxist ideology with the idea of a theoretically autonomous but political limited form of ethnic identity. Even in 1913, Lenin remarked that, “the Social-Democratic Party’s recognition of the right of all nationalities to self-determination most certainly does not mean that Social-Democrats reject an independent appraisal of the advisability of the state succession of any nation in each case.” This “independent appraisal” is best illustrated by formal

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467 Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, “Theses on the National Question,” in Lenin’s Collected Works, Vol 19 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 243-251. Lenin is speaking solely from the
acknowledgement of nationalities with a limited set of linguistic and cultural rights by the Soviets, but these rights were only bestowed in a heavily regulated manner, especially in regards to religion and national identity under the aegis of the Soviet state itself.

Over time, the Soviets were also far more concerned over internal legitimacy as it became increasingly clear that the October Revolution would not spur greater revolutions in Western Europe. This point is especially apparent after the failure of the Polish-Soviet War to spread the revolution westward beyond Ukraine. In short, the nationality policy of the Soviets was an implicit compromise with the national groups they had re-conquered. Foremost, the Soviet state needed to mend the potential divisiveness brought by their wars of expansion with the allowance of some educational and linguistic autonomy: korenizatsiia. Terry Martin, in his book, Affirmative Action Empire, sees these developments as the eventual formation of a system that balanced Soviet political domination with cultural and linguistic autonomy that was designed by the Bolsheviks and the Soviets to “confront the rising tide of nationalism response by systematically promoting the national consciousness of its ethnic minorities and stabilizing for them many of the characteristics of its ethnic minorities and establishing for them many of the characteristic institutional forms of the nation state.”

In this sense, it could be said that the Soviet Union hoped to consolidate its presence in the region with a new form of state legitimacy that was rooted in both managing the careful issue of ethnic identity in

\[468\] Martin, The Affirmative Action Empire, 1-2. In addition, Francine Hirsch, in her analysis of Soviet policy in Empire of Nations, provides an in-depth analysis of both the ethnographical origin of korenizatsiia as well as the functional method of this system, including the transition to “scientific racism under Stalin.”
Transcaucasia without weakening their political and therefore economic and military control of the region.

In many ways, the broader struggle in Baku has similarities to other disputes that have happened in other commodity-producing regions. In a contemporary setting, one can find the closest similar examples of this form of discord in the present-day Middle East and North Africa. The inter-ethnic conflicts, such as the Nigerian Civil War or contemporary sectarian struggles in the Persian Gulf between Sunni governments and Shia populations, especially in Iraq and Bahrain, have brought the influence (if not the intervention) of a multitude of foreign powers in oil-producing regions. Not only have imperial contests led to increasing violence across these areas, but the inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions spurred by them have led to deep fissures over identity that have continued for generations.

The tension in geopolitics surrounding Baku also intensified the ongoing labor struggle between employers and their employees, as well as the ongoing competition between political factions and ethnic groups, especially between Baku’s Armenian and Azerbaijani populations. These multiple interlocking conflicts, while all connected to the oil industry, were also broadly interconnected with the geopolitical situation of Eastern Transcaucasia. Labor struggles eventually led to the formation of radical political parties in Baku; during the aftermath of the October revolution, these parties called on their most loyal supporters to form their own militias in order to exert increasing amounts of

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political force that would in turn have broad geopolitical ramifications outside the city itself.

Through 1918, these militias would be the fonts of raw political power as they fought for the city in a series of pitched skirmishes. In short, political divisions in Baku would eventually become militarized divisions, and, as the greater drama between influential neighboring states played out, these armed factions would find ready allies outside of Baku who supported or opposed them based on what they perceived was the best option for expanding their influence in the city itself. Inside the microcosm of Baku, there played a miniature version of the struggle that was occurring outside of it; nevertheless, the two contests were inseparable from each other.

These struggles were not only united by direct material interests, but also by the formative process of identity itself. Rather than being in a contest with each other, ethnic, political, and religious identities, along with their subsequent material interests, often became interlocked. In this sense, ethnic and religious identities, especially, were incredibly powerful political motivators but at the same time existed alongside the growth of left-wing mobilizing ideologies that provided considerable competition beyond different parties and political factions.

The growth and interconnectedness of political and ethnic identity from the late nineteenth century through the Russian Civil War only helped drive Armenian and Azerbaijani nationalists further apart as they struggled for dominance over the urban space of Baku. The growth of ethnic identity would continue to be a powerful force behind geopolitical decision-making in Transcaucasia to the present-day; the same
boundaries of ethnicity remain powerful markers, as shown by ongoing skirmishes in and around Nagorno-Karabakh. Political influence behind these clashes was not nested in the dynamics of the oil industry itself but in the larger strategic disputes that surrounded it. When at historical points they connected, especially during the Russian Civil War, the results were absolutely devastating to the city itself as well as the rest of Transcaucasia.

The end result of these events was the eventual dominance of left-wing mobilization from the early 1920s in the form of Soviet state socialism. The practicalities of balance of power politics during this era, alongside the continued strength of ethnic and religious identities, required considerable compromise both in the borders of the then burgeoning USSR and in its relations with the outside world, especially fellow mobilizing states, such as Turkey. For at least the next sixty years, ethnic identity in the guise of a limited form of national identity would be tightly restrained in Azerbaijan, in many ways precisely because of the unpredictability it presented to the Soviets. Nevertheless, as shown by the Soviet occupation of Northern Iran during the Second World War and its promotion of a separatist People’s Republic of Azerbaijan in 1945, ethnic identity (in a geopolitical sense) also presented its own opportunities for the Soviets. In the case of the People’s Republic of Azerbaijan, they utilized ethnic identity for their own geopolitical benefit while at the same time minimizing the threat to themselves internally.

The Soviet occupation of Azerbaijan and the formation of the TSFSR would finally solidify Soviet power in Transcaucasia. While Soviet dominance would always face some degree of uncertainty, especially due to continued British influence in Iran, by the mid-1920s, Soviet control was now unquestionable. Nevertheless, the Soviet-British
rivalry over Iran, which focused on Southern Azerbaijan, would further Stalin’s paranoia over British intentions, as best illustrated by the 1927 war scare. However, the truest test of Soviet influence would occur during the Second World War but would be based on danger not from the British but from Germany. Baku reached its apogee as a strategic objective during the early 1940s, and while German offenses did not test the full mettle of Baku’s defenses, Baku continued to endure as a strategic economic, military, and geopolitical objective that would help focus regional and global powers on it well into the Cold War and beyond.

As Soviet control was solidified over Baku and the rest of Azerbaijan, another silent test took place. The Soviets were soon pressed to not only to occupy and dominate Azerbaijan, but also to re-establish a functioning society within Baku to match the industry they hoped to restart—as well as repair the physical damage from the successive battles that had been fought to control the city. For the Soviets, this goal would not only complete state domination of industry in Baku, as well as its state consolidation, but it would develop a political, educational, and security system that would be comparable to that of the rest of the Soviet Union. In order to accomplish this, Baku would face an extensive security crackdown and an ongoing investment in internal security that would leave a troubled legacy for the city.

One of the legacies of the geopolitical contests across this period was the Soviets’ realization of their alarming geopolitical vulnerability in Transcaucasia. Their policies from this period onward would progressively try to contain any threat to their dominance in Azerbaijan through a combination of compromise, such as their nationalities policy or through outright force, such as the development of a vast internal security network. For
the Soviets, the contest over Baku framed the delicate balance the Soviets as a revolutionary state would be forced to walk (as opposed to other powers) in order to hold its borders. The formation of the Soviet Union itself implicitly challenged the economic world order of the period, and the intervention of a multitude of foreign powers in not only Transcaucasia but other large parts of the RSFSR reflected a deep hostility to its initial formation. The Soviet response was born out of that reality.

The competition and conflict over Baku would have long-standing effects on Soviet perceptions of Baku’s vulnerability, and it would shadow much of their broader foreign policy during the inter-war period, as exemplified by Stalinist paranoia of Azerbaijani nationalist holdouts. This situation would add complexity to the relationship between the emergent Soviet state and the British Empire, a rift that would continue into the Cold War and beyond. It would also frame Soviet-Azerbaijani relations for the next century as well as post-breakup tensions in Transcaucasia and the North Caucasus, including the modern-day Nagorno-Karabakh War and the First and Second Russo-Chechen Wars. The contest Transcaucasia from 1918 to 1920 would also help frame later Soviet expectations of geopolitical conflict in the region and guide the Soviet Union to act defensively in Transcaucasia, especially in regards to the invasive methods of their internal security apparatus in Azerbaijan.

471 ARDA, f. 169, op. 1, d. 54, l.13-70. This is exemplified investigation and surveillance by the NKVD of citizens suspected of harboring Azerbaijani nationalist sympathies.
Chapter Four: Identity and Industry: Identity Formation in Late Tsarist to Soviet Baku – 1905-1922

1. Introduction

By 1905, the increasing ethnic tension between the Azerbaijani and Armenian communities alongside the general growth of the oil industry in Baku and the broader radicalization of politics in the Russian Empire had collectively altered the political and social milieu of Baku. The growth of political division in Baku was at least partially rooted in increasing desperate competition for employment. Competition for food and housing had progressively changed the manner in which individuals viewed and identified themselves, especially after 1905. At the core of this phenomenon was the emergence of ethnic identity as an essential component of the political milieu of Baku, a development that had a dramatic impact on the lives of those who lived in the city and in both social and political terms affected how they saw each other. Furthermore, the rise of ethnic identity in Baku would permanently alter how party politics would function and, in turn, be a formative factor in the later, inward-focused violence that the city would suffer during the Russian Civil War. Over time, with the formation of ethnically-aligned parties such as the Himmät, Müsavat and Dashnak parties, ethnic and political identity would coalesce into an ethnically-informed political identity.\(^{472}\)

The contours of local ethnic identity were formed from the ancestral cultures and languages of the region and then reinforced through the arrival of a multitude of

\(^{472}\) In this case, ethnic identity is more useful to the discussion than national identity or nationality, for these movements did not necessarily begin as secessionist or national movements, but rather parties focusing on protecting the political and economic rights of particular ethnic communities that existed in Baku. Furthermore, in terms of religion, the Himmät movement in particular would allow non-Azerbaijani Muslims to join it, but at its heart it would still remain dominated by Azerbaijani Muslims, as would the Müsavat Party.
economic migrants of various ethnicities. By the turn of the twentieth century, ethnic identity was further outlined by the work of intellectuals and party leaders who codified it into multiple political movements and parties. Ethnic and then political identity became directly framed by material interests—especially wage and skill differences between different communities.\(^{473}\) As a result, ethnic identity became a very different signifier of power, and this type of signifier would, in turn, become a decisive factor in the fate of the city.

Considering the available sources, and by looking at a cohesive snapshot of Baku from 1900 to the First World War, it is quite clear that it was a demographically cosmopolitan city.\(^{474}\) However, the city was never physically planned for the expansion it experienced. While some amount of urban planning occurred by virtue of private enterprises planning and owning much of the residential housing themselves, housing construction at the time was very much situational and based on industrial needs—and it remained in short supply throughout the First World War.\(^{475}\) Baku grew in many ways like an organic entity, feeding on the migration of workers into the city. While its demographic shifts were foreseeable, the outcomes of those shifts were not. As Baku grew from a small coastal town to an industrial center, it expanded outside of its core and, for the most part, grew on an ad hoc basis.

\(^{473}\) Stopani, *Nefepromyshlennyi rabochii* [Oil Workers], 28-34.

\(^{474}\) Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, 32. Census data illustrates how diverse the city had become by 1913, no ethnicity held an outright majority of the population.

\(^{475}\) ARDTA, f. 798, op. 1, d. 485, l. 13, 18.
The so-called “White City” or central part of Baku was built alongside the ancient core of the city on a planned, modern, grid pattern made up of large brick structures of then-contemporary Italianate neo-classical influence; however, this did not represent the urban environment that most of the population lived in.\textsuperscript{476} The vast majority of Baku’s citizenry resided in cramped worker housing that surrounded the so-called “Black City” surrounding the oil fields, usually in neighborhoods made of quickly-constructed wooden or brick structures.\textsuperscript{477} The old city itself, Iceriseher, most of it built with stone, existed unchanged from the late medieval period and was left intact. Workers from a variety of cultures were thrown together in employee housing; they lived side-by-side but nevertheless continued to identify themselves separately from their immediate neighbors. Therefore, on a social level, ethnic signifiers were more important than mere geography.\textsuperscript{478} This process did not explicitly change after the 1905 Revolution or even after 1914.

Baku’s population lived in an ever-changing urban space, and economic imperatives quickly spurred rapid demographic changes. During the late nineteenth century, its population growth was continually affected by increasing labor demand to feed the constant drilling of oil that was being pumped from underneath the city. While there have been attempts to separate the production of oil from its study as simply an

\textsuperscript{476} Swietochowski, \textit{Russian Azerbaijan}, 21.


economic commodity in Baku, there has been relatively little study on the long-term economic effect on the population and the physical externalities of its impact on the city, including environmental damage.

This chapter will investigate how ethnicity and identity functioned in Baku from 1905 into the Soviet period. It will also explore how the development of these various forms of identity would have an irrevocable effect on how politics and society would function both on a short-term and long-term basis in the city by helping spur the creation of political movements that would become increasingly radicalized from 1905 to 1917 and then increasingly militant during the Russian Civil War. While ethnic identity in Baku was, at its core, decided through personal identity by individuals and families, this system would come under intense pressure by materially-driven forces, specifically the economic and labor dynamics of the oil industry. The wealth of much of the population of Baku was tied to the oil industry, and it influenced geopolitical forces that had a profound long-term influence on the city. Both of these forces were beyond the ability of the population to control, and many of Baku’s citizens ended up victims of the confluence of these two processes.

In contrast to other works on the subject of identity in Baku and Azerbaijan, in particular Audrey Altstadt’s *The Azerbaijani Turks*, this chapter will not be simply a narrative of the development of only Azerbaijani identity or other ethnicities but will instead focus on the formation of ethnic identity itself as a process as well as the circumstances that led to solidification of ethnic identity alongside political identity in

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479 As stated previously, these parties included the Himmät, Müsavat, and Dashnak parties as well overwhelmingly Georgian portions of the Menshevik faction of the RSDLP.
Baku. While Azerbaijani identity is a significant factor in this process because of its strong connection to Baku, the process of the formation and politicization of ethnic identity in Baku, as a whole, is more significant for this work than the history of a single ethnic identity.

As a comparison, Alison Frank, in *Oil Empire*, illustrates that while some elements of a process of ethnic division occurred in Galicia, in particular between the 1880s and 1910, Galicia never experienced the labor strife or ethnic violence of Baku. However, even though Galicia did not experience the same degree of political or inter-ethnic violence as did Baku, there are still useful parallels between the mechanics of the oil industry and inter-ethnic tension in both places. In both cases, disagreements between communities were exacerbated by competition for employment and housing that was spurred by development of local petroleum resources. Indeed, Alison Frank states, “Galician workers appear to have felt the pull of national or religious identity more strongly than those of class identities,” but at the same time, while religious and ethnic strife existed, it never reached the same extent as Baku. However, in contrast to Galicia, ethnic and political violence surged through Baku multiple times during the early twentieth century.

In order to conduct this analysis of identity and its continuity between the Tsarist, Revolutionary, and Soviet periods in Baku, I have utilized documentation on the contours of ethnic violence during the Russian Civil War and early Soviet period from the State Archive of the Russian Federation as well as the Azerbaijani State Archive. They helped

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480 Frank, *Oil Empire* 127-131

481 Ibid., 126.
me explore not only why these events occurred but why they would have such a long-term impact on the city. In particular, material from the archives of the Communist Party at RGASPI, in particular from the Kavburo, has provided not only a unique guide as to how ethnic identity functioned in Baku, but also an intricate perspective on Soviet attitudes towards ethnicity in the form of nationality. Furthermore, documentation from Branobel in the Azerbaijan State Historical Archives has illuminated many of the complications resulting from differing wages levels and levels of education among its multi-ethnic workforce.

While a significant percentage of the population of Baku was either engaged in the oil industry or employed in support of it, this commonality of employment did not necessarily lead to broader solidarity along ethnic lines through class. It did lead to the population of Baku experiencing the effect of intensified ethnic and linguistic division alongside increasing class and labor strife of the period. Therefore, looking across Baku’s history from the initial development of the industry to the crisis of the 1905 Revolution and then the continued labor crises from 1905 to 1914, there is a clear trajectory of increased conflict and increased radicalization, especially along political lines.  

Therefore, the chief goal of this chapter is to address how ethnic identity, along with political identity, became such a powerful force in Baku during the early twentieth century—especially during the Russian Civil War. By focusing on both the creation of ethnic identities and their realized effect, this chapter will also address how the confluence of these forces would be devastating to the Soviets in 1918 and present such a challenge to them after 1920.

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When considering the process formation of ethnic and political identity in Baku, specifically from 1905 to 1917, it is apparent that how ethnic communities interacted in the case of Baku was unstable; the demographics of the city itself constantly churned from the mid-nineteenth century onwards as different communities would rise and fall in relative demographical strength to each other. The rise of national self-determination movements would dramatically re-frame ethnicity as a cohesive social and political marker and reinforce ethnic identity as a useful and powerful political tool to be utilized by multiple political parties, including (but not limited to) the Müsavat and the Dashnak movements. From a geopolitical perspective, this politicization of identity would add a further element to the already complex negotiations for political control of the city. Due to this transformation across the early twentieth century, significant elements of the civic politics of the pre-Soviet period in Baku became unavoidably connected to the issue of ethnic and religious identity and its formation inside an urban environment and would, in turn, become influenced by the complex geopolitical situation it would find itself in at the end of the First World War and through the Russian Civil War.483

2. Identity in the Urban Environment of Baku

If one looks at the ethnographical demographics of Baku in 1897, the city itself does not reflect many of the traditional assumptions of a typical colonial city on the southern frontiers of the Russian Empire comparable to Tbilisi or Yerevan. Even by 1897, the population of Baku consisted of a heterogeneous mix of nationalities, including

many residents from multiple European communities. Baku did not meet the traditional expectations that it would be populated by a small colonial presence of Europeans and a large presence of what would otherwise be considered “native” peoples. In terms of raw demographics, Baku was very diverse, and in this sense was more similar to other established cosmopolitan, formerly annexed interior cities of the Empire, such as Kazan, rather than a traditional colonial settlement in the French or British Empire—or, for that matter, such Central Asian cities as Bukhara or Merv.

Despite Baku’s cosmopolitan nature, there still existed a legacy of colonialism—or at least the perceptions of it, especially by native Azerbaijanis. In many ways, Azerbaijani identity and its formation would be defined by the multitude of ethnic diversity in Baku that had originated from outside the country. Therefore, the centrality of Baku to Azerbaijani identity helps inform the core versus periphery nature of Baku’s relationship with the rest of the Russian Empire, including its capital, St. Petersburg, which was nearly 3,000 kilometers from Baku.

Unlike a traditional colonial space, where there was clear separation of rulers and the ruled based on class and place of birth, Baku was still influenced by the unique existence of the Russian Empire itself, an empire in which the supremacy of a single national culture was not fully dominant for much of the nineteenth century. Moreover, it can be argued that the Russian Empire conducted a form of internal colonization of ethnic

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484 By 1897, out of a total population of 111,904 in Baku, 37,399 (or 33.4%) were “Velikorusskii,” or Great Russian; 930 were “Malorusskii,” from Central and Eastern Ukraine; and 636 were “Beloruskii,” or White Russian. There were also 2,460 Germans, 835 Poles, 312 Swedes, and 106 Lithuanians. Tsentral’nyi statisticheskii komitet [Central Statistical Committee]. Pervaia vseobshchaia perepis’ [First General Census], Table 13.
Russians themselves through the institution of serfdom. In material terms, most
Russian peasants during the mid- to late-nineteenth century lived in conditions that were
in many ways not that dissimilar to the conquered peoples of Transcaucasia. In Baku,
this did not necessarily mean that the Russian Empire was a benign entity in
Transcaucasia, but that the material divide between “conquerors” and “conquered” in
terms of ethnicity was, in fact, less significant than within a traditional overseas colonial
entity.

A testament to the blurred power relationship between ethnic Russians and the
people of Transcaucasia is that, at the beginning of petroleum extraction during the late-
nineteenth century, the Russia Empire had only barely moved away from serfdom. The
end of serfdom provided further cheap labor for nascent Russian industrialization.
Furthermore, by 1914, the material lives of many former serfs often had not changed
significantly during this period; the rural peasant comprised the vast majority of the
population of the Russian Empire. According to Steven Nafziger and Peter Lindert in
“Russian Inequality on the Eve of the Revolution,” the Russian peasantry, specifically
agricultural workers, comprised roughly 85 percent of the total population of the
Empire. Much of Baku’s history during the late imperial period in many ways reflected
the legacy of an early modern relationship between the state and the various ethnicities
that it governed. The Russian Empire was united by the personage of the Tsar and his

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bureaucracy, and while, linguistically, Russian was the dominant language of
governance, the empire remained explicitly ethnically cosmopolitan and native Russian
speakers remained an absolute minority. This form of governance was tested to its limits
by virtue of Baku’s sheer existence as an industrialized city that existed on the fringes of
the Empire.

