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## **Anatomy of a Rumour: Murder Scandal, the Musavat Party and Narratives of the Russian Revolution in Baku, 1917–20**

The Transcaucasus is adrift in rumors. They blow about in the air like the mountain winds.  
Scotland-Liddell

Just after midnight on 6 September 1919, amid the tumultuous Russian Revolution in Azerbaijan, a gunfight broke out in the New Light Café in central Baku city. Levan Gogoberidze, a leading Bolshevik member of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) and chair of the Baku Workers' Conference, was gunned down as he ate a late supper with two younger comrades, Mir Fattah Müsavi and Ashum Aliyev, both members of the Bolshevik's Himmät (Endeavour) faction. Gogoberidze survived, although seriously wounded. His supper companions were killed instantly. The event, what one observer called a 'small drama of three communists', sent shock waves throughout a tense and fractious Baku, capital of the newly-independent Azerbaijani Democratic Republic (ADR), one of the few remnants of the broken Russian Empire.<sup>1</sup>

According to the accounts of left-wing political parties, Gogoberidze and his comrades were the victims of an assassination plot, hatched by the Musavat (Equality) Party then sharing power in the ADR and perpetrated by one of its more notorious secret agents, Hajibäk Seidbäkov. The Bolsheviks claimed that Müsavi was shot because he had been holding documents that incriminated the 'Musavatist' ADR of a secret alliance with the White general, A.I. Denikin,

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1 The two quotes are from 'Doklad ministerstva vnutrennykh del: informatsiia Skotland-Liddell' in Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii Azerbaidzhanskoi Respubliki (hereafter GANI) f. 894 (Kantseliaria Ministerstva Vnutrennykh Del) o.10/d.81. Levan Davidovich Gogoberidze (1896–1937) was a member of the RSDLP from 1916, elected to the Baku Soviet in 1918. Mir Fattah Alioghli Müsavi (1891–1919) was a member of the Bolshevik Himmät from 1918 and Ashum Badaloghli Aliyev (1892–1919) from 1917.

then in battle with the Red Army to the north and ominously approaching within several hundred miles of Moscow. Seidbäkov reportedly started shooting after Mūsävi referred to him sarcastically as his ‘comrade’. That was pretext enough to start the fatal mêlée. ‘You are not my comrade’, responded Seidbäkov, at which point he drew his formidable Parabellum revolver and shot Mūsävi and Aliyev dead. According to the local Menshevik newspaper, Mūsävi was ‘so stunned that he did not even have time to move or reach for his gun’. The assassin Seidbäkov approached Gogoberidze to finish him off but misfired, only wounding him. He lay there bleeding on the cold stone floor of the café for several hours, bystanders and the police milling about, supposedly even discussing ways to cover up the truth of the crime. When the anti-Bolshevik governor-general, Puda Gudiyeu, arrived to survey the scene, he saw his old nemesis from the city’s fierce labour struggles lying in a pool of blood. ‘So Gogoberidze’, he exclaimed, ‘your crimes have finally caught up with you!’<sup>2</sup>

The official government story put a rather different spin on the incident. It was first verified by the account of Rustambäk Mirzayev (chief of the Baku city police and like Gudiyeu an avid anti-Bolshevik), one of the first to arrive on the scene; and later recounted in the report of an enigmatic British journalist, a certain Scotland-Liddell, who fully shared Gudiyeu’s and Mirzayev’s antipathies. According to the manager of the café, the three comrades had already been chatting and dining at their table for several hours. They had reportedly finished off five bottles of wine between them by the time Seidbäkov arrived for a late meal, accompanied by a fashionable young lady. He was indeed an ‘agent’, a manager of the Telegraph Agency of the Azerbaijani railway, his co-workers unanimously testifying that he was a ‘modest and hard-working’ young fellow. As Seidbäkov and his companion sat down to eat, Mūsävi reportedly began to taunt him, threatening that ‘very soon we will hang the current leadership of Azerbaijan by the parapets’ of downtown Baku and name Gogoberidze as prime minister. An argument ensued, with Mūsävi waving his revolver in anger. Seidbäkov quietly walked to the door, motioned his lady friend aside, took deliberate aim, and shot the three in cold blood. The police apprehended him within minutes and cordoned off the scene of the crime — or rather less a crime than an act of patriotism, in Scotland-Liddell’s estimation, ridding Baku of an urban blight — Bolshevism.<sup>3</sup>