The Russian Empire’s conquest of Baku after invading Transcaucasia in 1801 can
and should be framed as the actions of a territorially-expansionist imperial state. The
Russian Empire conquered Baku from a territorial rival, Persia, and, by promoting
industrial development, demonstratively changed the region’s demographics by virtue of
settlement made up mostly from the rest of the empire. In Struggle over the
Borderlands, Alfred Rieber sees the conflict between Azeris and Armenians in Baku
from 1905-1907 as partly due to the “uneven, confused and contradictory nature of
government policies toward the borderlands,” which were “not well suited to coordinate
interlocking problems such as industrialization, colonization and cultural assimilation in
the borderlands.” However, even these traditional assumptions of colonialism were
complicated in Baku by the cosmopolitan nature of the city; Russian, Armenian, and
local Azeri workers worked side by side in oil companies that were either foreign-owned

\[488\] Altstadt, The Azerbaijani Turks, 17.

\[489\] Azerbaijanis from Persia still made up a significant section of the work force in Baku.

\[490\] Alfred Reiber, “The Struggle over the Borderlands,” in The Legacy of History in
Russia and the New States of Eurasia, edited by S. Frederick Starr (Armonk, New York: M. E.
Sharpe, Inc., 1994), 81-82.

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or owned by domestic owners from a wide cast of ethnicities, including other Russians, Swedes, Germans, and Armenians.

While Russian culture and language had its primacy, as expressed simply by the amount of published materials printed in Baku in Russian as well as the large number of ethnic Russians who were represented in the bureaucratic hierarchy of local politics and in the city itself, there was still considerable linguistic diversity in Baku, and most of the population’s native tongues were non-Slavic languages. In addition, European subjects of Russian or Eastern Slavic heritage were often quite prevalent in the administrative hierarchy of Baku, even if in most cases Russian was used as the language of government and business. However, despite the primacy of the Russian language in administration and business, it was only the native tongue of roughly one third of the population.

Russian colonial structures in Transcaucasia had a different relationship between its periphery and metropole than what the than the rest of Europe experienced. Western European states during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were, in general, significantly more industrialized than their colonies, which traditionally were a source of raw materials for the now industrialized European metropoles. Baku’s industrialization largely happened contemporaneously with industrialization occurring across the rest of the Russian Empire, and in this sense was both temporally and economically linked to the Russian industrial complex as a whole. Due to its geographic position, Baku was rooted in an essentially different structure of power than other industrial parts of the Russian

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492 Tsentral’nyi statisticheskii komitet [Central Statistical Committee], *Pervaia vseobshchaia perepis’* [First General Census], Table 13.
Empire—especially Poland, Ukraine, and Central Russia itself. Situated on its geographic fringes and constituting one of the quickest-developing portions of the Russian Empire, Baku enjoyed a unique position in relation to the rest of the Russian Empire and existed in two worlds. It existed as a borderland city and also as a newly industrializing powerhouse. While the mechanics of industry may have had similarities in Baku, there was a much wider gap in terms of ethnic and religious identity.

Baku, at the same time, had the same power relationship with St. Petersburg as between any other colony and its metropole. This disparity of power was further complicated by Baku’s heterogeneous mix of ethnicities that pulled from European portions of the Empire as well as the rest of Transcaucasia and Persia. Moreover, the population of the city, regardless of ethnicity, and like the rest of the subjects of the Russian Empire, still lacked effective autonomy from the state itself, which rested at the heart of this colonial relationship. Consequently, Baku and the rest of the Russian Empire had a mode of industrial development that is distinct from traditional conceptions of colonization. This is the result of the difficult state of industrialization that multi-ethnic imperial states were forced into after being left behind by the industrial growth of Western and Central Europe and that North America had commenced well before the 1870s. As shown in Baku, Russian attempts to catch up with the industrialized world left a complex economic legacy, especially in its most recently conquered fringes.

In terms of a relationship between identity and violence, Alison Frank, in her book, *Oil Empire*, has asserted that in Galicia, like Baku, poor living conditions often

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493 Gatrell, *The Tsarist Economy*, 84-86.
overlapped with violence. In Galicia specifically, ethno-religious violence was perpetrated primarily by the majority Christian population against the minority Jewish population. According to Frank, “it would appear plausible that religious and economic tensions overlapped in the case of Christian violence directed against Jews.” While in her mind it is unclear whether the relatively superior standards of living conditions of the Jewish community prompted the violence and killings, it was obvious that Christians “expressed their dissatisfaction in a manner that made all Jews, regardless of occupation, age or sex, victims of their anger.” In that sense, there was a clear parallel between both Galicia and Baku, although it is debatable whether there was a common root cause for the violence; in particular, there was not the same educational and income difference between Jews and Catholic Poles as there was between Azerbaijanis and Armenians or Russians in Baku.

There is a clear juxtaposition between this heterodox mix and the actual nature of employment within the city itself. Garskova and Akhanchi’s article, “Discrimination in the Labour Market in the Baku Oil Industry,” illustrates some of these divisions. Their focus relies on the assumption that wage differences between ethnic groups were in part intentional, a gap they believe may have been caused by an informal system of discrimination by oil producers. In their words, “The firm [Branobel] enhanced

494 The population of Galicia at that juncture was 90% Christian, with Poles being the majority in western Galicia and Ruthenians (Ukrainians) being the majority of eastern Galicia. The Jewish population was roughly between 8-10% across the province.

495 Frank, Oil Empire, 131.

496 Ibid., 132.

497 I. Garskova and P. Akhanchi, “Discrimination in the Labour Market in the Baku Oil Industry” (Moscow State University, 1993).
discriminatory practice, all the while declaring that no discrimination existed in hiring. 498 Nevertheless, further analysis of their data alongside other statistics from the period complicates this process, and it is unclear how much discrimination existed beyond the linkage of wages and skill levels that has already been shown in Chapter One. While there were clear differences in wages and skill between ethnic groups, it is not established if these differences were actually due to an informal system of wage and employment discrimination.

As discussed in Chapter One, in Branobel and the other companies associated with it, there was a very clear divide between various ethnic groups in regards to literacy in Russian or their native tongue, degree of skill, relative number of skilled positions in workshops, and wages. In terms of workers employed, there was a remarkable amount of diversity that largely reflected the religious (and therefore implicitly the ethnic) mix of the local population. For example, in a sample of 1,974 workers working under the Nobel Association from 1878-1921, 931 of them were Muslim compared to 1,043 Christian workers, which generally reflected the demographics of the city at large.

498 Ibid.
The diversity of the Muslim population can be seen in the table below:

Table 4.1: Nobel Association, Baku: Muslim Workers, 1878-1921

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number of Workers</th>
<th>Literacy</th>
<th>Skilled Position</th>
<th>Number Married</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Azerbaijani</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persian</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iranian Azerbaijani</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lezghini</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazan Tatar</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Muslims</strong></td>
<td><strong>931</strong></td>
<td><strong>7%</strong></td>
<td><strong>3%</strong></td>
<td><strong>44%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Length of Service (Months)</th>
<th>Wages compared to Average Wages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Azerbaijani</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>95.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persian</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>84.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iranian Azerbaijani</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>97.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lezghini</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>88.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazan Tatar</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>94.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Muslims</strong></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>88.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this data, there are several clear trends. First, there is a clear discrepancy between the literacy of Muslim workers of different ethnicities. This contrast in literacy reflects both the educational level of the workers and their places of origin. In addition, it shows the possibility of workers obtaining higher-paid levels of employment. For

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499 Ibid., and ADRTA f. 798, op. 3.
example, if a Muslim worker grew up with little or no education, especially if that
education was not conducted in Russian, it would naturally be far more difficult to learn
the technical skills they needed in order to earn higher wages. However, according to
Branobel records, even among Muslims there are some notable differences in terms of
ethnicity: Kazan Tatars and Azerbaijanis, in general, have a higher degree of literacy than
Persians, Lezghin (Laz), and Persian Azeris. Consequently, there seems to be a
noticeable split in education and literacy between Muslim peoples from the Russian
Empire itself and those from Persia—even during the late Tsarist period. This divergence
shows the ethnic and educational divide between the workers who converged on Baku.

Table 4.2: Nobel Association, Baku: Christian Workers, 1878-1921

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Workers</th>
<th>Literacy %</th>
<th>Skilled Position %</th>
<th>Number Married %</th>
<th>Average Age</th>
<th>Length of Service</th>
<th>Wages Compared to Average Wages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russians</td>
<td>951</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>105.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenians</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>114.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Christians</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>147.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Christians</td>
<td>1043</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>107.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, there is a clear discrepancy between Armenians and Russians and
other Christians, especially non-Slavic Europeans—a fact that complicates the narrative
of a positive correlation between wages and religion and shows there was a

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500 Ibid.

501 Ibid. Throughout this period, Russians and Armenians remained the absolute majority
of the Christian population of Baku. Nevertheless, the category of “Other Christians” may have
included a substantial number of Swedes and Germans who would have had higher levels of
education than Russian or Armenian workers.
developmental split between various ethnicities, including those who share the same religion. In this sense, while Russian workers had a higher degree of literacy than Muslim workers of various ethnicities, they did not have significantly higher wages, as one might expect. It would be non-Slavic Europeans who would be on top of the wage pyramid.

However, despite the differentiation in literacy and training, the tendency for skilled positions seems to largely follow along religious, not ethnic, identity. It is initially unclear as to why this is so; it may simply be that a sorting process of specific skill sets by employers was more reliant on education, or that literacy itself and ethnicity are not necessarily a decisive factor in employment for industrial positions.

There is a clear 10-15% difference in wages between Muslim and Christian groups, with the clearest differentiation between Muslim Lezgini and “other Christians,” which most likely included non-Russian or non-Ukrainian groups, such as Poles, Swedes, and Germans.  

Nevertheless, despite the skill differentiation between these two groups, the difference in wages is not, in and of itself, evidence of an intentional ethnic class divide between workers. Instead, it is more pertinent to explore the possibility that the rise of ethnic division was based on pervasive unhappiness within multiple ethnic groups due to the broader economic and material pressures placed on them by the market necessities of the oil industry.

While Branobel most likely did not ascribe to a purposeful process of discrimination, the pent-up resentment that grew from these wage disparities (as

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502 Ibid.

503 This process included paying as low of wages as the market could bear for a particular skill set.
exemplified by the violence of 1905) only helped to further the radicalization of political factions or unions, which in turn reinforced the development and strengthening of both ethnic and political identity in the city. Furthermore, it was this economic-political dynamic that most likely helped ignite tensions between groups rather than overt ethnic discrimination. This driving force was the main cause of open hostility between ethnic groups and the political parties and militias that claimed to fight for their interests.

The available data shows there is clear wage division in the workforce, but the statistics seem to indicate that wage differentiation relates to skill and thus reinforces the argument that wages were based on the relative productive usefulness of the worker beyond his or her ethnic identity. This ethnic divide prompts a further question regarding the relative nature of how colonialism functioned in Baku. Even if wages were based on structural differences, such as education and skill sets rather than traditional discrimination, the result was that wages most likely entrenched the socio-economic divisions between individual communities. The outcome of this division was that it would reflect the solidification of relative class differences and ethnically-framed political identity, as would be demonstrated by the events of 1905 and party politics between 1908 and 1917.
Moreover, a sample of workers from Branobel itself shows the difference between the economic mobility of Christian and Muslim workers:

Table 4.3. Nobel Association, Baku: Sample of Average Worker Mobility, 1878-1921

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Christian</th>
<th></th>
<th>Muslim</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td>Administrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown above, Christian (largely ethnically Russian) workers did experience some degree of higher social mobility. Foremost, a higher number of Christians (33.3% in this representative sample taken from Branobel’s statistics) were able to obtain white-collar positions compared to Muslim workers (26.6%) being promoted from all other skill levels. In particular, 18.9% of Christian semi-skilled workers were able to obtain white-collar positions while only 11.7% of Muslim semi-skilled workers were able to obtain white-collared jobs. This difference is likely because Branobel used written Russian almost exclusively (internally), and this was a divergence due to the necessity of familiarization with Russian needed to conduct clerical work in the industry. While this division is not intentional, it does show that the relationship between “conquerors” and “conquered” did have economic effects. Russian migrants would have a clear linguistic advantage over Caucasian workers, especially Azerbaijanis, and this advantage would be

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504 I. Garskova and P. Akhanchi, “Discrimination,” and ADRTA f. 798, op. 3.
later reflected in social stratification between the two ethnicities. However, this stratification would not necessarily explain the degree of violence that occurred in Baku.

The spark that ultimately initiated violence between the Armenian and Azerbaijan communities may in part have been seeded by the 1895-1897 Hamidian pogroms. From 1895 to 1897, over 200,000 Armenians were killed in pogroms inside the neighboring Ottoman Empire.\textsuperscript{505} While there is no direct evidence of major violence in Baku itself during that period, there was a corresponding drop in the Armenian population in Baku from 24,490 in 1886 to 19,099 in 1897.\textsuperscript{506} One possibility for this drop is that once word of the pogroms became known outside of the Ottoman Empire, a significant number of Armenians in Baku fled to other areas of Transcaucasia. By January, 1905, according to the British Foreign Office, the situation had again worsened to the point that “Two days before the massacre occurred (in Baku) a deputation from the Russian and foreign petroleum companies visited General Fedaloff, the Governor of the town, and pointed out to him the impending danger [to the city].”\textsuperscript{507}

It would take years (if not decades) for the ethnic divisions that defined Baku during the Russian Civil War to fully foment. Nevertheless, the ethnic skirmishes in Baku during the 1905 revolution indeed largely occurred primarily between Azerbaijani and Armenian workers and resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Armenians and Azerbaijani
as well as widespread damage to the city itself.\textsuperscript{508} However, production statistics from Branobel show the geographically-limited nature of this struggle and its relatively moderate long-term effects on oil production totals.\textsuperscript{509} Obviously, there remained the latent potential for future labor disputes in Baku. However, for Russian and European populations living in Baku at the same time, there was a marked difference between the violence between the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities and between other communities in Baku.\textsuperscript{510} During the events of 1905, the individuals most affected were from the Armenian or Azerbaijani communities, not the Russian or European communities.\textsuperscript{511}

The development of ethnic identity alongside political identity in Baku was more than a result of material conditions. The man who, in a sense, embodied what would result from the strengthening of ethnic identity from this era was Mammad Amin Razulzade. He had a unique ability to organize the Azerbaijani national movement from the fragments that had existed prior to 1905 into a political force by 1917, and then into military force by 1918. Nevertheless, the formation of Azerbaijani identity was still tied to the development of Baku as a city itself, and in essence was inseparable from it. Baku had not only drawn a cosmopolitan population but acted as the first true urban center of any real size in Russian Azerbaijan. It provided fertile ground for Azerbaijani

\textsuperscript{508} Alekperov, \textit{Oil of Russia}, 136

\textsuperscript{509} Kostornichenko, \textit{Inostrannyi kapital} [International Capital], 343.

\textsuperscript{510} \textit{Tcentral'nyi statisticheskii komitet} [Central Statistical Committee], \textit{Pervaia vseobshchaya perepis'} [First General Census], Table 13.

\textsuperscript{511} Villari, \textit{Fire and the Sword in the Caucasus}, 202-203. Eyewitness accounts describe almost all of the causalities as being Armenian or Azerbaijani.
nationalism, both by having a wide variety of other ethnic identities and by providing a critical mass of ethnic Azerbaijanis situated within a single urban area that had not previously existed in the region.

At the core of the Azerbaijani national movement was the Müsavat or “Equality” party, founded by Razulzade. It was largely a reformist liberal party that nevertheless centered on ethnic nationalism. This ideology rested foremost on the hope that self-determination of an Azerbaijan nation state would happen through a liberalized economy with only moderate government intervention outside the oil industry itself. The party was at least initially based on constitutional and liberal ideas of parliamentary democracy, but at its core, and despite its rhetoric, it was far from ethnically inclusive. The lineage of the party is highlighted during its combative existence after the October Revolution, especially from November 1917 to March 1918, when it became the strongest political faction connected with the Azerbaijani community in Baku.

In this sense, Razulzade, the figure at the core of the Azerbaijani nationalist movement, exemplified the often-mercurial nature of political ideology in late Tsarist Russia as well as the difficulty that national self-determination would present to ruling a multi-cultural city. Born on January 31, 1884, in Noxvani in northern Azerbaijan, Razulzade in many ways represented the new wave of Muslim intellectuals on the borders of the Russian Empire who would be exposed to Western ideas of national

512 The broader debate over the nationalization of Azerbaijan’s oil industry is covered in Chapter Two.

identity and who would, in turn, help mold identity stemming from their respective homelands into a more politically powerful form.  

As a student at Baku Polytechnicum in 1904, Razulzade and his peers would help form the Müsavat organization as the first and only political organization at that time focused exclusively on Azerbaijani self-determination. Later that year, Razulzade would join the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP). After 1905, he began to align himself with the newly emergent Himmät organization that would merge Marxist rhetoric with calls for cultural autonomy for Azerbaijani. While Razulzade would leave the organization after the 1905 Revolution, the formation of the Himmät movement was clearly rooted in, at the very least, revolutionary socialism. By 1917, the Müsavatists had moved progressively into a more liberal reformist direction.

The core of the movement founded by Razulzade was very clearly focused on the formation of an Azerbaijani national state above any other goal. In this sense, Razulzade very clearly created an Azerbaijani counterpart of other reformist national movements of the Transcaucasia, comparable in some ways to the Georgian Mensheviks or the Armenian Dashnaks. Furthermore, differences between each faction became blurred as

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each one struggled not only for the border regions across Caucasus but Baku as well. The rivalry became more concentrated on annihilation of opposing factions than simply promoting self-determination in and of itself. Chapter Three discusses how this was especially evident in Baku. Not only were there many Armenians in Baku, there was a sizable number of Azerbaijanis in the rest of Transcaucasia as well, including Yerevan, which was 42% Azerbaijani, and, while Tbilisi’s Azerbaijani population represented only roughly 3% of the population, it had both a larger Russian and larger Armenian population. In this sense, the other cities of Transcaucasia were already intermixed; nevertheless, the contest over Baku saw the bloodiest urban fighting in Transcaucasia during the Russian Civil War.

The development of party politics along ethnic lines in Baku was reflected in the formation of a broader intellectual milieu and the development of an independent media, specifically municipal newspapers. The first edition of an Armenian language journal, *Haykakan Ashkarh* [The Armenian World], was published 1874. The development of an Azerbaijani press happened soon after; the first Azerbaijan newspaper, *Akinchi* [Ploughman], was published in 1875. It was followed by *Ziya* [Aurora] in 1879, after the 1878 Russo-Ottoman War. This expansion of journalism coincided with rising levels of literacy and was intertwined with an intellectual and political awakening in the city that would be impossible to deny by 1905.

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517 Tscentral’nyi statisticheskii komitet [Central Statistical Committee], *Pervaia vseobshkhata perepis’* [First General Census], Table 13.

While the mass expansion of press in Azerbaijani would be absolutely critical to the formation of both ethnic and linguistic identity, the delayed development of an independent Azerbaijani press would be reflected by the relatively later development of an independent Azerbaijani political sphere. However, once the first broadsheets in Azerbaijani were established in the 1870s, there was a deluge of both Azerbaijani newspapers and journals. The most internationally recognized one was by Molla-Nesreddin, an Azerbaijani satirical journal with the highest readership of any modern journal or newspaper in the Muslim world.519

At this juncture, Baku was rapidly expanding due to the massive influx of a population based on the oil industry. This was only because the industry itself was expanding at such a rapid pace during the 1880s. In fact, the first technical college and Razulzade’s alam mater, the Baku Polytechnicum, was generally geared for educating workers in the oil industry.520 Nevertheless, while education in Baku was largely technically-minded, by 1900 the city contained a widening intellectual sphere that correlated with the development of political radicalism.

It is at this point one can see a convergence of the development of the oil industry and the intellectual and educational infrastructure needed to sustain it, resulting in the birth of a movement that would frame “Azerbaijani” as a separate and cohesive identity.521 Looking at Azeri newspapers of the period, one can see the framework of

519 Ibid., 61-62.

520 The Baku Polytechnicum was established in 1889 and primarily focused on oil engineering. See Mustafa Mir-Babayev, “Establishment of the First Oil institute in Transcaucasia,” Reservoir 38, no. 8 (2011), 31-37.

521 Swietochowski, Russian Azerbaijan, 33-36.
these processes coalescing with the formation of publications such as the literary journals *Fuyuzat* [Generosity] or *Israd* [Recount] that progressively radicalized after 1905. These publications were likewise matched by Russian language papers, such as *Bakinskii Rabochii* [Baku Worker] or other newspapers affiliated with the Bolsheviks that would avoid non-political identity.

Although Razulzade’s movement remained at the center of political life in the Azerbaijani community and was the dominant political party, it did not exclusively prevail over Azerbaijani political life. Across the period of 1905 to 1917, the Müsavat Party became central to the political life of many Azerbaijanis in Baku, but it had to share the Azerbaijani community with its major competitor—the revolutionary socialist Himmät Party. This split reflected a continued radicalization of Azerbaijani workers beyond the confines of a liberal self-determination movement to focus on radicalization that extended beyond only ethnic identity and was crucial to the foundation of the Himmät Party.

While Baku was the center of the intellectual infrastructure of Azerbaijani identity, at the same time it was a rapidly expanding industrial city in which swift physical development and severe economic boom-bust cycles coincided with (if not enhanced) the growth of national and political movements. Largely because of this rapid expansion, Azerbaijanis themselves remained a minority within the city, and the awakening of ethnically-aligned Azerbaijani political expression existed in a politically

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523 Ibid., 120-121.
and ethnically contested intellectual milieu that reflected the deteriorating conditions amongst ethnic communities in the city. This friction added to the increasingly febrile atmosphere of Azerbaijan between the 1905 and 1917 revolutions, and while Azerbaijani intellectual life would blossom in the city, Azerbaijanis in Baku itself would continue to remain a minority in the city throughout both the late-Tsarist and Soviet periods. This rural-urban division in the demographical contours of Azerbaijan would be most fully felt after March 1918, when the Azerbaijani movement was able to call on its strength in the countryside along with Ottoman assistance.

Much of the impact of this ethnic friction was initially difficult to see in Baku, but it would nevertheless become more fully apparent after 1917, when the Tsarist state became unable to administer the city as the fissures between ethnic communities in Baku continued to widen and fractious political infighting dominated the municipal Duma of the Baku Commune. The long-term effects of ethnic tension are exemplified not only by the aforementioned violence of March and September, 1918, but by the eventual difficulty the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan had in reuniting the country after it was victorious. Ultimately, the damage caused by Ottoman-Azerbaijani forces was widespread, yet they primarily focused on the Armenian community and, along with reported murders and sexual assaults, there was a wave of more mundane property damage and looting.

As shown in Chapter Three, British files indicated tens of thousands of cases of loss of property and looting, including itemized lists of stolen property.\textsuperscript{525} While this event would have geopolitical consequences, its most damaging aspect would be to erode trust between religious and ethnic communities in the city.\textsuperscript{526} Furthermore, the tremendous violence, the length of the catalogue of stolen goods, and the extent of damage represents the unease of the relationship between Baku’s citizens—especially its Armenian citizens—and the barely existent government of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan. This is likely because the army of the then-nascent Azerbaijani national movement was complicit in the sacking of the city, and, by 1919, it struggled to become more ethnically inclusionary.\textsuperscript{527}

While there is a geopolitical context to this reporting, especially because the reports were compiled by the British, there is also very clearly an important point to focus on in terms of how communities would see themselves after the fighting had stopped. While the written reports do not specify the ethnicity of the suspects beyond “Turkish” or “Turkish askeri” (Turkish soldiers), according to the affidavits presented to the British Occupation Authority, it is clear that both Azerbaijanis and Ottoman soldiers were lumped together into one assumed identity. Moreover, the impressive number of reports and the detailed lists of looted items effectively reflect the damage that was caused by the arrival of the Ottoman-Azerbaijani forces—damage that was universal in central Baku.

\textsuperscript{525} GARF, f. 8209, op. 1, d.3, l. 1-209.

\textsuperscript{526} Gokay, “Battle for Baku,” 44.

\textsuperscript{527} GARF, f. 5297, op. 1, d. 1, l. 20-22. This is shown by the fact that a purge of the ADR’s military seemed to be primarily focused on the ethnicity and religious ordination of its suspects.
and swept across the city, affected both wealthier and poorer households of different ethnicities. That eye-witnesses report identified perpetrators as neither Ottoman nor Azerbaijani Turkish but simply “Turkish,” plus the sheer amount of property looted during September, both speaks to the coalescence of ethnic identity as a marker in the city and how many difficulties the ADR would have in attempting reconciliation after the September Pogrom.

The character of ethnic division in Baku after September 1918 not only reflected a genuine social division between the Azerbaijani and Armenian communities but highlighted the broader nature of ethnicity as innately connected to a growing revolutionary sense of nationalism. While the terror inflicted on Baku’s population by Ottoman and Azerbaijani national forces was directly the result of military action, the ADR—even after it stabilized—envisioned itself as a revolutionary movement primarily in terms of ethnic identity.

3. Identity during the Russian Civil War

The inter-ethnic division that fueled Baku’s violence was simultaneously reflected in broader inter-state violence occurring across Transcaucasia during the Russian Civil War. This parallel is exemplified by the broader war between Azerbaijan and Armenia in November, 1918. With the exit of the Ottoman Empire, ethnic and now national division

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528 GARF, f. 8209, op. 1, d. 3.

529 Ibid.

530 The Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan did have a parliamentary election in 1919, which non-Azerbaijani nationalist parties were allowed to participate in; however, the fairness of this election is still openly debated.
soared, which culminated in a full-scale military conflict between the two Caucasian states. The war would become an immense drain on both Armenia and Azerbaijan in terms of men, equipment, and monetary resources. The war would also become a crucible where the full extent of the entanglement of identity, violence, and the oil industry itself came into clear focus as battle lines were drawn across the region. The Armenian-Azerbaijan War reflected both the legacy of the recent geopolitical battle for resources by foreign powers and an inter-regional and inter-ethnic conflict over territory.

Not only was the Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict a humanitarian crisis on a regional scale as refugees fled the newly-erupted battle zones, but also state ideologies realigned and hardened to reflect purely ethnically-informed national divisions. While the geopolitical ramifications of this conflict have been previously covered, the deeper and more long-standing effect of the Azerbaijan-Armenian War is that it would lead to a poisonous relationship between both nations across the early twentieth century and well into the twenty-first century.

Beyond the Armenian-Azerbaijan war itself, contemporaneous purges serve as particularly illustrative examples of the toughening approach the ADR and its military took against non-ethnic Azerbaijanis within its own armed forces, particularly in its army. Archival documents from the ADR, later captured by the Soviets, show that in 1919 there was a concerted and organized effort to target non-Muslim and non-Azeri officers and enlisted men in the Army of Azerbaijan. In fact, thirty-three non-Azerbaijani (primarily


532 Auch, “Nationalitätenprobleme in Transkaukasien,” 144.
Russian) officers and enlisted men were later arrested and eventually forced out of the army.\textsuperscript{533}

In particular, accumulated documentation reflects that the ADR government had targeted men with Slavic names—ethnic Russians and Ukrainians who had stayed in Baku after September, 1918, and continued in what was theoretically a multi-ethnic, new national army.\textsuperscript{534} Actual evidence of this malfeasance by those targeted is limited; one order from regional command simply states that, “All the officers who were not Muslims have been dismissed from service of the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan.”\textsuperscript{535} While this purge was relatively small compared to the size of the Army of Azerbaijan, which had expanded to 30,000 by 1919, the impetus of the purge was most likely based on the perception that non-Azerbaijanis were innately untrustworthy based on their ethnicity.

This purge perfectly illustrates the lingering damage that the legacy of hardline stances on ethnic and religious identity had on Azerbaijan after its independence. While independence led to the end of the reoccurring violence that plagued Azerbaijan and Baku, it did not lead to any real long-term solution to the issue of ethnic division. This remained a significant roadblock to peace as the region continued to be exceptionally ethnically heterogeneous. While the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan existed as an independent political entity, it exhibited resistance to balancing its ethnically-constructed

\textsuperscript{533} GARF, f. 5297, op. 1, d. 1, l. 20-22.

\textsuperscript{534} Ibid., f. 5297, op. 1, d. 1, l. 12-22.

\textsuperscript{535} Ibid., f. 5297, op. 1, d. 1, l. 12.
national character with the diversity of its population, especially in its western fringes in Karabakh as well as in Baku itself.\textsuperscript{536}

The problems besetting the ADR after 1918 were two-fold. First, the nation faced the legacy of the local conflicts of the preceding year, which had led to a mass population movement, social instability, and infrastructure damage. Second, it inherited a precarious position in the much larger Russian Civil War, a war that continued to rage to the north. As unstable as Transcaucasia was during this period, most of the former Russian Empire was in nearly as much upheaval.

Ultimately, the Russian Civil War in Central Russia as well as Transcaucasia’s conflict were part of a connected conflagration, and it is easy to see how ethnic tension was increasingly heightened by the goal of self-determination based around ethnic identity. Also, at the same time, it was fed by the complications of petroleum production and the practicalities of harnessing that resource, since oil remained central to the Azerbaijani economy.

Moreover, as mentioned in Chapter Three, at the same time these events were occurring, the ADR remained formally and internationally isolated and was hampered by a lack of \textit{de jure} recognition. While Azerbaijan had achieved de facto independence, until 1919 it had relied on British protection. After the withdrawal of British support, the Azerbaijani were forced into an even more delicate international position without a major foreign benefactor.\textsuperscript{537} Nevertheless, taking into account that self-determination had

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{footnotes}
\item[536] Altstadt, \textit{The Azerbaijani Turks}, 101-103.
\item[537] Ibid., 96.
\end{footnotes}
\end{footnotesize}
formed the core of its state ideology, a reliance on foreign assistance speaks to the dichotomy of sovereignty versus survival for both the Azerbaijani national movement and other self-determination movements that sought independence from the husk of the Russian Empire during the Russian Civil War.

For the leadership of Azerbaijan, independence meant a full expression of its Azerbaijani national character. This belief complicated its need to find international assistance in order to regain its sovereignty. This independence could only truly exist as long as Azerbaijan could find a patron (first the Ottomans and then the British) to offset the lingering possibility of Soviet consolidation of the region. Neither the British nor the Soviets had any real commitment to further the desires of Azerbaijani nationalists for a full expression of ethnic hegemony.  

4. Identity in the Context of National Mobilization

In the context of this period of national consolidation, the formation of the ADR can be viewed as a cotemporaneous development of an early mobilization state. While Azerbaijan, like Kemalist Turkey, was a nation-state constructed around a single ethnic identity, it offered a movement that was focused around mobilization of its own accord. By looking at Khalid’s comparison of the similarity of mobilization states such as Kemalist Turkey and the Soviet Union, one finds analogous examples between both states in how state ideology was utilized to mobilize the population. As Khalid says regarding the Soviet Union and the Ottomans, “Both the Soviet and the Kemalist states

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sought to transform culture and to reshape their citizenries in the light of ideas of history and civilization. Both had, in other words, a civilizing mission.” Likewise, the ADR could be said to have been on a similar path of “a civilizing mission.” As Audrey Atstadt asserts, the ADR by 1919 had embarked on a “cultural program” that pressed Azerbaijan language, history, and culture in order to mobilize its population.

Azerbaijan very well could, in several ways, be presented as a proto-mobilization state—a state with foundations rooted in the Pan-Turkish movements of the period as well as the zeitgeist of revolutionary leftist fervor that surged through Russia from February 1917 onward. The first expression of this form of mobilization in Azerbaijan was before both the Armistice of Mudros and the formal formation of the Turkish national movement in Ankara.

Moreover, there is comparable ideological lineage between attempts by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) to shape a new Turkish identity within the framework of post-Ottomanism versus how Azerbaijanis utilized an intellectual framework that was squarely based in late-Tsarist Russia. Undoubtedly, the rise of pan-Turkism had its own influence on the Azerbaijan national movement, especially during 1918, which would impose its own legacy on the ADR. In addition, the ADR would be shaped by the aftermath of the violence that had been inflicted on the city of Baku and the rest of Azerbaijan, which was at least in part the result of its formation. The Müsavat

539 Khalid, “Backwardness and the Quest for Civilization,” 250.

540 Altstadt, The Azerbaijani Turks, 95.

Party and its leader, Razulzade, were placed in an increasingly untenable position because this form of mobilization, in the end, did not have the international support it needed in order to succeed; thus, in the end, the fate of the ADR simply came down to sheer geopolitical mechanics.

5. The Arrival of the Soviets

When the Soviets invaded Azerbaijan in April 1920, they were left with a difficult puzzle to solve because the wounds of the unresolved Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict still remained fresh. The Soviets were faced with the challenge of trying to administer a region that remained devastated and bitterly divided. This was especially difficult because the region was recovering from the mutual ethnic cleansing and targeted attacks that had been occurring from 1918 through the outbreak of the Azerbaijan-Armenian war. The degree of this tragedy was exemplified by the pitched combat between Azerbaijani and Armenians that was actively occurring while Soviet forces marched on Baku. The internal division that spurred the war had left the door open for the entry of the Soviets into Baku and the effective cutting off of Azerbaijani forces from their supply lines as they were distracted by their war with Armenia. The eventual outcome of the Armenian-Azerbaijan war sealed the defeat of the ADR, and the self-determination movement it was founded upon was nearly annihilated in one fell stroke.

The Soviets were easily able to occupy Baku and use it as a forward position to assault remaining “Müsavatist” forces left in Azerbaijan and eventually manage an

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542 This includes the combined causalities of the March and September Days of 1918, which amounted to the deaths of 10-20,000 people in Baku but does not include the 20,000 Armenians who died in the Shusha massacre in March 1920.
assault on Armenia in November, 1920.\textsuperscript{543} Nevertheless, the issue of what to do with Baku itself as well other recently incorporated areas of the former Russian Empire was an open question for the Soviets. The Soviets, in essence, wished to return to the stability that preceded the revolution, but at the same time they hoped to finally solve the issue of divisiveness that had marked the last three years. The Soviet solution to the broader question of ethnicity led to the development of a policy that would later be termed \textit{korenizatsiia}, a policy that provided a theoretical compromise that allowed an outlet for Azerbaijani nationalism through restricted cultural autonomy while re-centralizing much of the decision-making power in Moscow. The cultural autonomy offered by \textit{korenizatsiia} was exemplified by a linguistic and educational program that came at the expense of the Azerbaijan national movement and essentially replaced it with a restricted form of national identity shaped by the state itself.\textsuperscript{544}

In essence, the application of \textit{korenizatsiia} represented a codification of ethnic identity into codified national identity, a nod to the reality of the situation but also essentially a compromise position. Moreover, power remained reliably within the hands of the Central Committee to set those new national and cultural boundaries. As the case of the placement of Nagorno-Karabakh in the Azerbaijan SSR would show, this power would prove especially troublesome to the long-term stability of the region, especially as the Soviets took on the responsibility of deciding borders between individual Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs).

\textsuperscript{543} RGVA, f. 195, op.3, d. 232, l.59. By late May 1920, elements of the 11th Red Army were already regularly engaging “Dashnak” units along the Azerbaijani-Armenian border.

\textsuperscript{544} Hirsch, \textit{Empire of Nations}, 63.
As Terry Martin has shown in *Affirmative Action Empire*, the emphasis of the Soviets during the 1920s of establishing cultural autonomy in the Soviet Socialist Republics themselves, including the Azerbaijan SSR, meant allowing the broad outlines of linguistic and cultural autonomy to exist within the confines of a limited to non-existent political autonomy.\(^{545}\) Therefore, in this second wave of mobilization, what had become national identity was carefully fined-tuned to offer, in essence, autonomy in affairs that did not have the potential to conflict with Soviet interests, especially in non-political and cultural affairs.

However, this policy stands in sharp contrast to the formation of the Turkmen identity that Adrienne Edgar illustrates in *Tribal Nation*. According to Edgar, the Soviets would transform western Turkestan into the Turkmenistan SSR by “constructing a unified Turkmen nation,” including “standardized literacy language and a Turkmen ‘national culture.’”\(^{546}\) In contrast, in both Baku and rest of Azerbaijan, national and linguistic identity was already a stable marker, and the chief challenge for the Soviets was not the development of ethnic and linguistic identifiers but finding a way to come up with a solution that would undercut any future self-determination movement. For the Soviets, the creation of identity was unnecessary; instead, they were more invested in finding a way to impose a final settlement that solved the inter-regional crisis and allowed them to fully obtain control of the strategic points in the region, especially Baku.


In order to understand how Soviets treated ethnic identity in Azerbaijan, it is necessary to see how local elements of the Communist Party approached the issue at the SSR level. This is illustrated by the April 1922 selection of delegates from the Azerbaijan SSR to the Transcaucasian Communist Party (TCCP) Congress. This Congress presents some interesting illustrations of the weight the Soviets placed on identity and the general composition of delegates they wished to have represented in the party. Looking at the appointments selected by the TCCP, it is abundantly clear that there was a concerted effort by the Soviets to represent the ethnic diversity of Azerbaijan in its first full congress after the solidification of Soviet control. Nevertheless, their selection of delegates also reflected the political emphasis the Soviets placed on certain demographic groups, especially workers and soldiers, immediately after the start of the Soviet occupation.
Table 4.4: Delegates of the Azerbaijan SSR to the 1922 Transcaucasian Communist Party Congress\textsuperscript{547}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Baku</th>
<th>Susha</th>
<th>Ganja</th>
<th>Military</th>
<th>SSR Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of Delegates</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24 Years Old</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29 Years Old</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39 Years Old</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49 Years Old</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-70 Years Old</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azerbaijani</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenian</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary or &quot;High&quot; Schooling</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Primary or &quot;Average&quot;</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Education</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Membership since:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900-1904</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905-1909</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910-1913</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914-1916</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917-1918</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919-1920</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921-1922</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peasants</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligentsia</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{547} GARF, f. 393, op. 35, d. 600, l. 4.
The 1922 delegation presents an illustrative example of the political emphasis the party placed on the selection of delegates. For instance, the delegates from Baku represent a suitable diversity of ethnic communities.

Table 4.5: 1926 Soviet Census – Azerbaijan SSSR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Azerbaijan %</th>
<th>Armenians %</th>
<th>Russians %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>453,333</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>36.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compared to statistics from the 1926 Soviet Census, the first full census after the Russian Civil War, it can be seen from the parallels in census data that there is a clear attempt at tying appointments to the existing demographics of both Baku and the Azerbaijan SSR—although ethnic Russians were generally over-represented and ethnic Armenians were under-represented. However, it is also apparent that the ratio of demographics of Baku had shifted since the last Tsarist-era census in 1913; the proportion of Azerbaijanis had risen from 21% to 26.2% of the population of the city while the Armenian section had declined from 19% to 17%, and the percentage of Russians had increased slightly, to 37%.

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548 “Vsesoiunaia perepis' naseleniia 1926 god” [All Union Census 1926], TSSU Soyuz CCP (1928-29), Vol 10-16. Table 4.

549 The Soviet 1926 Census was the first full all-union census since the October Revolution.

550 “Vsesoiunaia perepis' naseleniia 1926 god” [All Union Census 1926], Table 4. By the 1939 census, the Russian population had increased to 343,064 (43.7% of the population). RGAE, f. 1562, op. 336, d. 966-1001.
Despite this ethnic diversity, representation by women remained limited. Out of the 512 total delegates, only twenty were female—or 3.9% of the total number of delegates, overall.\textsuperscript{551} Moreover, Baku itself, the only true urban area in Azerbaijan, had four women selected out of its 114 total delegates, or 3.5%. This statistic would contradict any expectation that a more urbanized and ethnically-diverse environment with a higher number of Europeans would necessarily lead to the selection of more female delegates than in the countryside.\textsuperscript{552}

When one is comparing educational and employment statistics of the delegates, some differences are apparent. Higher education is more common among cadres from Baku and among the military, 12% and 27% respectively, compared to the country as a whole, a mere 6%.\textsuperscript{553} Among middle levels of education, these differences are more muted between urban and rural delegates. Furthermore, less-educated cadres are the most common in all three categories, including Baku. The lack of inclusion of home-schooled military cadres is clear; all recruits are required to have some rudimentary schooling in the military. Nevertheless, the percentage of home-schooled cadres was higher in Azerbaijan as a whole: 32% compared to 24.6%, just in Baku.\textsuperscript{554}

The more elementary level of education in the countryside indicates lower levels of educational infrastructure in rural Azerbaijan. At the same time, the relatively high number of uneducated cadres in Baku itself shows that these positions were most likely

\textsuperscript{551} GARF, f. 393, op. 35, d. 600, l. 4.

\textsuperscript{552} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{553} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{554} Ibid.
filled by men who had initially come to Baku from the countryside to work in the oil industry. It also indicates that, while economic resources were concentrated in Baku, levels of education remained varied, especially in terms of how the Soviets approached recruitment of cadres from workers and the military.

Employment of cadres in Baku follows this trajectory: 60.5% of the cadres from Baku were workers compared to the more limited number (28.7%) from Azerbaijan. Almost half of the delegation of workers was from Baku itself, which speaks to the centralizing of industry in Baku. In comparison, 19.3% of cadres came from the peasantry in Baku and 28.7% from the countryside. The intelligentsia made up a similar percentage of delegates in both Baku and the countryside: 20.2% from Baku and 29.1% from the rest of Azerbaijan. While a significantly higher percentage of workers came from Baku, the fact that the workers, peasants, and intelligentsia were comprised of relatively equal numbers of delegates republic wide most likely represented the intention of the Azerbaijani Communist Party to put equal weight on all three categories of delegates to artificially balance them.

The age distribution of the delegates was also quite young from a contemporary perspective: 238 (or 46.4%) were under the age of 29, and 78.7% were under the age of 39. In general, the delegates were more recent additions to the party: 279 (or 54.4%) had joined after 1919, most likely after the occupation of Azerbaijan in 1920, while 399 (or 77.9%) of the delegates had become members after 1917. This difference in the age

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555 The average life expectancy during this period in Soviet history was between 40-43 years for men.