To the Bolsheviks, the killings at the New Light Café were a political scandal of the highest order, a pivotal chapter in the unfolding drama of revolution and civil war. To Baku society at large, long accustomed to a reputation of public lawlessness and violence, albeit now exacerbated by the menaces of

2 This version of the events was reported by the Bolsheviks in ‘Däkhsätli bir fajia’, *Zähmät sädasy*, no. 8 (10 September 1919); by the Socialist Revolutionaries in ‘Tragicheskoe ubiistvo’, *Zaria*, no. 6/108 (9 September 1919); by the Mensheviks in ‘K ubiistvu sotsialistov’, *Iskra*, no. 171/200 (9 September 1919).

3 As reported in the ADR newspaper, ‘Ubiistvo v restorane’, *Azerbaidzhan*, no. 190 (7 September 1919).

revolutionaries and other marauders, they were just one more in a long series of 'restaurant murders'.<sup>4</sup> We may never be able to solve the puzzle as to who was right. Apart from the corpses, most of the objective facts are lost to us. There are no trial records. Seidbäkov, who soon jumped bail and fled Baku, was never brought to formal justice. All that remains of the murders are the subjective reconstructions, one wrapped in the sensationalism of political rumour, the other in the mundane reportage of a news story. At the outset, we must concede that there is little we can be sure about when it comes to the murders at the New Light Café. These events were more significant for what seemed to happen than for what actually happened. This is not to surrender before some all-encompassing post-modern relativism. It is to recognize relativism always at work in history: the power of rumour and news to signify and invest an event with diverse meanings depending on their diverse audiences. Rumours, after all, are 'improvised news'. Arising especially in times of colonial crisis, war and revolution, they circulate between the fluid oral culture of gossip and the established print culture of newspapers. They are 'public communications', 'embellished by allegations and attributions based on circumstantial evidence', that help to 'make sense of uncertain situations'.<sup>5</sup> The Bolsheviks charged the murders at the New Light Café with just such discursive symbolic values, much to the misfortune of their Musavat rivals. This makes them especially useful as a 'micro-historical' case study, a key to unlocking some of the political mysteries of the Russian Revolution in Azerbaijan. Sometimes it takes a little story to make better sense of a big narrative.<sup>6</sup>

The leading narratives of the Russian Revolution, try as they do to stitch back together the shattered pieces of the old regime, tend to explain either its grand causes or its consequences. They call up either the wilful actors of political history, or the objective forces of social history, or the structural conditions of geopolitics to make sense of it all. Why did Tsarism fall and the Bolsheviks win? What did the revolution mean for the future course of Russian history? Did Russia follow the way of other world revolutions or not?

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4 Quoted from the 'Doklad ministerstva vnutrennykh del' in GANI f.894/o.10/d.81. Kidnappings, murders and blood feuds were a common reality in Baku, the city newspaper *Kaspii* reporting on bodies found in alleyways or washed ashore upon the Caspian Sea embankment.

5 Quoted from Tamotsu Shibusani, *Improvvised News: A Sociological Study of Rumor* (New York 1966); and Ralph Rosnow, 'Rumor as Communication: A Contextualist Approach', *Journal of Communication*, 38/1 (Winter 1988), 12. For studies of rumour in Russian and Soviet history, see David Moon, 'Russian Peasant Volunteers at the Beginning of the Crimean War', *Slavic Review*, 51/4 (Winter 1992), 691–704; Lynne Viola, 'The Peasant Nightmare: Visions of Apocalypse in the Soviet Countryside', *Journal of Modern History*, 62 (December 1990), 747–70; and Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism. Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York and Oxford 1999).

6 'Phenomena previously considered to be sufficiently described and understood assume completely new meanings by altering the scale of observation. It is then possible to draw far wider generalizations.' Giovanni Levi, 'On Microhistory' in Peter Burke (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (University Park, PA 1992), 93–113.