556 GARF, f. 393, op. 35, d. 600, l. 4.
of the delegates illustrates the fact that the Bolsheviks, like in the RSFSR, recruited cadres that were still working age. This age distribution is also due to the Bolsheviks’ heavy recruitment from the working class and formerly enlisted men. However, there is an obvious divergence in size of the number of delegates between older and more recent cohorts who joined before and during the revolution and the comparatively large number of young cadres who joined the party after the occupation of Azerbaijan in 1920. It is clear that the party made considerable effort to include delegates from members who had just recently joined the party.

This is not to say the Bolsheviks did not still have support in Azerbaijan during the independence period before the arrival of the Red Army, as Michael Smith shows when discussing the outbreak of the Sheki Rebellion in 1930.\(^557\) While the Bolsheviks may have been suppressed and scattered for a time (from the summer of 1918 to mid-1919), by the end of 1919 it was abundantly clear that the war was going in their favor. Despite this resurgence of Soviet forces elsewhere, it took the protection of the Red Army itself to protect Party officials who had come from the north.\(^558\) According to Audrey Altsadt, “Like the viceroyalty and the Baku Commune, this was nonnative rule, for the party-state division coincided with national differences. The state apparatus was made up mainly of Azerbaijan Turks; in the Party, they were a minority.”\(^559\) However, evidence from the Central Committee of the AzSSR shows that, while Azerbaijanis were


\(^{558}\) Altstadt, The Azerbaijani Turks, 110.

\(^{559}\) Ibid.
a minority in the Party by 1923, they were generally better represented than Armenians.\textsuperscript{560}

Ultimately, the demographic makeup of the 1922 Azerbaijani Communist Party Congress presents us with an image that is not necessarily representational of the demographics of Azerbaijan but is, instead, illustrative of the mechanics at play in the internal politics of the Azerbaijan SSR. The demographics of the Party congress Congress reflected the demographic makeup of the Party itself in Azerbaijan, which was young and included a high number of male soldiers and workers with fairly minimal levels of education. The Soviets also appointed smaller numbers of delegates from a more diverse employment and educational background, but they remained a stark minority within the Party congress. Foremost, the Soviets specifically seemed to prioritize equal representation among occupations as a priority compared to gender, ethnicity, education, or age. In this case, the desire for having an ideal balance of occupations among cadres overcame concerns such as gender or ethnicity. Party representatives were clearly chosen based on a finite set of criteria.

However, the local Azerbaijani party’s control of much of the resources under the republic was limited. While Azneft would remain formally autonomous, most of its directives still came out of Moscow. Across the 1920s, Azneft would still be at the mercy of the directives of the Central Committee, especially after 1928.\textsuperscript{561} Looking at the degree

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{560} RGASPI, f. 588, op. 2, d. 175, l. 44-47.
\item \textsuperscript{561} RGAE, f. 6880, op. 1, d. 4, l. 16-21, and GARF f. 8350, op. 1, d. 941, l. 68.
\end{itemize}
of planning that Gosplan continued to direct toward Baku, Sovietization meant centralization of political functions away from Baku and Azerbaijan as a whole.

As in the case of other areas of the Soviet Union, directives would be sent down that would be interpreted differently in each SSR, thus leading to differing results for each republic. While these disparities would have their own effect on the oil industry, for the population there was a considerable difference in how nationality policy would in fact be applied (as imagined in Moscow) and how it would actually be implemented inside the Azerbaijan SSR.\footnote{RGASPI, f. 588, op. 2, d. 176, l. 25. This included frequent complaints by Nariman Marimanov of Azerbaijan’s subordinate place in this structure.} In Azerbaijan, this policy was applied by the Soviets of hopes of establishing a period of relative stability. However, this supposition directly clashed with the recent histories of ethnic division in both Transcaucasia and Baku. In addition, as will be shown in Chapter Five, there was a wide divergence between Soviet designs for a mass social and economic re-organization of Baku and the actual reality the population of the city was forced to live in. The citizens of Baku were given little to no choice in accepting the compromise provided by the Soviets.

Transcaucasia was reunited under a single political authority by early 1921, and, on a theoretical level, the divisiveness of the revolutionary and civil war period was at an end. However, Soviet dominance simply meant that the Soviets, through their nationality policy, could have been said to simply “paper over” the differences of ethnicity. Looking at Francine Hirsh’s contention that the Soviet Union was a “Prison of Ethnicity” for non-Russian nationalities, or Slezkine’s outlook of korenizatsia as a communal apartment in
which each nationality had its own room with a “common Russian living room,” it is quite clear that identity became a managed process under the Soviets.\(^{563}\)

According to Slezkine,

The Soviet Union forced the high priests of national cultures to be part-time worshipers of other national cultures: it instituted an administrative hierarchy that privileged some ethnic groups over others, it interfered in the selection and maintenance of national pantheons, it isolated ethnic communities from their relatives and sympathizers abroad, it encouraged massive migrations that resulted in competition for scarce resources, diluted the consumer base of the national elites, and provoked friction over ethnic quotas. Finally and most fatefully, it deprived the various nations of the right to political independence, a right that was the culmination of all nationalist doctrines, including the one that lay at the foundation of the Soviet Union.\(^{564}\)

The result of this very stark sorting out process was that different nationalities were formally identified and molded into new categories by the state.\(^{565}\) Moreover, the “walls” of this new reality were created in hopes of forestalling any possible threat to Soviet authority while at the same time allowing enough cultural autonomy to quell any appetite for self-determination that remained in individual communities. Nevertheless,

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\(^{564}\) Ibid., 451.

these metaphorical walls were implicitly formed in the first place to address the intense violence the Russian Empire and its successor states saw from 1905 to 1921. The re-framing of ethnic identity into distinct nationalities was a core of Leninist ideology of the period, but at the same time, in the context of Baku, Slezkine’s theory is also supported by the reality of a still very tense relationship between the Soviet Union and many of its new borderlands, especially Transcaucasia and the North Caucasus.

In regards to Baku, the actual value of the oil industry to the Soviets would be increasingly reflected by the emphasis they placed on ensuring the city would function in a reliable manner so Azneft could extract useful supplies of crude and benzene from Baku’s fields. Losing control of Baku was a not an option for the Soviets, and their methodology in handling the city after 1920 reflected the necessity that control of the city was for Soviet economic strategy in the region. In order to accomplish this, they attempted to minimize friction between ethnic groups in the city. Nevertheless, neither the Soviets’ broader nationality policy nor its internal security policy offered a permanent solution to the ethnic turmoil that plagued the region.

6. Conclusion

Considering the legacy of colonialism and the expansion of commodity production in Baku, the cumulative results of this process are evident. The power structures that surrounded oil production in Baku, both private structures (in the case of field owners) and public structures (in the case of the Tsarist administration), led to a system of economic relations that is difficult to separate from the rising tension that

566 Debo, Survival and Consolidation, 179.
occurred in the city from 1905 to 1920. The citizens of Baku could not remove themselves from the formation of political movements based on ethnic identity and the broader strains of revolutionary fervor that were surging across Baku. Nevertheless, ethnic identity was only one aspect in the civic splintering of Baku, and it would continually intersect with class and political identity in order to solidify the political blocs that would eventually take hold in the city in 1917.

While the origins of this process are easy to point to, it is more difficult to imagine that a different course was possible, considering the economic, social, and political forces at play. The arrival of different ethnicities was often unplanned, and differences in pay grades were often simply correlated with experience; both historical and modern-day perception of discrimination in Baku during the late Tsarist Period is difficult to dismiss. Even if the case for overt discrimination was thin in the matter of wages, statistically-speaking, the fact that skills correlated with pay and that there was a broad and apparent gap in skill sets based on ethnicity meant there was an inherent wage disparity between workers of different ethnicities. If direct discrimination in the form of salaries was not formally apparent, it is quite clear that different communities in Baku did not necessarily (on average) have the same skill sets or levels of education, and that disparity may have further enticed rifts between ethnic groups that would, over time, and be reflected in ethnic conflicts between communities, particularly in 1905 and 1918. Nevertheless, the full culmination of this growing ethnic and political division was only apparent in historical hindsight; it was the outgrowth of growing tension and division that took place over decades, the most critical break occurring from 1917 to 1918.
Ethnic identity in Baku cannot be adequately explained as originating from a single source or any particular process. The very nature of ethnic identity has some problematic aspects, including (especially in Baku) the eventual societal division—if not violence—that polarized around ethnic lines. The formation of ethnic identity was irreversible and a necessary byproduct of both urbanization and political mobilization, especially for Azerbaijanis. In this sense, Baku and its industrialization can be viewed as a critical catalyst in this formation, and thus there is a material lineage to consider, especially when regarding what happened in the city. Moreover, it is unclear if Azerbaijani, as an ethnic identity, would have formed in the same manner if Baku had remained a small port town, or if Azerbaijani identity would have remained the same if it had been solely influenced by Iranian constitutionalists in Tabriz, especially since revolutionaries recruited from Transcaucasia had made revolutionary resistance possible in Tabriz in the first place.\textsuperscript{567} In addition, if industrialization resulted in migrations of populations that made Baku diverse but resulted in disputes that exacerbated political divisions, then formation of identity was in at least in some ways tied to the division and violence that would later directly affect the city.

While material changes can help influence ethnic and political identities, the process of identity formation exists beyond the confines of any process of industrialization, and how Baku’s citizens wished to identify themselves is indicative of an organic construction. These ethnic decisions rested inside the broader intellectual milieu of the period, a time where self-determination and cultural autonomy became increasing priorities across the Russian Empire, and Baku was not an exception. The

desire for greater independence would occur not only in Baku but across Transcaucasia, the European portions of the Empire, and even manifest itself in Bukhara, in what would later become Uzbekistan.\textsuperscript{568}

Ethnic identity and its formation and solidification can be seen as having a multi-varied origin, both circumstantial (based on the unique confluence of circumstances in Baku) and in part inspired by an intellectual awakening that had already swept Europe during the early and mid-nineteenth century and then fully affected intellectual life in Transcaucasia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At the same time, the formation of ethnic (and in many cases, political) identity in Baku was partially deterministic, brought by mass industrialization into an area that had previously been completely rural; however, it was also part of a broader intellectual milieu that existed beyond the confines of Baku in which an intellectual blossoming inspired a sense national self-determination among Azerbaijanis. Azerbaijanis were also exposed to the manner in which identity was expressed by the other ethnic groups, including Armenians, Russians, and Georgians, who were also present in Baku and the rest of Transcaucasia. At the same time, these developments were occurring during an especially difficult economic period in Baku as the population continued to swell and far exceed available housing, and Baku’s oil production during the late Tsarist period had already peaked.\textsuperscript{569}

The 1908 oil crisis and the First World War only increased these economic pressures on


\textsuperscript{569} Nevertheless, oil production would recover to comparable turn-of-the-century levels by the 1930s.
the industry and further complicated the relationship between private enterprises in Baku and their workers.\textsuperscript{570}

Consequently, there were a variety of influences that had an impact on identity in Baku in the formation of political parties tied with specific ethnic identities, as well as the ongoing struggle between competing ethnic groups. Thus, it is important not to view identity as a signifier that only applied to a population via political or social structure—or through material processes. Personal agency still existed because identity itself remained malleable and is based on individual and familial circumstances; this is especially true because cultural cross-pollination was not only common in Baku but also the rest of Transcaucasia. An individual who may have been born to an Azerbaijani- or Armenian-speaking household could see him or herself as Russian (or, more broadly, as European), depending on personal circumstance. As Baku became larger and attracted international development, the lines that separated different ethnicities only blurred further.

Ultimately, under the Soviets, national identity became a managed quantity through a centralized system of codification. The Soviets recognized the dangers of a sense of ethnic or national identity existing outside the bounds of the Soviet state due to this flexibility, and the ability to redefine one’s nationality became progressively more limited under the Soviet state than it had during the revolutionary period.\textsuperscript{571} The Soviets’ obvious attempts to address the dangers arising from the ethnic divisions that had plagued Baku indicate there may have been no apparent useful solution to this struggle once it

\textsuperscript{570} ARDTA, f. 798, op. 1, d. 1573, l. 60, 63.

\textsuperscript{571} Hirsch, \textit{Empire of Nations}, 283-284.
attained the momentum it had during the Russian Civil War. Soviets would have times have to brute force to manage Azerbaijan, nevertheless had difficulty in fully stamping out both an independent form of both Azerbaijani and Armenian identity that existed outside the frame of their form of national identity. The legacy of ethnic violence from this period, reflected in the resumption of violence between Azerbaijani and Armenians in both Nagorno-Karabakh and Baku during the late 1980s, shows that the power of ethnic identity has not diminished even after seventy years of Soviet rule.
Chapter Five: The Pacification and Sovietization of Baku – 1920-1938

1. Introduction

When the Soviet 11th Army arrived in Baku on April 20, 1920, it met little active military resistance by the city’s defenders, and what forces the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan had left behind to defend Baku were quickly swept aside in the space of little more than a day. With the relative ease of this victory, the re-establishment of Soviet authority would permanently alter the course of Baku’s history for the rest of the twentieth century. The return of the Soviets in 1920 into Baku would not only fundamentally alter the geopolitical balance of forces in Transcaucasia, but it would be a key factor in Soviet consolidation of one of the more rebellious and strategic regions of the former Russian Empire. Furthermore, re-taking Baku would provide a powerful ideological and strategic victory for the Soviets, who could put both their economic and social practices, including practices towards non-European nationalities, to full effect in Azerbaijan.

The arrival of the Soviets would not only alter the political boundaries of Transcaucasia but establish political and social processes that would lead to the complete reorganization of Baku and its society—a massive reorientation of how people would relate to the state. Under the Soviets, the population was now part of a mobilizing Soviet state that focused on creating a new “Soviet man” out of the rubble of the Russian Civil War, and at the same time the occupation of Baku’s oil industry allowed the Soviets to re-tie the industry back to the central organs of the Soviet state through a comprehensive program of nationalization. The Azerbaijan campaign by the Soviets was part of a broader effort to not only mobilize the population of newly occupied portions of the former Russian Empire, but also harness their economic potential.

572 Debo, Survival and Consolidation, 180-181.
Other historiography, of course, has touched on the Soviet period and its long-term effect on the city, but more study is necessary. For example, although Audrey Alstadt’s work, *The Azerbaijani Turk: Power and Identity Under Russian Rule*, spends several chapters documenting the effect Sovietization had on Baku, it is apparent that a further look needs to be taken at both the explicit security policies the Soviets placed on Baku and the rest of Azerbaijan, as well as how these enforcement measures figure into the broader political context of Soviet occupation. In addition, Jörg Baberowski has partially covered this period in *Der Feind ist überall: Stalinismus im Kaukasus*; however, the majority of his emphasis is after 1927. The goal of this chapter is to explore the result of the Soviet attempt at pushing for a full consolidation of both physical and ideological control of Azerbaijan and how Soviet methodology would be a critical break from Baku’s previous history.

Archival material culled from the State Archive of the Russian Federation and Russian Archive of Socio-Political History as well as the State Archive of Azerbaijan on the Soviet security apparatus, the Caucasus Bureau, and the formation of Azneft will be used in this chapter to show the complexity of Soviet strategy in Azerbaijan—both in its motivation and in the dramatic flaws of its methods. Archival sources collected for this chapter have revealed not only the clear motivations of the Central Committee of the Communist Party but also how much those motivations would have a profound effect on the population of both Baku and the rest of Azerbaijan.

To accomplish this task, it was necessary to access material from state archives in both Russia and Azerbaijan in order to illustrate both the complexity of the Soviet internal security system as well as the dramatic human impact that both the secret police and, after 1927, the Glavnoe Upravlenie Lagerei (GULAG) had on the population of the Azerbaijan SSR.
Furthermore, in order to fully investigate the inner-workings of the Soviet internal security system, access to both the Communist Party archive in Moscow and the State archive in Baku was essential. This archival material on how the state security developed in Azerbaijan alongside the nationalization of Azneft is vital in order to examine how state authority functioned in Azerbaijan and illustrate how that system of authority was enforced with violence and mass detention. Furthermore, these archival materials are essential in order to understand how much the nationalities policy of the Soviet Union, along with education, would play key a role in Sovietization.

2. Soviet Strategy in Azerbaijan

Baku presented a unique challenge to the Soviets, for the Soviets had to address the issue of ethnic identity in such a way as to not overtly favor one set of nationalities enough to cause a negative reaction against the Soviets or to destabilize the peace the Soviets had established. Considering the legacy of bitterness between communities in Baku, though, especially between the Armenian and Azerbaijani populations, and the ongoing lack of security in the city, there remained a challenging gap between Soviet desires for stability and the reality of continued ethnic division in the region through 1920. Despite the clear hopes that Baku could be re-engineered in order to achieve their ideological and pragmatic goals, the Soviets still had to contend with the historical memory of a period of violence that had barely ended by late 1920. To that effect, the Soviets attempted Sovietization with a carrot and stick approach: the carrot of cultural autonomy and class equality, and the stick of pacification and surveillance.

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573 Auch, “Nationalitätenprobleme in Transkaukasien,” 143-144. The Soviets were only able to fully occupy Transcaucasia by November 1920.
Sovietization was portrayed differently by those who lived under it and those who conducted it. Without a doubt, the ‘liberation’ of Transcaucasia, including Baku, was portrayed as a form of liberation and anti-imperialism by the Soviets themselves, part of a broader movement “to liberate the peoples of the east.”\(^{574}\) As Kirov stated in a response to the Azerbaijan Central Committee in October 1921, “we must protect ourselves [the Azerbaijani SSR] against two main threats to the proletariat revolution in the east, from capitalist Europe . . . Entente influence and national-revolutionary elements.”\(^{575}\) The reality of the situation created points of conflict—foremost, the resumption of one state mobilized around ethnic identity versus a state mobilized around a nascent Marxist-Leninist foundation that blurred the lines with traditional colonialism as an equally repressive (if not also equally damaging) form of imperialism.

In addition, despite Soviet military successes, regional resistance against Soviet rule also did not end in 1920. As Bruce Grant illustrates in “An Average Azeri Village (1930),” “active resistance continued versus the Soviets well into the Stalinist period, especially in more religious villages.”\(^{576}\) According to Grant, “as many 10,000 men and women . . . took part in one night of street battles” in Sheki in resistance to Soviet authority, specifically in order to re-establish Islamic religious autonomy.\(^{577}\) While by the 1930s the Soviets had made a considerable effort at co-opting religious courts in the Northern Caucasus, religion still played a role as a unifying form of resistance. In Azerbaijan itself, religious authorities, especially imams, played a significant role in local resistance against Sovietization. The proclaimed anti-imperialist stance

\(^{574}\) RGASPI, f. 80, op. 5, d. 28, l. 1. Kirov in both Kavburo meetings and at Azerbaijan CP party congresses continually framed the mission of the Soviets in anti-imperialist terminology.

\(^{575}\) Ibid.

\(^{576}\) Grant, “An Average Azeri Village (1930),” 706.

\(^{577}\) Ibid., 710.
of the Soviets was complicated by a selective co-option and suppression of ethnic and religious identity, depending on the needs of the period. In addition, this resistance was further complicated by the fact that the most hostile regions in the countryside were almost entirely Azerbaijani, and the Soviets had to balance their battle against resisters with any assumption of ethnic favoritism.

Furthermore, in terms of administrative mechanics, after 1920, Baku would be ruled from Moscow in a more direct manner than it had ever been from Petrograd under the Russian Empire, even if the local Communist Party and Azneft were given some autonomy over their own affairs. Furthermore, this type of centralization was justified by the Soviets as a necessary antidote to exterior threats on their border. The occupation of Transcaucasia was, in a realistic sense, directly comparable to other recent adventurism by the Russian, Ottoman, and British Empires in and around the city from 1918 onwards. Moreover, while according to Soviets there was justification for Soviet intervention in order to protect the interests of Baku’s proletariat, in reality, as shown in Chapter Two, Baku’s workers would still have a problematic relationship with Azneft even it remained a state-owned enterprise run ostensibly in the interests of the working class as a whole. In particular, there were frequent complaints by Azneft to Kavburo about “low productivity” of workers, complicating the directives being sent for far higher production. However, at the same time, the nature of Soviet politics made it impossible for the

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578 As Jörg Baberowski shows in Der Feind ist überall: Stalinismus im Kaukasus [The Enemy is Everywhere: Stalinism in the Caucasus], the selective adoption of Sharia courts by the Soviets in Transcaucasia reveals a complex relationship of both suppression and co-option of Islam by the Soviets.

579 RGAE, f. 6880, op. 1, d. 151, l. 1. This is best illustrated by how much of the decision-making during the early foundation of Azneft was regularly directed by Moscow.

580 RGASPI, f. 64, op. 1, d. 31, l. 1-8.
type of open political and labor division of the Tsarist period to grow, and dysfunctions in the workspace translated into low productivity and missed quotas.  

The Soviet leadership’s defense of the intervention by the RSFSR in Transcaucasia in order to protect the region’s population came into tension with the pre-established narrative of self-determination by ADR and other independent states in the region. As shown in previous chapters, during the late Tsarist period and the Russian Civil War, multiple liberal and leftist parties of various ethnicities in Transcaucasia supported their own independence movements, and many of these movements were based on the idea that an independent nation was not only focused around ethnic identity and desire for self-determination, but also strongly on economic left-wing (if not self-proclaimed anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist) grounds. Both Mensheviks in Georgia and Dashnaks in Armenia saw their struggles against the abuses of capitalism as well as the merits of self-determination as closely linked. Moreover, these national liberation movements often had a strong component of their platforms that was either hostile to capitalism or at least demanded considerable reforms of it. In the end, the Soviets used their military dominance to secure an ideological monopoly over the concept of anti-imperialism and over local movements that had championed their own native forms of anti-imperialism through self-determination.