Interpretations may vary widely, but its basic ‘anatomy’, its sequence of facts and parade of personalities, are by now beyond dispute.<sup>7</sup> These efforts have defined the terms of debate in Russian and Soviet history. They are invaluable. Still, they have created something of an impasse, pitting the political and social historians against each other and sometimes creating more polemic than clarity. The sum of these two parts may even lead us right back to the closed circle of Soviet historiography; to its bi-polar plot lines of heroes and villains; to the union of voluntarism with determinism; to the Bolshevik Party orchestrating the laws of the Marxist dialectic to the rhythms of Russian time.<sup>8</sup> Even Leopold Haimson’s celebrated model of ‘social polarization’ — namely between the *verkhi* (élites) and *nizi* (masses), the *tsensovoe obshchestvo* (census or propertied society) and the *demokratiia* (the revolutionary democracy) — may stray into this determinist track. It helped to undermine the paradigm of ‘totalitarian’ politics, explaining the divisions within Russian society that first made revolution possible, opening new vistas on a variety of social and national groups. Yet it still often locked them within the causal dichotomy of ‘polarization’, one-way bound for the inevitable revolutionary break-up, class ‘radicalization’, and the fatal contradictions of the ‘dual power’ (*dvoevlastie*).<sup>9</sup>

These causal forces are too tightly bound to the traction of dramatic elements: a beginning and end, characters and plots, a climax and dénouement. They leave us with orders of magnitude far surpassing the scale and wreckage of human events on the ground, far outweighing the very shattered pieces of the old regime. Micro-history, focusing on such events as the New Light murders, helps return us to what Lev Trotskii once described as the ‘molecular’ unfolding of social and political conflict; or what Paul Ricoeur has elegantly called the ‘the plot of lived experience’. For ‘what is resignified by narrative is what was already presignified at the level of human acting’. Retrospective history takes its cues from our everyday prospective imaginings of events either currently happening or still to come. We remember history from the ground up.<sup>10</sup> With such focus on the microscopic, on the everyday

7 For a critical review of the historiography, see Ronald G. Suny, ‘Toward a Social History of the October Revolution’, *American Historical Review*, 88/1 (February 1983), 31–52. The term was made famous, of course, in Crane Brinton’s *Anatomy of Revolution* (New York 1965).

8 S.A. Smith, ‘The “Social” and the “Political” in the Russian Revolution’, *The Historical Journal*, 38/3 (1995), 733–43; John Eric Marot, ‘A “Postmodern” Approach to the Russian Revolution? A Comment on Suny’, *The Russian Review*, 54 (April 1995), 260–4; Ronald G. Suny, ‘Revision and Retreat in the Historiography of 1917: Social History and Its Critics’, *The Russian Review*, 53 (April 1994), 165–82.

9 Leopold Haimson, ‘The Problem of Social Stability in Urban Russia, 1905–1917’, *Slavic Review*, XXIII/4 (December 1964), 619–42; and XXIV/1 (March 1965), 1–22. On ‘polarization’, something of a mantra in the historiography, see Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *The February Revolution: Petrograd, 1917* (Seattle and London 1981), xii, 6–7, 569; and William G. Rosenberg and Diane Koenker, ‘The Limits of Formal Protest: Worker Activism and Social Polarization in Petrograd and Moscow, March–October 1917’, *American Historical Review*, 92/2 (April 1987), 296–326.

10 Leon Trotskii, *The Russian Revolution: The Overthrow of Tsarism and the Triumph of the Soviets*, ed. F.W. Dupee, trans. Max Eastman (Garden City, NY 1959), 143. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. I (Chicago and London 1984), 31, 81. Or, as Hayden White has written in

and trivial, the events at the New Light Café reveal a much more tangled web of relationships between the Bolsheviks and their Musavatist rivals in Baku, a much more open-ended world of possibilities, than our retrospective historiography usually allows. Yet they also show how these historical actors crafted plot lines and meta-narratives out of the seeming randomness and chaos of their lives, indeed out of the very rumour and agitation of the revolutionary era, long before the historians crafted theirs. The more Russian society fell into revolutionary anarchy, the more rumourmongers were prone to narrate it. The events at the New Light Café show just how adept Bolshevik propagandists were (and the Musavatists not), amid the spiralling anarchy of the revolutionary era, in prefiguring and empowering the plot line of social polarization that has survived so tenaciously to this day.<sup>11</sup>

No study of rumour can be complete without an enquiry into origins. Not the origins of rumour as such, but the pathologies of prejudice and suspicion that inform it, the ideological 'codes' that give it meaning. No rumour survives in isolation. It is always part of a 'conversation' with other rumours. It, too, has a history.<sup>12</sup> Bolshevik propaganda about the events at the New Light Café depended upon a whole set of preconceptions about Muslims in general and about the Musavat Party in particular. The party's foundation in 1911 was an event from which the Bolsheviks did not soon or easily recover. They had been among the few politicians to court the opinion and support of progressives within the Muslim community of Baku. In 1904, the local committee of the RSDLP approved the Himmät faction, meant to represent the Muslim masses and promote their broad-based social and cultural advancement. This task became especially acute over the course of the next year, as anonymous rumours and mob violence, provoked by colonial crises and class antagonisms, overwhelmed the Muslim Turk and Christian Armenian communities of the Transcaucasus in mutually destructive sectarian pogroms. Muslim development and Muslim–Armenian reconciliation became imperatives for social-democratic unity. In 1906, the Bolsheviks and Himmätists further established

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response to Ricoeur, 'A meaningful life is one that aspires to the coherency of a story with a plot. Historical agents prospectively prefigure their lives as stories with plots.' From 'The Metaphysics of Narrativity: Time and Symbol in Ricoeur's Philosophy of History' in *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore and London 1987), 173.

11 Gary Saul Morson, *Narrative and Freedom. The Shadows of Time* (New Haven and London 1994), 6–9, calls this approach 'sideshadowing', one which recognizes 'a *middle realm* of real possibilities that could have happened even if they did not'. Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Visions and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York 1989), vii, calls this 'history from the side rather than history from above or below'. On the naming of 'events' as the building blocks of plots in literature and history, see Yuri Lotman, trans. Gail Lenhoff and Ronald Vroon, 'The Problem of Plot' in *The Structure of the Artistic Text* (Ann Arbor, MI 1977), 231–9; and Roland Barthes, 'Writing the Event' in *The Rustle of Language* (New York 1986), 150.

12 I borrow the terms and approach from Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi 1983), 264–5; and Anand A. Yang, 'A Conversation of Rumors: The Language of Popular *Mentalités* in Late Nineteenth-Century Colonial India', *Journal of Social History*, 20 (1986–87), 485–6.

the Union of Petroleum Workers in Baku, dedicated to the struggle for the rights of the Muslim workers of this oil-rich, industrializing city, and a check against Menshevik and Socialist Revolutionary (SR) domination of its Russian and Slavic proletariat.<sup>13</sup>

These mass-based political organizations counted the Muslim poor within the social-democratic camp, albeit in a rather demeaning secondary status, and transformed the Bolsheviks into a force of considerable political weight. But after 1907, the Stolypin reaction and economic depression decimated social-democratic ranks. In the international arena, the revolutionary, anti-European awakenings in Iran and Turkey, as well as the Balkan Wars, further inspired the Muslims of the Transcaucasus to pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism. Several leading members of the Himmät — among them Mammäd Amin Räsulzadä, together with other progressive thinkers in the Muslim community — established the Musavat Party in 1911. In its early years before the first world war, it was a relatively small, secret underground organization, much like its counterparts throughout the Middle East, working for the prosperity and political unity of the Muslim and Turkic-speaking world. The Tsar's secret police kept a close watch, never really identifying the Musavat Party as such, but staying well attuned to the subversive 'pan-Islamic' ideals of its members and sympathizers.<sup>14</sup>

Russia's social democrats received the foundation of the Musavat Party in these imperial, orientalist terms, governed by the long-standing ideological categories of Muslim 'backwardness', 'treachery' and religious 'fanaticism'.<sup>15</sup>

13 For the historical contexts, I have relied upon Ronald G. Suny, *The Baku Commune, 1917–1918: Class and Nationality in the Russian Revolution* (Princeton, NJ 1972); Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905–1920. The Shaping of National Identity in a Muslim Community* (Cambridge 1985); and Audrey Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks: Power and Identity under Russian Rule* (Stanford, CA 1992).

14 The Musavat's organization and programme bears remarkable similarity to the Arab 'al-Fatat' and 'al-Qahtaniyya' parties, all of whom drew inspiration from the Turkish Committee of Union and Progress. See Eliezer Tauber, *The Emergence of the Arab Movements* (London 1993), 90–9. The fears of 'pan-Islamism' among Russian imperial administrators were consistently expressed in such sources as: Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv politicheskikh partii i obshchestvennykh dvizhenii Azerbaidzhanskoi Respubliki (hereafter GAPPOD) f.276 (Istoriia Partii) o.8/d.459 (police reports in the Transcaucasus between 1911 and 1914); GAPPOD f.276/o.8/d.328/l.41,57 (secret police surveillance of the mail between 1909 and 1915); and Gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv Azerbaidzhanskoi Respubliki (GIA) f.46 (Kantseliaria Bakinskogo Gradonachal'nika) o.3/d.11/l.198,401,476 ('top secret' reports of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and other bodies for 1910). Several of these sources were reprinted in the official ADR publication, Ministerstvo Vnutrennykh Del, *Dokumenty po russoi politike v zakavkaz'e* (Baku 1920).