During the late Tsarist period in Baku, the Bolsheviks had started out as just one leftist faction among many in Transcaucasia. However, the rhetoric of the Bolsheviks was in tension

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581 Ibid., f. 17, op. 87, d. 121, l. 3, 9.

582 Swietochowski, “The Himmāt Party,” 120.

583 These parties include both the Armenian Dashnaks and the Georgian branch of the Mensheviks, both of which had significant strength in Baku as well as in Armenia and Georgia, respectively.
with regional left nationalist parties, specifically on the issue of a singularly ethnically-focused form of nationalism. While later domination of Baku and the rest of Transcaucasia was justified by the Soviets by proclaiming themselves the sole force capable of resisting imperialism from outside the former Russian Empire, that argument was explicitly undermined by the very tactics they had used to occupy the region in the first place.

Baku was not isolated from the direct contradictions between the Soviet government’s intentions and the ultimate result of its actions. The return of Soviet control meant a reversal of the local revolutionary process that had started in 1918; moreover, by the spring of 1920, the RSFSR had administratively become a very different type of state than it had been immediately after the October Revolution. What initially had been an uprising largely organized on an ad hoc basis in October 1917 had, by the spring of 1920, taken on the full trappings of a structured state, including an increasingly professional army and a growing bureaucracy. This functional difference in administrative structure would be reflected in how state-construction would occur in Baku, specifically how nationalization and administrative decisions would be passed in a regulated manner in contrast to the relatively ad hoc nature of previous Bolshevik rule in Baku during the summer of 1918.\footnote{RGASPI, f. 70, op. 3, d. 4, l. 77, 78. This is demonstrated by the rapid development of AzRevkom within weeks of the occupation of Baku.} While the RSFSR can still be argued to be a revolutionary state by 1920, the solidification of state structures meant a fundamental shift in administrative methodology from ad hoc structures formed for survival to policy concentrated on long-term planning (including economic planning by Gosplan) by the early 1920s.\footnote{While Azerbaijan was never formally a part of the RSFSR, during the early 1920s it was clearly evident that it was essentially governed by the Central Committee of the Communist party of the RSFSR.}
While the terms “Bolshevik” and “Soviet” are often used interchangeably due to the direct political lineage between the Bolshevik faction and the Soviet Union, in the case of Baku, there is a direct contrast between the political movement that had been active during the late Tsarist period and the early Civil War period compared with Soviet-rule. The local Bolsheviks that nominally controlled Baku in the summer of 1918 were not only largely autonomous from Moscow, but they were forced to find a delicate balance with their allies in order to retain any semblance of control. Soviet rule after 1920 was explicitly a very different type of administration that did not need to rely on local political support.

The ideology of the Soviet state can still be concluded to be explicitly revolutionary in intention; however, the methods, practices, and infrastructure of the Party and the state it created had evolved and expanded considerably from the end of 1917 to the spring of 1920.586 Because the Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) had been reborn by 1920 from a revolutionary movement into the administrators of the formal hierarchy of a state, this transformation would be another step of transformation for the citizenry of Baku. The population of Baku had seen several movements and governments fall across the revolutionary period and its aftermath; under the Soviets, they would finally experience a reprieve of stability. The arrival of the Red Army in 1920 would simply be the latest in a series of handovers that had begun in 1917, but it would mean the re-importation of a very different type of administrative system than had existed (including under the Bolsheviks themselves) in 1918.

586 Michael David-Fox, ed., Crossing Borders: Modernity, Ideology and Culture in Russia and the Soviet Union (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015), 76. Moreover, as Michael David-Fox has argued in Crossing Borders, Soviet ideology did not necessarily exclude what could be defended as the pragmatic actions needed to achieve necessary objectives. If anything, in the case of Baku, ideology and pragmatism often and regularly worked in tandem during the early Soviet period. The expansion and regularization of the Soviet state only enhanced its military capabilities in Transcaucasia as well as allowed for the construction of a more robust internal security system in the region.
In the case of the local Bolsheviks in Baku, while from 1917 to 1918 they recruited from local sources and allied with other local political parties, the arrival of the Soviets meant a very different dynamic, specifically since much of the Soviet apparatus and its methodology had to be brought from the RSFSR back into Baku.\textsuperscript{587} This also meant that Baku would again be controlled by what had become essentially a foreign state and dominated by decision-making coming from a central authority far removed from it, geographically. Nevertheless, Soviet rule would bring with it a form of stability the city had not seen since January 1917.\textsuperscript{588} This shift would have consequences for the Soviets’ relationship with newly integrated lands and their response to the people and movements within them. Baku would no longer be city divided against itself but a city on the periphery of a rapidly expanding and slowly industrializing Soviet state. This is in contrast to what Lenin stated in \textit{The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination}:

Victorious socialism must achieve complete democracy and, consequently, not only bring about the complete equality of nations, but also give effect to the right of oppressed nations to self-determination, i.e., the right to free political secession. Socialist Parties which fail to prove by all their activities now, as well as during the revolution and after its victory, that they will free the enslaved nations and establish relations with them on the basis of a free union and a free union is a lying phrase without right to secession—such parties would be committing treachery to socialism.\textsuperscript{589}

\textsuperscript{587} Altstadt, \textit{The Azerbaijani Turks}, 110.

\textsuperscript{588} Ibid., 113.

\textsuperscript{589} Lenin, “The Socialist Revolution,” 1.
Soviet rule in the context of Baku and the rest of Azerbaijan would mean loss of self-determination for those conquered nations, and, soon after, the dominance of local Communist parties would make “free political secession” impossible.

In order to establish civil and military authority, the Soviets were forced to placate the desires of at least a portion of the population and then frame their rule inside the bounds of the ideological framework of Marxist-Leninism—although many of its tenets were still very much in flux in the early 1920s. In terms of Baku itself, this compromise of recognizing the multi-ethnic nature of the city did help stitch up the still raw wounds of the Russian Civil War and quell much of the chaos that had surrounded the interregnum period. The ultimate goal of the Soviets through this process involved turning away from what they saw as the problematic elements of nationalism and separating it from what was seen as the confines of “imperialism.”

While the definition of Sovietization is in many ways particularized to whatever regions of the Soviet borderland are being discussed, in the case of Baku, Soviet control had comparative similarities with other Soviet cities, such Kharkiv or Bukhara, but was framed around different economic motivations. There was considerable continuity between methods of Soviet rule across the former Russian Empire; this included the development of a surveillance state alongside the

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590 Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, “‘Last Testament’ Letters to the Congress” (December 1922-January 1923), Lenin’s Collected Works, Volume 36 (1973), 593-611.

591 Ibid.
creation of a restricted form of national identity and Leninist concepts of what “national” identity needed to entail in order to be applied to newly incorporated regions.\textsuperscript{592}

Despite clear similarities, there nevertheless are apparent differences in Soviet methods in the case of Azerbaijan; their inordinate concentration of security forces in Baku and the rest of Azerbaijan exemplified the strategic necessity that resource-rich border regions were to the Soviet state and Soviet ideas about what, theoretically, was the most efficient manner of their incorporation. While there was a wide variety of different historical conditions and ethnicities at the boundaries of the greatly expanded Soviet state, at the same time there was clear continuity between Soviet approaches toward non-Russian nationalities across the Soviet Union. In the case of Baku and the rest of Azerbaijan, these policies were still framed alongside the extraordinary violence and division that the city and the rest of the country had experienced during the Russian Civil War.

3. The Initial Sovietization of Baku

In the case of Baku and Azerbaijan, Sovietization was a surprisingly swift reform process that took a considerable number of resources and amount of preparation in order to come into place, but it nevertheless rapidly solidified Soviet authority in the region from April to November 1920. In the space of mere months, the Soviets had nationalized almost the entirety of Baku’s industry and infrastructure. This not only included oil fields and factories, but everything

\textsuperscript{592} Hirsch, \textit{Empire of Nations}, 43. It also pertains to Lenin’s definition of \textit{narodnost} and the fundamental difference between developed and undeveloped peoples in the Russian Empire.
from fisheries to cognac manufacturing. Sovietization would hit Baku almost as quickly as the Red Army had taken the city only weeks before.

In the context of Transcaucasia, this meant the Soviets were not necessarily only filling a political vacuum but purposefully dismantling the independent states that existed in the region and completely reconfiguring the political and social lives of those populations into a new form that would fit both a new ideological mold and also a practical one: to re-utilize the resources of Transcaucasia for the still-embattled Soviet state, most especially Baku and its oil. It is abundantly clear that Baku and its industries were absolutely essential to the RSFSR, and any hope of industrialization would be greatly limited without a local source of petroleum and its byproducts.

To that end, it is quite apparent from the spring 1920 records of the Soviet 11th Army that the invasion of Baku was not a quickly-made decision and that it had been founded on a realpolitik basis: the RSFSR could not survive in the long-term without controlling Baku. Furthermore, documentation from the Russian State Military Archive makes it clear that preparation for the invasion happened well in advance of its offensive and that the 11th Army had positioned itself north of Astrakhan for weeks in preparation for an opportune time to strike southwards towards Baku. By the time the assault happened, the invasion had the appearance

593 RGVA, f. 195, op. 3, d. 17, l. 44-45. Elements of the 11th Red Army were essential in securing these facilities.

594 Debo, Survival and Consolidation, 179.

595 RGASPI, f. 159, op. 2, d. 15, l. 110-115. This includes using oil as commodity to trade for other sources of energy, such as coal.

596 Ibid.

597 Ibid., 177-180.
of a full military invasion rather than the internal uprising that had previously catapulted the Bolsheviks into power in Baku during 1918. This shift represented both the legacy of pitched battles that had occurred during the past two years as the Red Army shifted from an ad hoc militia to a regular military and the fact that the arrival of the Red Army was as much an expression of raw military power as it was relatively muted support for the Soviets who existed inside the city.

By early April, 1920, the Soviet troops that had already massed along the Azerbaijan/Russian border were met with little resistance after they crossed it. When the Soviets attacked southward, their advance was as swift as their supply chain allowed, and Soviet forces were impressively able to move through the rest of Azerbaijan with minimal resistance. This did not mean the hinterlands they passed through were not hostile. While Soviet formations took the rail station and key points in Baku’s city center and from that vantage were able to quickly consolidate control over the rest of the city and the oil fields surrounding it, they dug in during in the days and weeks that followed, anticipating a major revolt Baku.\(^{598}\) While the Soviets had largely taken the defenders of Baku by surprise, this did not mean an end to all long-term resistance against their occupation, even if a major revolt did not occur in Baku itself.

Nevertheless, this Soviet victory paved the way to a complete occupation of Baku and its oil fields, and they had achieved their primary object in an astoundingly short amount of time: little more than two days.\(^{599}\) Once their conquest of Azerbaijan was complete, the Soviets also gained a base of operations from which they could easily strike into Armenia and Georgia, where they faced only moderately more opposition against their advances across fall and winter of

\(^{598}\) RGVA, f. 195, op. 3, d .251, l. 9-20.

For the Soviets, this campaign would also mark a critical turning point in the Russian Civil War, for it would not only fully secure their southern flank, but also bring a region with necessary strategic resources, primarily oil, under their control.

This quick military success also allowed the Soviets to easily and relatively painlessly seize ownership of Baku’s oil fields and production facilities before the possibility of their being damaged in any possible fighting, as had occurred previously in March and September of 1918. In this endeavor they were for the most part successful: the wells were taken intact, and the Soviets were able to take the city without the devastation that occurred in much of the rest of the former Russian Empire, as shown by how quickly the Soviets were able to continue (if not immediately increase) production. The Soviets seized ownership of the entirety of the oil industry itself—not only its fields, but all major infrastructure—and, within the next several months, they nationalized the myriad private companies operating in Baku and consolidated them into Azneft.

In April, 1920, on the eve of the invasion of Baku, Serebrovskii was ordered to form the Azneftkom (Azerbaijani Oil Committee), the predecessor of what would essentially become Azneft. Serebrovski was given an extended mandate to organize new oil drilling, and facilitate the shipping of oil and materials, and was granted the direct protection of the Red Army to

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600 Smelë, The Russian Civil Wars, 143-145.

601 GARF, f. 6467, op. 1, d. 94, l. 106. This is exemplified by the fact that pre-war production was reached by 1927.

602 RGAE, f. 6880, op. 1, d. 4, l. 16-21. In particular, the Soviet Union of Engineers would be integral to this process, for different oil pipelines were integrated into each other, and Soviet engineers would be forced to repair damaged equipment due to years of deferred maintenance.
achieve these goals.\textsuperscript{603} This order gave Serebrovskii both the authority and, theoretically, the materials necessary in order to broadly nationalize the oil industry in Baku and essentially remake it as new state entity.

Despite the authority that Serebrovskii was granted, the First World War and its aftermath had greatly disrupted the industry, and a lack of investment had left the remaining operations reduced to nearly depleted fields, which could only provide a fraction of their pre-war returns. In addition, due to the disturbance, the remaining elements of Baku’s oil fleet had scattered to Gilan during the summer of 1918.\textsuperscript{604} Nevertheless, despite the setbacks faced by Serebrovskii and Azneft, by the end of 1921, production had increased from its near nadir of 3,836,000 metric tons (comparable to its production numbers between 1880 and 1881) to 4,179,000 metric tons by 1921 and 4,916,000 metric tons by 1922.\textsuperscript{605}

Serebrovskii believed that the growth of the industry depended on substantial investment from Moscow and that, despite the progress that had been accomplished, further investment and regular supplies and workers were needed to adequately feed the industry.\textsuperscript{606} Nevertheless, these supplies were in short supply, especially because, in the rest of the SSRs, Azerbaijan suffered food shortages across 1921-1922. While Serebrovskii, along with the rest of Azneftkom, had accomplished a tremendous feat in restarting the industry, due to this famine, serious supply issues continued to plague the industry. This included a lack of affordable food and housing for

\textsuperscript{603} Ibid., f. 270. op.1, d. 7, l. 16-17.

\textsuperscript{604} NAUK, WO [War Office] 106/1562, 4.

\textsuperscript{605} Altshuler, Neftianaia promyshlennost’ [Oil Production], 11-41.

\textsuperscript{606} ARTDA, f. 2548, op. 1, d. 4. l.17. As cited in Brinegar, “Baku at all Costs,” 55.
the workers, a complaint that had previously disrupted the industry during the late Tsarist era and helped foment the ethnic and political division the city had faced from 1905 to 1918.

By April, 1921, these shortages worsened to the point that they led to a strike against Azneft itself, an event illustrating how little progress in workers’ conditions had been accomplished in the previous year.607 To this effect, Ordzhonikidze, during a discussion over further economic integration in the Caucasus, notified Lenin that “he [Ordzhonikidze] had [previously] raised an alarm to the center due to the food situation . . . and there is now a strike,” and he followed this with “while the strike was liquidated . . . if the hunger situation among workers had not improved, there is absolutely no guarantee that the strike will not repeat itself with greater force.”608

While Azneft was able to contain and “liquidate” the strike, this incident would be utilized by Ordzonikidze to press for a full integration of the foreign trade committees of the RSFSR as well as the Georgian, Azerbaijan, and Armenian SSRs, in order to facilitate food shipments and improve regional trade.609 The subtext of this argument was that disruption in the supply of food to the Azerbaijan SSR had caused the outbreak of this strike in this first place, thereby jeopardizing oil production in Baku and, in return, complicating oil supply provision to the other SSRs.610 While a combination of the end of the Russian Civil War and the Polish-Soviet War, along with food aid from the United States, would eventually solve the immediate

607 RGAE, f. 270, op. 1, d. 8, l. 54.
608 RGASPI, f. 85, op. 5, d. 46, l. 1.
609 Ibid., f. 85, op. 5, d. 46, l. 1-5.
610 Ibid., f. 85, op. 5, d. 46, l. 6, 19.
issue of supplying food to Baku, the famine and its complications would force further cooperation between the Caucasian SSRs and the RSFSR.

Ultimately, the strike and its consequences would help precipitate the establishment of the Transcaucasian SFSR itself as both Ordzonikidze and Kirov pressed for further integration. Despite how quickly the Soviets achieved victory in Baku and their relative successes with Azneft, though, they faced many of the same hurdles across Transcaucasia during parts of their expansion after 1917. While the Soviets were able to overwhelm the forces that openly opposed them with relatively little effort, the mechanics of long-term rule against an increasingly restive population often proved to be more difficult—especially in the mountainous areas of northern, western, and southern Azerbaijan, where the local populations were both thinly spread and had largely existed untouched by the urbanization that had occurred in Baku.

Most importantly, this strategy involved not only the suppression of the violence of ethnic nationalism and a coordinated internal security policy, but the political consolidation of Transcaucasia into a single political structure: the Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (TSFSR) and the settlement of its internal borders between Armenian, Azerbaijan, and Georgia in 1921 by the Kavburo. While formally the TSFSR would briefly exist alongside the RSFSR, not inside it, it would quickly become clear that it would be nearly completely dominated by officials and cadres from Moscow, and it would be summarily incorporated alongside the other SSRs during the formation of the Soviet Union itself as the Party focused on “the struggle against nationalist deviation.”

611 RGASPI, f.64, op. 1, d. 17, l.15.

612 Ibid., f. 61, op. 1, d. 1, l. 242. In particular, Kirov, in the Kavburo minutes, puts a distinct ideological emphasis on eliminating nationalist tendencies in Azerbaijan as a method of confronting what
In order to accomplish this task, Lenin entrusted Sergo Ordzhonikidze to push forward for greater regional economic and political integration. Sergo Ordzhonikize, born in 1886 in Kutaisi, by 1920 had been an active member of the RSDLP since 1903. In 1911, as a member of the Bolsheviks, he was sent as an advisor to Constitutional forces during the Persian Constitutional Revolution and took an active part in the Russian Civil War as a commissar in Ukraine fighting white forces under Anton Denikin. For Ordzhonikidze, further integration and centralization in the Caucasus was as much a necessity as it was for Lenin. Altstadt asserts that Ordzhonikize prioritized this integration against the wishes of “indigenous leaders” who saw “economic integration as diminishing their sovereignty.” However, Ordzhonikidze influenced more than political and economic integration; he also had a considerable hand in guiding the security of the policy of Soviet forces in the region against “counter-revolutionary” elements that had been desperately attempting to resist Soviet advances across 1920 and Soviet rule through the early 1920s.

The transition to the new republic was a delicate process. While the Soviets applied a joint superstructure to command the TSFSR, neither Lenin nor the rest of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (including Kavburo) could easily mend the ethnic divisions that plagued it—nor much of the economic damage and neglect that had occurred across the region as a result he termed imperialist interests in the region. Moreover, Nariman Narimanov would only be criticized by other members of the Central Committee of the AzSSR for promoting “factionalism,” which tended toward more nationalist interests.


RGASPI, f.85, op. 5, d. 46, l.1-5.

Ibid.

Ibid., f. 61, op. 1, d. 147, l. 17. The Kavburo was primarily concerned with securing the borders of Soviet-controlled territory in Transcaucasia from raids from both Persia and the North-Caucasus.
of the Russian Civil War. In addition, the legacy of the Tsarist era had to be dealt with carefully; while portions of Transcaucasia were industrialized—especially Baku, Tbilisi, and, to a lesser extent, Batumi and Yerevan—for the most part, Transcaucasia was largely untouched by Tsarist-era industrialization and, much like other portions of the pre-Soviet state, this lack of development therefore necessitated significant investments in additional infrastructure.\footnote{Alex Marshall, \textit{The Caucasus Under Soviet Rule} (London: Routledge, 2010), 195-198.}

The structure of Transcaucasia was irreversibly changed by the First World War, and the Russian Civil War had many irreversible effects on the social structure of broader Transcaucasia, including the near annihilation of Ottoman Armenia and the subsequent reduction of Armenia to a Soviet rump-state. While a Turkish-Soviet rapprochement fully solidified after the dust of Turkish reconsolidation had settled, the attention of Armenian nationalists was focused east, towards Nagorno-Karabakh, especially after the Soviets, at the urging of the Central Committee in Baku, allocated the region to the Azerbaijan SSR.\footnote{RGASPI, f. 61, op. 1, d. 61, l. 1-9. The Kavburo was deeply involved in the final alignment of the borders of all three Caucasian Republics after 1920.} Unfortunately, the potential for long-term conflict between Azerbaijani and Armenian nationalists continued to exist, because only the Soviet state was able to enforce the borders it had drawn.

Due to these early signs of resistance, Soviet efforts at controlling the hinterlands of Azerbaijan proved far more difficult than the Soviets had assumed at first, and the Soviets were eventually forced to engage in running battles with remaining Azerbaijani forces and irregular militias that Red Army had termed “counter-revolutionary gangs.”\footnote{RGVA, f. 195, op. 3, d.251, l. 8-29. The 11th Red Army would be a crucial element in Soviet suppression of internal resistance in Azerbaijan after 1920.} These skirmishes on Azerbaijan’s southern border not only would last for years and consume a significant portion of

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item RGASPI, f. 61, op. 1, d. 61, l. 1-9. The Kavburo was deeply involved in the final alignment of the borders of all three Caucasian Republics after 1920.
\item RGVA, f. 195, op. 3, d.251, l. 8-29. The 11th Red Army would be a crucial element in Soviet suppression of internal resistance in Azerbaijan after 1920.
\end{thebibliography}
Soviet resources and time, but they added to a growing concern regarding the Soviets’ ability to hold on to Azerbaijan without the devotion of increasing amounts of manpower and resources to suppress local resistance.