15 Daniel Brower, 'Russian Roads to Mecca: Religious Toleration and Muslim Pilgrimage in the Russian Empire', *Slavic Review*, 55/3 (Fall 1996), 571; Daniel Brower and Edward Lazzarini (eds), *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700–1917* (Bloomington, IN 1997); and Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861–1917* (Princeton, NJ 1985), 214–45, offer surveys of the ideological varieties of 'pan-Islamism' and Russian 'orientalism'. Among social democrats, these prejudices recalled Karl Marx's 'Romantic Orientalism', an imperative to bring a new civilized and progressive existence to the 'fundamentally lifeless Asia' on European terms. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York 1979), 154.

To the Bolsheviks, the Musavat's was a betrayal of historic proportions. In the words of one Soviet analyst, Räsulzadä and the Muslim social democrats of Baku had 'made a 180 degree turnaround straight from Bolshevism to pan-Islamism'. This was a potent and tenacious charge, targeting the Muslims as a deviant and disloyal minority within the empire, manipulated by the traitorous Musavat.<sup>16</sup> The Menshevik and SR parties of Baku, both largely dependent upon the support of selected Georgian, Armenian and Jewish cadres, as well as upon the ethnic Russian workers, had long vilified the Muslims as 'inert' and 'unconscious'. They were illiterate and inactive, failing to attend workers' meetings and pay union dues. They were primarily responsible for the communal violence between Muslims and Armenians in 1905. They did not speak Russian and remained vulnerable to religious and pan-Islamic rhetoric. No one could really speak for them because they had nothing worthwhile to say. The Musavat, by default, was the false friend of social democracy, just a party of feudal 'beks and khans', of nouveau riche capitalists and hate-mongering chauvinists. These accusations, centrepieces of a paranoid style in social-democratic politics, have endured in the historical literature far beyond their origins. In time, disparate parties — from the Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and SRs on the left, to Constitutional Democrats and Denikinists on the right — all agreed. The Musavat was hardly a party at all, rather just a handful of Muslim intellectuals and adventurists lording it over the 'dark' and 'ignorant' Muslim masses as they had always been lorded over, those very masses a 'lumpen proletariat' too ignorant to ever represent themselves.<sup>17</sup>

The charges were not entirely baseless. The early history of the Musavat Party defies simple categorization. Within a few short years between 1911 and 1917, its leaders set out to transform it from a small secretive organization into a mass party, here flirting with pan-Islamism, there with social democracy, or here again with a new nationalism. These were the building blocks of that creative 'synthesis' of Islam, socialism and nationalism which Alexandre Bennigsen and his school first examined during the 1970s in the thought and work of the Tatar national communist, Mirseid Sultangaliyev.<sup>18</sup> The Musavat's shifting politics tolerated few sympathizers outside the Muslim community. They certainly made for a motley collection of truths and half-truths ready for exploitation by the party's rivals. Without a doubt, the early Musavat was an élite secretive organization devoted to pan-Islamism. Its

16 Quoted from Mirza-Davud Guseinov, *Tiurkskaia demokraticeskaja partiia federalistov 'Musavat' v proshlom i nastoiashchem*, vol. I, *Programma i taktika* (Tiflis 1927), 10.

17 Compare A.I. Denikin, *Ocherki russkoi smuty*, vol. 4, *Vooruzhennyya sily Iuga Rossii* (Berlin 1925), 166–8; B. Baikova, 'Vospominaniia o revoliutsii v Zakavkaze (1917–1920 gg.)' in *Arkhiv russkoi revoliutsii*, 9 (1923), 109; P.A. Dzhaparidze's comments in *Izbrannye stat'i, rechi i pis'ma, 1905–1918 gg.* (Moscow 1958); Efendiev's comments (27 July 1919) in *Bor'ba za pobedu sovetskoi vlasti v Azerbaidzhane (1918–1920). Dokumenty i materialy* (Baku 1967), 236; and Suren S. Shaumian, 'Bakinskaia kommuna 1918 goda', *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, 12/59 (1926), 76, 83.