During the initial Sovietization of Azerbaijan, including Baku, there were three primary avenues upon which the Soviets first focused their activities. First, was economic consolidation, including the nationalization of the oil industry, which has largely already been covered in Chapter Two. Second, was the Soviet attitude towards controlling identity, specifically the issue of national identity that was contained in their policy of korenizatsiia, a policy framed to a large extent by the Soviets’ social policy toward non-majority European SSRs. Third, was their internal security policy, which broadly followed policies across the other borderlands of the Soviet Union but had several unique constraints in Azerbaijan, especially potential liabilities, such as existence of large Azerbaijani populations in northern Iran and the strategic vulnerability presented by the oil industry in Baku.

The Soviet invasion and unification of Transcaucasia in essence took two forms: the aforementioned occupation by the 11th Red Army and then the creation (or re-creation from the Tsarist period) of an internal security state that was present before the collapse of the Russian Empire. As discussed previously, earlier Bolshevik pretensions of trying to establish a presence in Baku from 1917 to 1918 were invariably undermined by a lack of manpower and a reliance on temporary political alliances in order to sustain what minimal ability they had to command the city. These inadequacies left Bolshevik-friendly forces consistently on the

defensive and unable to effectively achieve full domination of the city they desired. However, while resistance in Baku fell fast in late April, 1920, an abortive pro-Soviet rebellion inside the city was not able to take the city without considerable outside assistance from the Red Army.\textsuperscript{621} This experience, though, did not necessarily assure that the Sovietization and reformation of Azerbaijan would be welcomed by its population, and open resistance in the countryside would remain a continual problem for the Soviets, especially during 1920 and 1921.

This drastic change of events in favor of the Soviets would mean a very different relationship with the city than the Bolsheviks had with it during 1918; there was no longer the need to create alliances with the variety of political factions that once existed in Baku. The Soviets were confronted with the dilemma of trying to manage a population in both Baku and the rest of Azerbaijan that had not only inflicted outpourings of rage against itself multiple times but, despite those experiences, still managed to retain its multi-ethnic character. While the Soviets arrived as a conquering army, there was relatively little input from the rest of the city in the rapid decisions being made on their behalf by the Revolutionary Committee of Azerbaijan (Azrevkom), then the newly reconstituted Communist Party of Azerbaijan and its Central Committee—especially when many of those decisions were being made in Moscow and then sent to Baku.\textsuperscript{622}

To that the end, the Central Committee of the Azerbaijani Socialist Soviet Republic (AzSSR) needed a system of enforcement beyond the Red Army itself, and to that effect an entirely new security system had to be constructed in Baku to ensure that the Soviet state could

\textsuperscript{621} Altstadt, \textit{The Azerbaijani Turks}, 109-110.

\textsuperscript{622} RGASPI, f.17, op. 87, d. 121, l. 3-7. Both Kavburo and Azrevkom took their orders directly from the All-Union Central Committee.
adequately maintain control of the city for the long-term. However, as proven elsewhere across the Russian Civil War, the relatively limited manpower that had once been devoted to the Tsarist-era Ohkrana or the Azerbaijani Ministry of Internal Affairs would not be adequate, considering the circumstances faced by the Soviets. They would need a well-trained and expanded secret police to ensure that possible enemies from within would not dare threaten the new Soviet order; also, to secure Azerbaijan’s borders, especially its southern border, they would need a well-manned border force.

The first step in the process was to re-create a formal policing and juridical structure, a police force, and a system of “revolutionary courts”—of all of which Azrevkom was able to create within months of the fall of Baku.623 This included the re-use of the Baku Central Prison by the National Commissariat of Justice to detain suspects holding “counter-revolutionary” tendencies.624 Soon after this development, the Soviets also oversaw the creation of a reliable system of internal security (i.e., the establishment of the Cheka in Baku) and a coordinated strategy to adequately utilize their personnel in newly incorporated territory. Furthermore, because Cheka itself was formed shortly after the revolution and was already a powerful organization in the RSFSR by 1920, Cheka agents were generally recruited from the RSFSR itself and transferred to the Azerbaijan SSR after it was occupied.625

The Cheka in Azerbaijan had a daunting security mission ahead of it. First, it had to suppress formal internal threats that challenged Soviet authority, including the remaining Müsavatists and Dashnaks who had opposed Soviet rule—although resistance by these groups

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623 ARDA, f. 169, op. 1, d. 102. These courts were mostly established under the People’s Commissariat of Justice in the spring of 1920.

624 Ibid., f. 169, op.1, d.318, l.14.

were significantly declining in number by the end of 1920. Second, it had to destroy what the Soviets had generally termed “bandits,” who regularly attacked Soviet forces in the area. In general, the resources the Soviets devoted to defeating these “bandits” indicate they were more organized and well-armed than any loose-knit criminal enterprise and, in essence, at times functioned as guerilla forces that openly opposed Soviet-based rule. According to the Kavburo, in late 1921 the issue had become serious enough that “the Azerbaijani-Iranian border require[d] extensive plantings of reserve military posts, and the presence of shock military units.”

Therefore, in Azerbaijan, the Cheka had a dual mandate: first, to oppose remaining “counter-revolutionary forces,” such as Dashnak and Müsavat sympathizers who threatened Soviet hold in the region, and second, to suppress any “banditry” that threatened the Soviets’ hold on the countryside. However, it is clear that, due to the considerable resources devoted to the “bandits,” they were more than an issue of security and also presented a possible ideological threat to the Soviets. Therefore, the priority for the Soviets was not only to destroy security threats but also to shift public perception against open opposition to Soviet rule. That meant that wiping out the bandits operating on the frontier would not only secure the borders of the AzSSR but also eliminate the possibility of a successful resistance to Soviet control by annihilating any insurgency that could eventually pose an alternative political structure to Soviet rule.

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626 RGASPI, f.64, op.1, d. 66, l. 3.
627 Ibid., f. 64, op.1, d. 147, l.13. These forces were ordered to the Iranian border even as a Soviet-backed government was in active control of Gilan in 1921. The relationship between the Soviets and the Bashmaki offers a similar example of this strategy, although that contest was largely stripped of the same geopolitical consequences as Soviet support for revolutionary Gilan.
628 Ibid., f. 64, op.1, d. 147, l. 13.
629 Ibid., f. 64, op.1, d. 33, l. 6-13.
Clearly, the origins of counter-Soviet forces in Azerbaijan after 1920 were more complex than any local “banditry” that had sprung up after a forced transfer of political authority. Much of it was born of a native resistance movement that was able to counter Soviet influence in the Azerbaijani countryside, especially in the mountainous areas along the Iranian border where Iranian Azerbaijanis had already taken up arms against Soviet occupation. However, at the same time, these resistance groups could not necessarily be tied to previous national movements that had existed during the Russian Civil War. After 1920, their leadership of been scattered, suppressed, or refused to openly resist the new regime, such as was initially the case with Mammad Amin Razulzade himself. By 1921, the original Azerbaijani national movement that was founded in the confines of the multi-ethnic and religious milieu of Baku during the early twentieth century had nearly completely lost its authority with the fall of Baku and the subsequent annihilation of its remaining forces in Ganja in May, 1920.

There is also the possibility that local resistance in Azerbaijan was regularly cited by Kavburo records as “banditry” because the existence of any organized resistance movement may have been deeply problematic for the political narrative the Soviets hoped to construct. If the Soviets were indeed an anti-imperialist force supported by the populace, the existence of such a genuine resistance movement would directly undercut their claims. While organized crime in some form most likely existed in these frontier areas, especially along the North Caucasus frontier, it is harder to frame the constant harassment the Soviet forces faced along the


632 RGASPI, f. 64, op. 1, d. 55, l. 16-18. In particular, dogged local resistance corresponded with significant skepticism of Soviet rule.
Azerbaijani-Iranian border as simply due to frontier crime, especially since major active resistance lasted at least until late-1922.\footnote{Ibid., f. 80, op. 6, d. 13, l. 1.} Therefore, the explicit ideological threat presented by an organized resistance against Sovietization was in part neutralized by the Soviets’ refusal to acknowledge that it was a threat in the first place. In short, some elements of “banditry” were very possibly depoliticized by the Kavburo largely because banditry, on its own and on a conceptual level, was not nearly as politically dangerous as an active “counter-revolutionary” movement against Soviet rule—especially if bandits in Soviet Azerbaijan happened to be linked with the growing resistance against Soviet influence in Iranian Azerbaijan.\footnote{Ibid., f. 64, op. 1, d. 55, l. 13-18.}

Moreover, rural resistance was clearly more complex than the Soviets gave it credit for. Vladimir Bobrovnikov, in “Bandits and the State,” from the volume, \textit{Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700-1930}, runs into a similar situation while examining Soviet efforts to combat perceived banditry in Chechnya, North Ossetia, and Dagestan.\footnote{Vladimir Bobrovnikov, ed., “Bandits and the State,” in \textit{Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700-1930} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 259-260.} More precisely, he claims that the irregular bandit forces in the North Caucasus had shown enormous amounts of control, and “by the beginning of the 1920s, heads of bandit groups were the only real power in towns and the countryside.” That said, across the 1920s and early 1930s, “village bands terrorized Soviet Party officials.”\footnote{Ibid., 259.} However, in the case of Bobrovnikov’s study, it was unclear whether these bandits can be framed as an organized resistance against Soviet rule in ideological terms; nevertheless, they functionally acted as such.\footnote{Ibid., 260.}

\footnote{Ibid., f. 80, op. 6, d. 13, l. 1.}

\footnote{Ibid., f. 64, op. 1, d. 55, l. 13-18.}


\footnote{Ibid., 259.}

\footnote{Ibid., 260.}
presented an effective and well-organized force that not only complicated Soviet planning but required genuine allocations of resources in order to contain.

Soviet sources themselves reveal the degree of intervention that the Soviets needed in order to halt the attacks—as well as address the very nature of the motivation(s) behind them. Kirov reflected on the situation against counter revolutionaries, foremost that the Cheka needed to “remove all bandit elements and especially and obviously harmful [elements].”

638 It is still unclear from the Kavburo material the exact nature of these “bandit elements,” especially on the Iranian border. Regardless, the Soviets were a clear target of asymmetric warfare, and this was almost certainly linked to resistance (which the Kavburo openly acknowledged) against the Soviet occupation of parts of Iranian Azerbaijan from 1920-1921 in order to support the Soviet-created Iranian Soviet Socialist Republic, better known as the Gilan Soviet Republic.

639 As shown further by Bruce Grant in “An Average Azeri Village (1930),” the hinterlands of Azerbaijan that remained majority Azerbaijani after 1920 and were more closely aligned with local and religious concerns after the collapse of the ADR. Resistance in these areas was guided by local concerns rather than any formal self-determinist movement.

640 Nevertheless, despite the local nature of this resistance, in further operations guided by Ordzhonikindze and Kavburo,

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638 RGAPSI, f. 80, op. 6, d. 13, l. 1.
639 RGAPSI., f. 61, op. 1, d. 206, l. 110-163. Kavburo documents clearly indicate that the Communist Party was deeply invested in the foundation of the Adalet Party, which sparked the occupation of northern Azerbaijan and the attempted formation of the Iran Soviet Socialist Republic in 1920.
640 Grant, “An Average Azeri Village (1930),” 724-726.
there was significant cooperation by border forces, the Red Army, and the Cheka in counter-insurgency operations.  

In preparation to limit cross-border support from Iran, the Soviets spent a considerable amount of time re-enforcing their side of the Azerbaijani-Iranian border with frontier troops. By 1921, the Soviets had deployed thousands of troops along the delineated border; almost 2,861 were arranged along the border of Iran and Azerbaijan alone. In addition, hundreds of additional troops were sent to guard the western portions of the border in Nakhchivan and along the Caspian coast. These border forces existed not only to limit raids across the border from Iran but also to establish closed frontier zones that would contain the population inside Soviet control.

The Soviets had difficulty fighting resistance against Soviet rule in this context, and not just in Azerbaijan but the rest of Transcaucasia as well. While “counter-revolutionary movements” were routinely pointed to as the ultimate threat to Soviet influence, the reality was more complicated—especially considering Sovietization’s domineering nature in Azerbaijan. The struggle of the Soviets to fully subdue Azerbaijani nationalism was framed in the context of an ideological struggle against counter-revolution. In reality, this proclaimed struggle was contested by the existence of a sustained resistance against Soviet rule, as exemplified by the Sheki rebellion, which did not have a clear ideology to call its own except resistance against Soviet rule itself.

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641 RGASPI, f. 64, op. 1, d. 147, l. 13.
642 Ibid., f. 64, op. 1, d. 147, l. 22.
643 Grant, “An Average Azeri Village (1930),” 725.
Azerbaijan was the weak link in the Soviets’ frontier policy in Transcaucasia, and the difficulty in policing it was due both to geography and the lack of a local population willing to assist Soviet efforts. Azerbaijan’s mountainous border was treacherous, with mountains ranging from the Caspian to the border of the Armenian SSR, and due to its low population density, the Soviets were forced to rely extensively on frontier troops in order to create a sustainable force to monitor the border. For the Soviets, these border forces also provided a necessary firewall between the Azerbaijani population in the Azerbaijan SSR and Azerbaijani nationalists in Southern Azerbaijan.  

While these frontier forces only represented a small portion of the overall security system the Soviets had amassed in Azerbaijan, they provided its most visible line of defense. The secret police, initially the Cheka, then the Obedinënnoe gosudarstvennoe politicheskoë upravlenie [Joint State Political Directorate] (OGPU) and Narodnyi komissariat vnutrennikh del [People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs] (NKVD), were a necessary instrument for conducting the surveillance and enforcement needs of the Soviet state inside the rest of Azerbaijan. In essence, Azerbaijan, like the rest of the Soviet Union, would be controlled through layers of both enforcement and surveillance. In the case of Azerbaijan, the priority towards solidifying Soviet control would be readily contested by an active resistance to Soviet rule.

5. Azerbaijan and the GULAG

Beyond the structure of security forces in Azerbaijan, there is the issue of how exactly these structures would be connected with the rest of the Soviet Union. While it is quite clear that Cheka would be active in conducting surveillance in Azerbaijan across the 1920s, and the

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RGASPI, f. 64, op. 1, d. 147, l. 17-18. The Central Committee of Kavburo was continually frustrated by cross-border infiltrations from northern Iran during the early 1920s.
Soviets would face active resistance by the mid-1920s, the rise of Joseph Stalin over his opposition in the Central Committee in 1927 would reflect a sudden and considerable change in Soviet methods in Azerbaijan. After 1930, this shift eventually included the mass detention of suspected enemies and the mass transportation of residents of Azerbaijan to GULAG labor camps in Central Asia.  

The first new targets of this shift in detention strategy were high officials from the previous government. Mass detention extended to most of the cabinet of the Republic of Azerbaijan across the late 1920s and early 1930s, and multiple cabinet officials—including State Controller/Minister of Communications, Jamo bey Hajinski; State Controller/Minster of Taxation, Nariman bey Narimanbeyov; and the Minister of Education and Religious Affairs, Hamid bey Shahtakhtinski—were detained and eventually sent to the isolated Solovki labor camp in the White Sea. Although the hierarchy of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan had been permanently dismantled under Lenin, it would take Stalin’s mass internment of former Azerbaijani high officials to fully demolish the quiet understanding that had existed between the Soviets and the former ADR officials who had been allowed to continue to live freely in the Azerbaijan SSR after 1920. By the 1930s, an entire generation of a political leadership that had been firmly rooted in much of the initial wave of Azerbaijani national identity was now scattered

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to the wind, either living in exile or surviving as best they could in labor camps administrated by the GULAG.  

During the 1930s, the largest GULAG labor camps were mostly located outside of Azerbaijan, but Stalin’s *dekulakization* campaign and later purges affected Baku and the rest of Azerbaijan as much as they did the rest of the Soviet Union. Initially, as early as 1921, tens of thousands of Azerbaijanis, Armenians, and European Soviet civilians from across Azerbaijan were transported to Cheka camps inside Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, one can look at this mass detention as an extension of a broader security policy that had developed from the earliest days of the arrival of the Soviets in Azerbaijan. The structure of the Soviet security state necessitated multiple phases of expansion, from protecting the frontiers of the state itself, to suppressing revolt from within, and to finally purging any remaining perceived threat to Soviet rule.

Paranoia played significantly into Soviet consideration of mass detention; the chief worry seemed to be foreign sabotage or intervention in the oil industry. This concern was highlighted by the attempted recruitment of Razulzade by Polish intelligence and the subsequent Soviet response through mass investigation of those suspected of aiding the Polish government. As early as 1920, records from Azrevkom document an in-depth investigation of eighty-three college students from Baku State University harboring links to possible Azerbaijani nationalist

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647 Khalid Abeed shows in his work, *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), that a similar arrangement that took place in the Uzbekistani SSR during the 1920s was ended under Stalin.


649 ARDA, f. 169, op. 2, d. 54, 57, 61, 79, 104. The local NKVD would be ruthless in its prosecution of suspects harboring either nationalist or foreign sympathies.

650 Ibid., f. 169, op. 2, d. 54, l. 13-70.
leadership in exile. While it is unclear if there was any clear attempt by foreign intelligence services, including Poland, of actually infiltrating Azerbaijan through students or other methods, this perceived threat prompted the NKVD to launch an exhaustive investigation of the topic. This action highlighted both the degree of paranoia at the time by the apparatus of the local Communist Party as well as the relative continued importance of Baku in Soviet designs.

Much like their paranoia regarding Polish subterfuge in Western Ukraine, the Soviet methods in Azerbaijan concentrated on the fear of the Polish as a dangerous adversary. As Alfred Reiber says about Western Ukraine, “In 1930 the Soviet leaders were deeply concerned that Russia’s western neighbors, especially Poland, would take advantage of mass uprisings by kulaks in right-bank Ukraine and Belorussia to launch an intervention.” Likewise, the connection between Mammad Amin Razulzade and Polish intelligence may have sparked a similar fear by the NKVD in Azerbaijan, although the assumed threat was primarily that of an internal uprising or industrial sabotage.

By 1929, the Soviets had amassed a considerable number of elite interior troops in Azerbaijan, specifically from the OGPU, in order to defend energy interests in the region. According to statistics from the OGPU itself, 963 troops were assigned from the 24th OGPU attachment to protect Azneft facilities, and a further 107 troops from the 109th OGPU division

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651 Ibid., f. 410, op. 1, d. 12, l. 47-48. Azrevkom kept updated lists of suspected students.

652 Ibid.


654 ARDA, f. 169, op. 2, d. 61, l. 127-134.
were assigned to protect other gas facilities.\textsuperscript{655} According to OGPU records, this was the highest concentration of troops allocated to any single region.\textsuperscript{656} The significant presence of the OGPU highlights exactly how important Azneft was to both the OGPU and the Central Committee to which it reported.

By 1930, the scale of Stalinist repression increased, including a mass battle against financial speculation, as documented by volumes of records in the Azerbaijani state archives of small-scale corruption and black market selling—largely located in Baku. Over time, the focus of the Soviets moved from these relatively apolitical instances of speculation to more politicized campaigns, such as \textit{dekulakization}. This included files from the AzSSR NKVD, planning the deportation of families of “Kulaks” from rugged rural Azerbaijan to the confines of Kazakhstan.\textsuperscript{657}

Detention practices in Azerbaijan during the 1930s reflected a shift in methods from ad hoc prison camps in the early 1920s to a flow of detainees from prison camps into the GULAG system after 1930. While initially detainees were arrested and then sent to the central prison in Baku for detainment, increasing numbers of detainees were sent quickly and directly to labor camps.\textsuperscript{658}

\textsuperscript{655} GARF, f. 9401, op. 1, d. 1, l. 4. The OGPU kept meticulous records of its force commitments across the Soviet Union.

\textsuperscript{656} Ibid., f.9401, op. 1, d.1, 1, l. 1-5. Zagas is the Soviet state natural gas monopoly in the Azerbaijan SSR.

\textsuperscript{657} RGASPI, f. 17, op. 162, d. 17, l. 95.

According to the OGPU, the transfer of Azerbaijanis and other peoples from the “southern” portions of the Soviet Union into Central Asia was part of a concerted effort on the part of the Soviets to “protect” the lives of inmates. In their own words, “Due to the fact that the climate of the northern confines of the USSR heavily affects their [the inmates’] health, making them work in the [northern camps] is unproductive and often leads to disability issue[s] that contributes to the growth of a significant element in the camps that are unable to work.”659 The OGPU was subsequently ordered to move “indigenous people of the nationalities inhabiting Transcaucasia, the North Caucasus, Central Asia, Kazakhstan . . . to OGPU camps and places of exile located in the southern and middle part of the USSR.”660 Thus, it could be argued that the camps in the “southern and middle parts of the USSR,” specifically in Central Asia were more temperate than those in Komi ASSR or Kamchatka; however, the high rate of attrition of prisoners in these camps matched those of GULAG camps in other regions.661

By 1934, the scale of repression increased after the assassination of Soviet President Kirov, and the stage was set for a far greater wave of repression in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan was not insulated from the “Great Terror” and felt the full effect of a multiple series of purges. The first series of purges, according to Eldar Ismailov, included “oppositionists within the Bolshevik Party [and] anyone suspected of disloyalty to the Stalinist leadership,” like in much of the rest of the Soviet Union, but they also went after former members of parties and peasant insurgent

659 GARF, f. 9401, op. 1, d. 340, l. 35.

660 Ibid.

661 Ibid., f. 9401, op. 1, d. 340, l. 35-37.
groups. By July, 1937, the Soviets had decided to “shoot 1,500 people, imprison 3,750 people in camps and evict 150 families,” and by the end of 1937 this increased to 2,792 people sentenced to death and an additional 4,435 imprisoned in Azerbaijan. A further 1,108 were sentenced to death in 1938. While the Soviet practice of mass arrests, torture, and imprisonment based on minimal evidence in Azerbaijan was not vastly different from that of the rest of the Soviet Union, it was built on top of the vulnerability (or assumed vulnerability) of the Soviet borderland to internal insurrection. According to the Prosecutor of the SSR, Salma Salmanovich Adil Babayev, during the thaw in 1955,

It seems that all sectors of the Azerbaijani population were active in counter-revolutionary activities and were members of a variety of counter-revolutionary organizations. Old Party members were declared enemies of Soviet Power, the governing Party and governments [according to the Troika] literally recruited each other into various counter-revolutionary organizations, the Armenians became Müsavats, Russian workers fought for the establishment of a bourgeois – [the Azerbaijani] nationalist government in Azerbaijan and old professors became militants in terror groups.

According to the argument presented by Ismailov, by the time of the Great Purge, the Soviet Central Committee was searching for “counter-revolutionary” influences even if they had to invent them. Consequently, consolidation of Soviet authority in Baku was broader than any policy focused on economic consolidation, and the Soviets’ continued invasive security and

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663 Ibid.

664 Ibid., 12.
6. Language and Education

As part of the nationalizing process, the Soviets worked to develop a social model that would cut the “Gordian knot” of political and ethnic divisiveness in the aftermath of the Russian Civil War, and education turned into one of the most powerful weapons in the Soviet arsenal. However, this meant education policy was focused on developing not only a formal system for school-aged children, but one for adults as well—including the schools needed for educating its security apparatus. Under the concepts of korenizatsiya, this schooling would be conducted in the language of the population itself; however, as in the case of Baku and the rest of Azerbaijan, this effort was complicated by the ethnically, linguistically, and religiously heterogeneous nature of the population. As other scholars have mentioned, such as Farideh Heyat, education and language autonomy was a necessary reform—both as counter-reaction that would occur from subsuming formerly independent nations into a distinctly non-independent federative state and as

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665 GARF, f. 393, op. 23a, d. 608, l. 2. In particular, illiteracy in the police forces would be a continuing problem in the Azerbaijan SSR.
a transformative program for remaking Azerbaijani society, especially the issue of illiteracy among female Azerbaijanis.\textsuperscript{666}

The Soviets, in this sense, needed a reliable language of communication—and one based on the administrative legacy of not only the RSFSR but also Azerbaijan itself. Almost all of the official archival documentation, from the imperial period through the entirety of the Soviet period, remained written or translated in Russian. Even during the brief existence of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan, state documentation remained primarily in Russian, and this tradition held into the Soviet period.\textsuperscript{667} While at certain points documentation was written in Azerbaijani, it is also often coupled with a Russian translation.

Of course, Azerbaijani would continue to be taught to ethnic Azerbaijanis, and this would be greatly assisted by the movement to a Latin-based script system in 1927, roughly at the same time as the Turkish script changed.\textsuperscript{668} Furthermore, the Soviet state needed to educate its security services in order for them to succeed, and there is evidence of Soviets investing in educating their agents in order to achieve this, including attempts at promoting literacy among its prison guards.\textsuperscript{669} On that point, Azrevkom fostered the development of a system of education for its rank and file and ordered a certain amount of rudimental instruction and library access for its police and security officials.\textsuperscript{670} Indeed, a key part of developing a security structure to police

\textsuperscript{666} Heyat, \textit{Azeri Women in Transition}, 88-89.

\textsuperscript{667} As evidenced by the fact that archival records of the ADR from ARDA were primarily in Russian, with a much more modest number of records in Azerbaijani.

\textsuperscript{668} Azerbaijani script would change four different times (1929, 1939, 1958, and 1991) under the Soviets.

\textsuperscript{669} ARDA, f. 410, op. 1, d. 32. This material from Azrevkom includes the broader educational needs of the internal security system of the Azerbaijan SSR as well as the guards of its prisons.

\textsuperscript{670} Ibid.
Azerbaijan, and especially Baku, required literate security personnel, and education remained at the core of this process of reorganization.

The consolidation and expansion of the Soviet educational system across the 1920s and 1930s not only facilitated the development of internal security forces in Baku and the rest of Azerbaijan, but it helped advance what the Soviets thought of as a more modern society, including a more literate and higher-skilled populace—including women.\textsuperscript{671} The development of a modern higher educational system in Azerbaijan during the Tsarist period was at the same time focused, in part, on the creation of technical colleges to train the engineers needed to support the oil industry. Under the Soviets, further investments were made in educational infrastructure to facilitate oil engineering, including the expansion of the Baku Polytechicum into the Azerbaijan Polytechnic Institute in 1920. Of course, these investments only further tied the population to the industry and limited opportunities for skills diversification. This concentration of educational infrastructure toward oil production was further burdened by Azneft mandates; keeping up with “the steady growth of the industry . . . and the shortage of specialists” required routing significant physical and human capital towards oil and gas production.\textsuperscript{672}

Therefore, while the Soviets did explicitly expand education, including the formation of technical schools in addition to the already established Baku Polytechnic, it can be argued that these investments were a variant of “Dutch disease”—a concept that oil industries, in particular,

\textsuperscript{671} Heyat, \textit{Azeri Women in Transition}, 95-96. In the case of Baku, it can be argued that Soviet conceptions of modernity rested on a functional basis: the Soviet Union simply needed a work force to supply its industrial needs.

\textsuperscript{672} RGASPI, f. 80, op. 7, d. 29, l. 1. This material includes minutes from the Azerbaijani Central Commitment on the personnel needs of Azneft.
sap investment from other industries and limit diversification through over investment in oil. The revenue efficiency of petroleum demanded not only continual infrastructure investment in wells, catalytic factories, and pipelines, but it continually demanded human resources as well. Investment in technical education to promote the oil industry meant a shifting of resources from other forms of higher education back into supporting the oil industry.

The korenizatsia policy of the Soviets and the restricted linguistic and cultural autonomy was further complicated the cosmopolitan nature of the Azerbaijan population, especially its large ethnically Azerbaijani Muslim population in the countryside. The Soviets had to be careful to balance schooling to meet the needs of each community due to the chance of ethnic tension; however, doing so was greatly complicated by the fact that, even by “1925/1926 . . . 76 percent of all teachers in Azerbaijan had no qualifications other than a low level [Islamic] education.” In addition, the Soviets continued to struggle with addressing the latent desire of Azerbaijanis inclined to support national irredentism alongside providing a necessary plurality of education among the various nationalities that lived in the republic. In the end, the Soviets chose to support linguistic and cultural pluralism coupled with increasing levels of secularization, but even during the Stalinist period, madrasas would stay open despite Soviet efforts to eradicate them.

During the 1920s, instruction in Baku itself generally reflected the make-up of the ethnic population. Individual schools were established for every identified and catalogued ethnic group.

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673 “Dutch Disease” is specifically named after the over-concentration of investment in the Dutch North Sea oil fields to the detriment to other Dutch industries.


675 Ibid., 200.
and separate Azerbaijan, Armenian, and Russian language schools existed inside the city.\textsuperscript{676} Despite this relative plurality in the educational system, though, Russian remained the dominant language of the public sphere, and those ethnicities that \textit{were} identified and given schools, as shown by Francine Hirsch in \textit{Empire of Nations}, were defined by Soviet ethnographers who had their own criteria for specific identities.\textsuperscript{677} Nevertheless, internal data from the Azerbaijani Communist Party in 1922 shows that there was an attempt to balance instruction in Azerbaijani and Russian in majority Azerbaijani schools.\textsuperscript{678}

As the stance on linguistic autonomy in education changed under Stalin to force a greater focus on Russian, the effect of this change was felt especially strongly in Azerbaijan, and the once very broad leniency in education for nationality minorities was steadily reduced with an increasing emphasis on Russian language and culture. In Baku, this meant that Russian, the language of business and government, remained the dominant language of the public sphere and was increasingly used in the private sphere as well, a situation that only changed during the 1990s, when Azerbaijani returned to dominance. However, the imprint of both Sovietization and Russification was felt more strongly through the Stalinist period and, rather than promoting cultural autonomy, ethnicity/nationality became both strictly controlled state identifier and autonomous form of identity.\textsuperscript{679}

\textsuperscript{676} Heyat, \textit{Azeri Women in Transition}, 55-56. However, language policy would subsequently change in the Stalinist period, with a far greater focus on Russian language over local national languages.

\textsuperscript{677} Hirsch, \textit{Empire of Nations}, 133.

\textsuperscript{678} RGASPI, f. 17, op. 60, d. 299, l. 7-8.

\textsuperscript{679} Ibid.
7. Conclusion

It is quite apparent that modernity in Azerbaijan (in the Soviet sense) meant the mobilization of the population, as it did in the rest of the Soviet Union—but with an emphasis on harnessing the industrial dynamics that made up Baku, and that dynamic necessitated increased technical education. Looking at Soviet planning of the period, it is obvious that a mass expansion of production was underway, requiring an overt investment in the structural education in applied engineering that was needed to supply the petrochemical industry. While the Soviets (as shown before) had plans for the expansion for Baku’s oil industry, this goal had to be nested within the broader social mobilization that was happening across the Soviet Union, and while the Soviets were successful with mobilizing the population of Baku as well as an entire new generation of engineers to supply its needs, based on complaints by Azneft, the actual amount of talent needed to readily supply the industry was still slow in forming, despite these efforts. According to an article in *Krasnyi Baku* [Red Baku], the refusal of Azneft to pay fees and taxes to the Baku Soviets may have undermined funding for schooling in Baku.

In this sense, Baku was not necessarily unique; the Soviet Union was a heterodox mix of ethnicities (which, under the Soviets, were codified into a defined set of organized nationalities) that nevertheless existed beyond the invisible boundaries set by the Soviets. While, as part of the Sovietization process, educational and cultural policy would be adjusted to reflect the diversity of the population, at the same time, the Soviets demanded total retention of political

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680 Ibid., f. 80, op. 7, d. 29, l. 9. Azneft was open in its complaints to the Central Committee of the Azerbaijan SSR regarding a continued lack of local oil engineers.

681 *Krasnyi Baku*, No. 9, 5-11, as cited in Brinegar, “Baku at all Costs,” 260.

control; any sort of “disallowed” political or civic spheres outside of Soviet dominance effectively ceased to exist after 1920. Consequently, because political, social, and labor relations were now all dominated by a single entity, this shift helped promote stability—but also made the relationship between the population and the state increasingly opaque. In any case, the unique Soviet approach to identity and education was stretched to its limits in regards to Baku, especially due to the latent historical memory of the events of only a handful of years before, during the early part of the Russian Civil War.

Despite attempts at creating a more codified form of identity and language, Azerbaijani and Armenian identities continued to exist in separate forms than what was allowed by the Soviets. More precisely, rural life continued largely as it had before the arrival of the Soviets, and despite the Soviets’ attempts to control religious life, it would take dekulakization and then collectivization before the full impact of Soviet rule would hit the peasantry. While irredentists and active resistance against Soviet rule was suppressed during the 1930s, the continued existence of villages in the countryside ready to oppose Soviet efforts would constitute a continual problem for the Soviets, especially during the Sheki rebellion in 1930, led by the grandson of a Sufi Cleric, Mustafa Molla. This incident not only led to significant violence but the brief formation of an independent polity in the mountains of western Azerbaijan.683

During the 1940s, resistance against Soviet dominance was subsequently expressed by many Azerbaijanis and other peoples of Transcaucasia through active collaboration with the Nazis, especially after 1941. Almost 40,000 Azerbaijanis either volunteered as prisoners or went

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683 Grant, “An Average Azeri Village (1930),” 706-710.
AWOL in order to join SS-formed units in Nazi-controlled territory.\textsuperscript{684} While many other nationalities did so as well, including Russians, Ukrainians, Estonians, and Latvians, in the case of Azerbaijan, this degree of active collaboration was unique because the Nazis never physically entered Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, not only were the Nazis able to reliably recruit Azerbaijani prisoners, many recruits were fully willing volunteers and the Nazis were able to remotely establish an elaborate espionage network within Azerbaijan itself.\textsuperscript{685} This desire among Azerbaijani volunteers to join SS units speaks both of the antipathy many Azerbaijanis had for the Soviets as well as the resilience of ethnic identity, even under a totalitarian state.

While this fissure fused after the collapse of Nazi Germany, there remained a problematic legacy of how ethnic identity continued to function in Soviet Azerbaijan. After the war, ethnic divisions were suppressed with the application of military forces, and unlike Soviet anti-insurgency operations in western Ukraine, active resistance was generally quelled quickly. One can see this process again having a lasting result into the 1980s as fissures between the Azerbaijan and Armenian communities reopened again, especially in Baku and western Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh would have tremendous repercussions for both populations and would lead to the mutual ethnic cleansing of over 700,000 ethnic Azerbaijanis from Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, and nearly 500,000 Armenians from Azerbaijan, most of them from Baku.\textsuperscript{686}

\textsuperscript{684} RGASPI, f. 80, op. 7, d. 29, l. 1. The Central Committee of the AzSSR would investigate Azerbaijani volunteers to SS units after the war.

\textsuperscript{685} According to Alex Alexiev, nearly 110,000 Caucasians collaborated with the Third Reich, a significant number of who were Azerbaijanis. Alex Alexiev, “Soviet Nationalities in German Wartime Strategy,” \textit{RAND Corporation} (1982), 28.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict would cause a rift that would continue to split the region for decades to come and fundamentally alter the ethnic make-up of both nations, especially in the city of Baku, which not only saw a mass evacuation of its Armenian population but also much of its population from European portions of the former Soviet Union, mostly ethnic Russians and Ukrainians.\(^\text{687}\) The results of the war would be most acutely felt by large refugee populations on both sides of the conflict who struggled to readjust to their new lives amidst the chaos left by the war itself as well as the broader break-up of the Soviet Union. This would directly parallel many of the struggles Azerbaijani and Armenian refugees had faced to find safe harbor during the Russian Civil War. During the late 1980s (much like in 1918), rural Azerbaijani refugees would come to Baku in hopes of finding safe harbor while Armenian refugees would flee to Yerevan.\(^\text{688}\)

Furthermore, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, a war that is still active at the time of this writing, left wounds lasting into the early twenty-first century that have not even begun to heal. Active artillery duels still occur across cease-fire lines, and many of those displaced still struggle to find economic stability a generation later.\(^\text{689}\) These repercussions have created a frozen conflict that would play a significant role in the broader geopolitics of the former Soviet Union, especially in Transcaucasia. While it may take decades or more for their full effect to be reliably apparent, parallels may very well be drawn between the ethnic violence of both periods. While the future is uncertain, present-day circumstances suggest there will be no easy resolution occurring as the weight of history surrounding Baku continues to press forward into the twenty-first century.

\(^{687}\) Ibid., 105, 285.

\(^{688}\) Ibid., 90, 101, 105.

\(^{689}\) Geukjian, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict*, 1-5, 207.
One possible explanation for these parallels is simply due to the place Azerbaijan and other borderlands had within the structure of the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union. According to Alfred Reiber in “Civil Wars in the Soviet Union,” both the Tsarist and Soviet leaderships were centered around a long-held belief that, “Yet so long as the center kept its nerve, stood united around a strong leader, and exercised its superior coercive power while the rebellious regions failed to coordinate their actions or gain powerful and interested external allies, the dissolution of the state was avoided.” While this assertion is open for debate, in the case of Baku and Azerbaijan, Soviet methods clearly focused on keeping rebellious regions on its borders (such as Azerbaijan) from coordinated rebellion or halting the influence of external power, exemplified by Soviet paranoia of Polish infiltration. Nevertheless, centralizing policies under the Tsars, the ADR, and the Soviet Union all had the effect of maintaining continued bitterness on top of the legacy of political and ethnic division inflicted on Baku and the rest of Azerbaijan.

In this sense, the full extent of the historical processes of the early twentieth century in Baku still had a continuous effect on the city well into the Soviet period and beyond—and, despite the Soviets planning otherwise, any attempt to address those ethnic divisions in any realistic sense failed in the long term when confronted with a combination of ongoing material factors and a troublesome historical memory of violence and retribution. Nevertheless, there remained a symbiotic connection between Baku and the rest of Azerbaijan, especially due to the importance of Baku to both the Azerbaijani and Armenian communities as well as the Soviets.

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690 Reiber, “Civil Wars,” 162.

691 ARDA, f. 169, op. 2, d. 61, l. 127-134.
Indeed, there remains a degree of continuance of ethnic division between the pre-Soviet and post-Soviet period as the ethnic turmoil that surrounded rapid demographic and economic shifts occurring in the region during the Tsarist period had a continued legacy that was not completely interrupted by the Soviets and their own legacy. Instead, the story of Baku under the Tsar, under independent Azerbaijani, and then under the Soviets is part of an evolving story that shows continuity in economic motivation between different regimes, and the fate of the city that was more profoundly damaged by what seemed, at the times, to be logical economic and political decisions.

While events in Baku have shown that populations of a region are not necessarily fated to travel along a certain historical path, the ability of populations to decide the course of collective actions affecting their societies was increasingly tested by political and material factors across the twentieth century. Through the circumstances of the First World War, the Russian Civil War, and then the Soviet occupation of the city in 1920, the fate of the city and its key industry, oil, was often at the mercy of states and the relatively minor input from the population as a whole. When the administration of the city was in flux, especially from 1917-1918, this period was punctuated with widespread violence and continual foreign intervention from outside the city itself.\textsuperscript{692}

This juxtaposition is not only important in the context of state intervention but in recognizing that converging historical processes that unite into a particular course of events have a certain historical momentum and are difficult, if not impossible, to fully stop. This does not necessarily mean there is a predisposed dialectic that guided these events but rather that when

\textsuperscript{692} Gokay, “The Battle for Baku” 40-45.
social, economic, and geopolitical forces co-align, such as they did in Baku, they lead to a
cascading series of events that may be nearly impossible to halt.

In the context of Baku, social, economic, and political processes were not only guided by
the manner in which established power structures attempted to address those factors but by the
fact that those processes had their own momentum that neither those in power nor those directly
affected by them had the ability to overcome. While the weight of events affecting Baku’s oil
industry can not only be difficult to overcome, state and private intervention may have only
inadvertently exacerbated the situation. Ultimately, the after-effects of the aforementioned events
occurring in Baku are difficult to resolve; Baku and its path across the early twentieth century
has provided both an illustration of how these elements interact with each other and a historical
warning regarding the realistic limits of a state governing over a society that has already
undergone such dramatic social, economic, and political pressures.
Conclusion: Outcomes and Consequences

There are key lessons to be learned from the broader social, economic, and political implications of Baku’s tumultuous journey. Foremost, it is apparent that, from the late Tsarist period, a combination of rapid economic growth in a localized area in and around Baku, coupled with a private prioritization of investment in oil production over other considerations (especially affordable housing and food), led to increased ethnic and religious diversity as well as a politically radicalized and divided urban space. This process, alongside economic and political intervention under multiple governments, had a clear material, political, and geopolitical effect in Baku during the Russian Civil War, especially from 1918 to 1920, and the early Soviet period. In particular, the intervention of governments in both the oil industry itself as well as participants in a broader geopolitical conflict in order to control it only exacerbated many of the social and political pressures that had been building in Baku from 1905 to 1917.

In the case of Baku, the period from 1900 to 1917, is a critical epoch when overlapping economic, ecological, and social factors intersected, fomenting ethnic, religious, and labor unrest. The pressures brought by rapid industrialization, including lack of worker housing and the severe ecological consequences of the rapid development of a petrochemical industry, would create pressures that were effectively inescapable for the population who lived there. These pressures would also lead to a period of remarkable economic growth and widening cultural diversity for the city. From 1897 to 1913, Baku
nearly doubled in size, from 111,904 to 214,672 residents, and multiple stressors would continue to fester under the surface in Baku.\footnote{Altstadt, \textit{The Azerbaijani Turks}, 32.}

While individually each of these factors could be taken as disparate aspects of Baku’s development, the evidence laid out in this thesis supports the assertion that, while social division has complex origins and was not necessarily always linked to material circumstances, in the case of Baku it was nevertheless fundamentally rooted in the development of Baku’s oil industry. Baku’s oil industry, by its sheer existence, exacerbated economic and (eventually) political competition among its working population and set off a series of events that not only attracted significant geopolitical interest in the region but a divisive series of ethnically-framed political struggles.

The origins of the oil industry in Baku have provided some rather clear evidence of how the initial development of the city would reflect the political, geopolitical, and ethnic friction that precipitated eventual outbreaks of political and ethnic violence in the city. Most importantly, a combination of an oversupply of labor together with an undersupply of housing and inflated food prices exacerbated the threat of ethnic division and created the right environment for greatly increased political division during the early twentieth century. Other factors, such as ecological damage from the oil industry, only exacerbated these main factors and created an increasingly destabilized situation in Baku, as exemplified by building political friction in the city from 1905 to 1920.

The population of Baku was also affected by the investment and planning of various governments and private enterprises, including private enterprises in Imperial
Russia, as well as the governments of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic and the Soviet Union. These states and enterprises rarely took political or ethnic division into account when adjusting their strategies to maximize revenue and utility from the industry. Ultimately, state directives and investments were driven by a limited subset of criteria—primarily whatever economic or strategic value the state or private enterprises could extract in the most efficient method possible.

At the core of these events is both the flexibility and persistence of states, specially the ADR and the Soviet Union, on concentrating their resources in order to accrue an essential commodity. This practice boils down to economic pragmatism focused on the needs of increasing production (a task the Soviets were evidently successful at) that can arguably be guided by both ideological motivation and realpolitik. The Soviets, more than the relatively laissez faire strategy of the Russian Empire and the hybrid strategy of the ADR in pushing then backing away from nationalization, had the clearest result in pushing production levels above Tsarist levels by 1927. Nevertheless, despite the ultimately “positive” effects in these production achievements, they exacted a material and human cost in terms of resources and lives as the needs of the state and industry shifted in relation to each other. This changing environment would have long-term consequences for all the states controlling the wells, which were forced to continue to invest in oil infrastructure versus other needed internal infrastructure, and for all the workers, who would be forced to negotiate with an increasingly powerful state and its subsidiaries rather than individual private companies.

While the business of oil extraction in Baku came under greater economic pressure after 1905 (and on through 1920) and was directly affected by much of the
social division that grew around it in the first place, the industry itself would survive based on its value to the successive states that controlled the city. Despite obvious moments of adversity, the industry continued to function across the chaos of this period, and oil production rarely ceased completely, despite periods of extreme unrest and open violence. However, due to the tenacity of the Soviets (and, to a lesser extent, the ADR) in demanding continued production without considering either the long-term repercussions of a lack of continual investment during the Russian Civil War or the raw limits to the capacity of the fields themselves, the oil industry in Baku would, in relative terms, lose over a decade versus its competition and would never regain the place it once had in the emergent energy market.694

In addition to direct state intervention, a collection of other foreign states pushed the region for broader strategic goals, which often prioritized realpolitik objectives during their efforts to take and hold Baku. The Ottomans, the British, and the Soviets all had independent desires for the region that, while differing in their geopolitical positions, could be framed either in terms of military objectives (especially in the case of the Ottomans) or economic necessity (as was the case with the British and the Soviets). Ultimately, both of these desires remained linked to the oil industry itself, and the geopolitical desires of great powers only complicated the increasingly divisive and volatile situation in Baku, especially from 1918 to 1920.

694 DeGolyer and MacNaughton, *Twentieth Century Petroleum Statistics*, 5, 8, 9. Oil production in the USSR, almost entirely located in Baku, would be dwarfed by American production during the 1920s and 1930s despite a relative expansion of production in Baku. By 1927, American production would be 770,129,000 barrels per year, while Soviet production would be a much more modest 77,018,000 barrels per year.
While there were broad differences in ideology between the powers in their struggle for useful control of Baku and its surrounding area, there seemed to be relatively little difference in tactics between the various forces advancing in the region. Whether they were ancient regimes or newly formed republics, the direct application of force remained the primary method of advancing geopolitical needs across this period. In that sense, there was a consistency in the form of violence applied to the region, even if the explicit political goals were often quite different. While state ideology had a limited effect on the methodology of building legitimacy, the actual methods used by individual powers were more directly related to the amount of resources they were willing to apply to military adventures than to a steady, fast adherence to ideological motives. Motivations for actions by both the British and the Soviets were flexible and strategic, and economic interests often intertwined with geopolitical interests; at a point, these became inseparable from each other.

Ethnic if not political identity only grew in strength across the late Tsarist period, and while individual workers and other residents still had some control over their political if not ethnic identity, it is quite clear the population of Baku was, from 1900 to 1920, caught in a tide of strong political currents in which political choice was often limited based on one’s ethnicity and cultural upbringing. This was especially the case in the twin outbreaks of inter-ethnic violence that rocked the city in March and September of 1918. Neither the independence of the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic nor the return of the Soviets provided further options for residents.

The issue of ethnic identity itself is a mercurial signifier in the case of Baku, especially since the creation of Baku provided the impetus for the coalescence of a
cohesive, distinct Azerbaijani identity to form in the first place and then helped create a competitive scenario between the Azerbaijani and Armenian communities. While it is impossible to say whether ethnic identity in Baku would have functioned differently without the extensive and ethnically-diverse labor pool needed by the oil industry, it does show that the growth of ethnic identity, at times correlated with religious identity, was molded over time by economic competition by different ethnic communities in Baku and that, in return, ethnic identity would become easily tied with political identity to form firmly delineated ethno-political identities among the differing political factions in the city. It is abundantly clear that ethnic and political identity, by 1917, had trumped religious identity as the critical factor in Baku’s political development during the late Tsarist period. Moreover, this process would have devastating consequences on the population of Baku during the March and September Pogroms of 1918, and for the entire region during the first Azerbaijani-Armenian War.

The arrival of the Soviets would provide a crucial shift in how political and ethnic identity would function in the city as they radically altered the relationship between citizens in the state through the establishment of an overbearing security and surveillance apparatus as well as the reframing of ethnic identity inside of a carefully-controlled frame of nationality. While this system was successful in quelling violence and eventually eliminating both political and military resistance to Soviet rule, it was far less successful

696 Suny, *The Baku Commune*, 178. This is made abundantly clear by the rise of ethnically-focused parties, such as the Dashnaksutyun, Müsavat, and Himmät Parties as well as the growth of the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks in Baku’s Duma.

in untangling the traumatic legacy of the Russian Civil War or addressing the legacy of historical memory brought on by that conflict and its aftermath, including the unresolved issue of Nagorno-Karabakh. Ultimately, continual divisions between the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities, especially during the 1980s and early 1990s, would be a testament to the Soviets’ inability to re-direct the historical course that Baku and the broader Caucasus had already taken. The weakening of the Soviet Union as a dominant force in the region would uncover the decades of unresolved hostility that had taken root during the early Soviet Union, especially because the majority of Nagorno-Karabakh had remained ethnically Armenian while a part of the Azerbaijan SSR.

The working population of Baku, caught between the disastrous results of the Russian Civil War and the reality of Soviet rule, had a very limited ability to resist the demands of the Soviet state. This form of domination would not be the case in rural portions of Azerbaijan, which would put up a more assertive resistance against Soviet intervention after 1920. These insurgencies would have little direct impact on the oil industry in Baku itself. Nevertheless, rural opposition to the Soviets would communicate the continued tension between the state and much of the population and would have a lasting legacy that eventually highlighted the complex and fraught relationship the Soviet state would have with both Baku and the rest of Azerbaijan.

However, this is narrative is not solely reliant on structural processes, and with such an analysis there is the obvious danger of seeing these elements as strictly deterministic. It is very difficult to say with complete certainty that the development of the oil industry directly led to a series of predictable events that culminated in a cascade

698 Geukjian, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict*, 1-5, 207.
of violence during 1918. In the context of these events, it is still important to pay attention to the influence that material conditions had on the history of Baku from 1900 to 1920. It is quite possible to say that the events of this period were decided by the way in which industrial development telescoped and intensified social, ethnic, and political strife, specifically in 1905 and 1918. By the same token, while it could be argued that the economic influences of the oil industry are a key path to understanding what happened, nevertheless the development of the oil industry on its own does not come close to explaining how all of the developments Baku faced came to be.

The material influences of the industry itself and its geopolitical ramifications were separate factors that were both linked but were varied in their ultimate effect, especially since major events occurring during the period—in particular the First World War—would suddenly shift the social and economic course of the city in an unpredictable direction. While the material and economic influence of the oil industry would have a profound effect on the demographics of the city and how ethnic and political identity functioned in it, much of the events of the later portions of First World War and then the Russian Civil War in the city and the rest of Transcaucasia were dependent on how multiple geopolitical actors utilized those events for their own ends.

In the case of Baku, there is evidence that there is no definitive end to historical processes once they have been set into motion, and while there are occasional lulls, these processes slide under the surface only to re-appear generations later under different circumstances; nevertheless, they are still largely guided by the same factors that caused their initial formation. The conflux of identity and ethnic violence in Baku as well as Nagorno-Karabakh would continue to be a silent issue for both Armenians and
Azerbaijanis across the Soviet period. This silence has clearly provided a vivid illustration of the ramifications of ignoring the mechanics of identity and material interests in order to harness the economic potential of a resource, in particular oil, which in turn led to a set of processes that are beyond the control of any government or private enterprise. The effort to harness oil production in Baku would lead to repercussions that would last generations. There was no way to “cut past” the division the city had faced from 1917 to 1920, and historical memory of that division would be perpetually reinforced by both a later disagreement over Nagorno-Karabakh and the continued necessity of the oil industry to Soviet designs in the region as well as its broader industrialization strategy which required political domination of Azerbaijan. These two factors effectively froze ethnic division on the surface, but in reality would only delay violence until the Soviet Union was no longer able to adequately control the security situation in Transcaucasia by the late 1980s.

The priority for future investigation should be why these governments (especially Tsarist Russia, the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan, and the Soviet Union), motivated by ostensibly different forms of political ideology, led to a set of similar practices. These practices include an inordinate focus on supporting both public and private investment in the industry and a general unwillingness to address the myriad social, economic, and political consequences of the industry’s development. The ultimate answer to their commonality may simply be that, despite disparate ideologies, all three states nevertheless were weighted by similar economic and geopolitical concerns, and the high profitability of petroleum production spurred over-investment with an attendant lack of interest in
addressing the negative outcomes produced by that industry. It is possible to see similar
parallels to these processes in the oil industries of Austrian Galicia and Mexico.

Alison Frank’s discussion of Galicia’s oil industry in *Oil Empire* shows
remarkable similarities to that of the growth of oil production in Baku, but with some key
divergences. One initial aspect they shared in common was a progressive loosening of
state intervention in the oil industry during the 1870s and 1880s, a shift that led to a
considerable expansion of the industry. In the case of Baku, the Russian government
helped initiate the growth of Baku’s oil industry by directly sending engineers to the
region and then loosening the leasing structure of tax farming to allow an initial wave of
private investment. This was followed by the introduction of an auctioning system in
1873, which allowed a further burst of investment and privatization that led to the
industry’s massive growth from 1874 to 1900. In the case of Galicia, however, land rights
and subsoil rights were already primarily held by small holders who initially worked their
own lands, personally. While there were some attempts by the Austrian government to
regulate oil extraction during the 1870s, by 1884 it acquiesced to local interests and
allowed landholders to sell the rights to oil under their land separately from the land
itself.\footnote{Frank, *Oil Empire*, 72.} In Russia, on the other hand, actual subsoil ownership was retained by the state,
which in turned leased the fields. The Russian government did allow private enterprises
operational autonomy, though, and in both countries private interests had nearly
unfettered control over their fields by the 1880s.
Another parallel between the two oil-producing countries was the impact small start-ups had in advancing the industries of both regions. In the case of Baku, this was best illustrated by the work of Ivan Mirozoyev and the Nobel Brothers, and in Galicia, by Stanislaw Szczepanowski and William MacGarve.\footnote{Ibid., 79. The advances of these pioneers were eclipsed as larger and better funded operations entered the Russian oil market, although the major exception to this was Branobel.} Nevertheless, in Baku, the work of its pioneers was directly followed by larger conglomerates, unlike in Austria where, according to Frank, “neither monopolies nor cartels could be successfully established in Galicia” until just before the First World War.\footnote{Ibid., 143.} While large companies did exist there, such as MacGarvey’s Carpathian Company, their interests were much smaller than of Baku’s oil interests during the period.\footnote{Ibid., 163.} By 1909, Standard Oil was able to enter into the Galician Oil market, soon followed by British Primer Oil in 1910—although at that point general production in Galicia had already peaked.\footnote{Ibid., 168-171. Galician production would not reach much higher than 600-800 thousand barrels a year after 1914.} While Galicia did not see a consolidation of oil interests before the First World War, this consolidation happened too late in Galicia’s development to affect the industry in the same manner as it did in Baku.

Despite these similarities in development and government intervention between Galicia and Baku, however, there remained a distinct difference in terms of the demographics and origin of the working population of both sets of fields. Foremost, while the workers in Galicia were primarily local Poles, Ukrainians, and Jews, the working class in Baku was primarily made up of migrant labor pulled from across the
Russain Empire as well as northern Iran. Despite the local nature of Galicia’s workers, Frank argues that the “the primacy of allegiances was not based on class,” an outcome which ultimately limited the amount of labor agitation that occurred in Galicia. This situation, coupled with relative political stability from 1900 to 1914, certainly limited the degree of political radicalization that occurred in the province.

Likewise, the division between manual laborers and skilled laborers in Galicia was less strict than in Baku. According to Frank, there is no clear evidence that Polish, Ukrainian, or Jewish workers were truly locked into unskilled or skilled positions, although much of the management was non-local or foreign, especially after 1910. In contrast, in Baku (as Chapter One shows), there was a much clearer distinction between manual laborers, who were more often than not Azerbaijani or Persian, and skilled laborers and management, who were far more likely to be Russian, Armenian, or foreign-born. Ultimately, while Galicia did have a locally-sourced but diverse workforce, the intensity of its labor struggles as well as the degree of political radicalization it experienced remained significantly more muted than in Baku.

Furthermore, there is a distinct temporal gap between the peaks of the two oil-producing regions. While Galicia experienced a dramatic boom in production during the early twentieth century, from 1910 to 1920, a combination of steady depletion of existing fields and the complications of Russian advances during the First World War greatly

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704 Ibid., 127.
705 Ibid., 126.
706 Ibid., 127-129.
limited production capacity, and production steadily declined as a result.\textsuperscript{707} By 1925, Galicia only produced 705 metric tons of oil or 0.54\% of the global share in contrast to the Soviets’ 6206 metric tons or 5.0\% share of global production and the United States’ overwhelming 90,373 metric tons of production or 71.2\% share of global production.\textsuperscript{708} Baku suffered significant declines during the First World War and the Russian Civil War, but Soviet investment in the 1920s allowed a broad recovery to occur in Baku.

In comparison, Myrna Santiago’s tripartite focus in her \textit{Ecology of Oil} on “shifts in local land tenure patterns, changes in local land use and transformation in local social structures and composition” in Tampico’s share of oil production directly parallels that of Baku’s; nevertheless, there are some striking differences between the histories of both industries.\textsuperscript{709} In terms of local land tenure, the land taken by the oil industry in Baku, unlike the land in and around Tampico, was almost entirely non-arable and largely uninhabited. While undoubtedly the expansion of the oil industry in Baku did cause occasional population displacement, this displacement was nowhere near the level illustrated by Santiago, where entire villages were uprooted as the land they lived on was purchased by entrepreneurs such Edward Doheny, or the ecology system they depended on was eroded from under them in the space of months.\textsuperscript{710} Nevertheless, the living conditions of workers both in Baku and Tampico did have direct parallels; working class

\textsuperscript{707} Ibid., 70, 178. Baku’s production would reach a nadir of 3.2 million metric tons by 1920.

\textsuperscript{708} Ibid., 242. In comparable terms, this was 600,000 metric tons per year. DeGolyer and MacNaughton, \textit{Twentieth Century Petroleum Statistics}, 5, 8, 9.

\textsuperscript{709} Santiago, \textit{The Ecology of Oil}, 4.

\textsuperscript{710} Ibid., 67-68, 83.
neighborhoods in Baku, like in Tampico, often lacked “asphalt, potable water and sewage systems.” Moreover, as shown in Chapter One, oil fires and ground and water pollution were also a significant issue for Baku.

Likewise, while the oil industry caused profound social effects for both populations, the demographical change in the case of Baku was far more pronounced. While the oil industry in and around Tampico would pull in local workers and foreign engineers, the population change in Baku was vastly more pronounced to the point that the largest population in Baku by 1897 was Russian, not Azerbaijani. Moreover, while Santiago shows that the social impact of the oil industry was extensive in Tampico, including the growth of a robust labor movement, the region never saw the degree of political splintering and radicalization that Baku did during the early twentieth century.

While part of this may have been situational, since the politics of Baku also tracked with the radicalization happening across the Russian Empire, Baku was placed in a unique geopolitical position due to the events of the First World War and the Russian Civil War. Consequently, the connection between identity, politics, and violence in Baku may very well have been fundamentally different than it was in Tampico. Nevertheless, Santiago shows that there was very clearly a similar division between Tampico’s working population and its employers. If anything, both Baku and Tampico exhibited a similar

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711 Ibid., 121.
712 Ibid., 123-127.
713 Altstadt, The Azerbaijani Turks, 32.
714 Santiago, The Ecology of Oil, 230. While extensive strikes took place from 1918 to 1920 in Tampico, these labor actions never reached the comparable violence Baku would see in 1905 or 1918.
three-way division between local Azerbaijani or Mexican manual laborers, imported skilled workers, and largely British or American management.\textsuperscript{715}

Nevertheless, while significant strikes and occasional outbreaks of violence did occur in Tampico, the city never experienced a similar level of ethnic or political violence as that of Baku.\textsuperscript{716} Ultimately, both labor migration and labor conflict in Tampico were substantially different from what they were in Baku, and therefore, as a result, Tampico never faced the same degree of political or ethnic violence. In both the case of Galicia and Tampico, while there are broad similarities in the development of all three oil-producing regions, it was only in the case of Baku that radicalization and violence reached such an extensive degree.

While a comparison between Baku and other similar oil-producing regions such as Galicia and Tampico is useful, both areas more than likely experienced different historical results due to different complications—such as the different timing between the peaks of their respective oil industries and the outbreak of the First World War, as well as their geography.\textsuperscript{717} While Galicia experienced its fair share of ethnic tension as well as violence, especially during the First World War, it did not experience the same sort of internal violence against itself as Baku did from 1905 to 1920. In contrast, Tampico never experienced the same form of explicitly ethnic division as either Galicia or Baku. In comparison, all three localities may well have taken a different historical course because the social life of each locality was substantially different and there were differences in the

\textsuperscript{715} Ibid., 164-167.

\textsuperscript{716} Ibid., 236-237.

\textsuperscript{717} Frank, \textit{Oil Empire}, 70, 178.
timing as well as the scale of the development of each oil industry. In particular, the
decline and near demise of Galicia’s oil industry in the early twenty century would
change how the mechanics of its regional economy functioned, and, as a consequence,
the violence it experienced during the First and Second World Wars was largely external
to the internal economy of Galicia itself. Likewise, the rise of Tampico’s industry during
the late 1910s and its stagnation during the 1920s and its location in the Western
Hemisphere would steer its own historical development.

Baku, from 1900 to 1927, provides us with a unique snapshot of the industrial
transformation of a city during a period of political and military turmoil—a snapshot that
can provide profoundly useful lessons for today. While Baku itself has faded as a center
for oil production, the vast movement of labor in search of employment in commodity
production—as well as the attendant geopolitical struggles to harness those resources—
are elements that are still very much a part of our present-day. While it can be argued
that, unlike the Russian Empire and its breakup from 1917 to 1921, most of the world in
the early twenty-first century is in relative peace, there are certainly current examples that
should give us pause, such as the clear effects that general oil-price fluctuations have on
the Nigerian Delta or the geopolitical complexity of the majority Shia population
surrounding the main centers of oil production in Saudi Arabia.

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718 Thane Gustafson in Wheel of Fortune: The Battle for Oil and Power in Russia
(Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2012) provides useful illustrations of the
contemporary impact of these processes.

719 Michael Watts, ed., State, Oil and Agriculture in Nigeria (Berkeley: Institute of
International Studies Press, 1987) and Robert Vitalis, America’s Kingdom, 19-20. In addition,
Steven G. Galpern, in Money, Oil, and Empire in the Middle East, shows the effects that Anglo-
American geopolitical and energy interests in Iran had on the growth of Iranian nationalism
during early 1950s. Jedrzej Frynas in Oil in Nigeria: Conflict and Litigation between Oil
Communities and Village Communities (Münster, Germany: LIT Verlag Münster, 2000) provides
example of Baku is relatively unique due to the multiple revolutions and periods of warfare it faced, we should take to heart the warning its history provides: foremost, that the collision of material and geopolitical interests and ethnic violence can still happen and most likely will.

In addition, due to the plainly evident fact that our modern-day society is still collectively dependent (if not more dependent) on a steadily increasing supply of oil at stable prices than the world of the early twentieth century, it is likely prudent that both contemporary state and private enterprises be aware of the political, social, and economic legacies left by an over-reliance on oil and other essential commodities. These dangers are not only applicable to a particular state or private enterprise but to entire populations that surround the industry and therefore are often reliant on the employment provided by their production. The social, political, and economic processes present in Baku from 1900 to 1920 and focused on in this thesis are not unique to the city or the period and are still both applicable to our present and its future.

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