18 Alexandre A. Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, *Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union. A Revolutionary Strategy for the Colonial World* (Chicago 1979), xx.



leaders were largely well-educated professionals from the upper-class echelons of Azerbaijani Turkish society; its mass membership, mostly recruited between 1917 and 1919, comprised the poorly-educated Muslim underclass of Baku. By the power of custom and deference, Muslim elders and Musavat intellectuals did indeed enjoy the authority of traditional beks and khans among the Muslim poor. At the First Congress of the Musavat in October 1917, the capitalist mogul, Haji Zeynal 'Abdin Taghiyev, was greeted with prolonged applause by some of the very same Muslim workers who had fought him in the labour struggles of the day. Thus, Firuz Kazemzadeh's classic account of the Transcaucasus in revolution was partially correct to call the Musavat a 'party of the rising Azerbaijani bourgeoisie', the 'Azerbaijani masses . . . an obedient tool in the hands of a small leading group'.<sup>19</sup>

The Musavat's own awkward and laborious process of self-definition in 1917 complicated matters even more. Party programmes speak of a stalwart commitment to social-democratic values. The labour programme of the Musavat and its closest allies, the Turkic Party of Federalists and the Committee of Baku Muslim Social Organizations, reflected a moderate economic socialism: it called for an eight-hour day and six-day week; for special privileges for pregnant women and mothers; for pay twice a month in cash; for government insurance for lost work, and for inspections of workplaces and housing. It was against work for children under sixteen years of age and unjust overtime work. The land programme of the Musavat resolved to redistribute government and estate lands, without compensation, as the free private property of the 'working poor'. 'Up to now we have lived in grease and dirt', proclaimed the labour activist, Javad Mälik Eganov, at the First Congress of the Musavat, which promised the Muslim poor of Baku fuller representation in its ranks and fuller service to its class interests. The just tenets of the *Qur'an* and *Shari'at*, in union with the basic principles of European social democracy, demanded nothing less.<sup>20</sup>

Leading American and European historians have always recognized this socialist dimension of the Musavat, represented by Baku's 'left wing'. But they also portray a party struggling to fit its social-democratic ideals into a new 'liberal-nationalist' framework, in Tadeusz Swietochowski's apt words.<sup>21</sup> The

19 'S'iezd partii "Musavat", *Izvestiia Komiteta Bakinskikh Musul'manskikh Obshestvennykh Organizatsii* or *IKBOO* (published as a supplement to the journal, *Kaspii*), no. 242 (28 October/10 November 1917). Firuz Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia (1917-1921)* (New York 1951), 22.

20 'Pervoi s'iezd partii Musavat' (26 October 1917) in GANI f.894/o.10/d.60/ll.1-9; and 'S'iezd partii "Musavat"', *IKBOO*, no. 243 (29 October 1917). 'Munitsipal'naia programma', *IKBOO*, no. 171 (2/15 August 1917). 'Programma tiurkskoi partii federalistov' in *IKBOO*, no. 109 (19 May/1 June 1917) and no. 110 (20 May/2 June 1917). The land programme was not accepted at the First Congress as such, but in the compromise formula — the 'free use of the land for those willing to work it', from *IKBOO*, no. 232 (17/30 October 1917). On the religious principles supporting these platforms, see 'Musul'manskaia zhizn'. Miting musul'man', *IKBOO*, no. 171 (2/15 August 1917).

21 Tadeusz Swietochowski, 'The Himmät Party: Socialism and the National Question in

'liberal' Azerbaijani nation was to fulfil such modern values as secularism, women's rights, native-language instruction, universal education, and territorial autonomy within a new Russian federated republic. Like the Georgian Social Federalists and Georgian Mensheviks, with whom Azerbaijani Turkic intellectuals had longstanding ties, and not unlike the Armenian Dashnaksutiun Party, with whom relations were strained, the Musavatists found their moral compass not in class polarization but in class co-operation. Räsulzadä called this project 'Turkism', the union of the 'workers, peasants and progressive classes'. For him and his compatriots, the Russian Revolution was not merely an economic or political revolution, but also a national revolution, destined to give the 'oppressed classes their freedom' and the 'oppressed peoples their autonomy'. Or, in the words of Sultangaliyev, who enjoyed a wide readership in Baku, the revolution ought to free the 'exploited nations' of the Russian Empire just as much as the 'exploited classes'.<sup>22</sup>

Räsulzadä's logic was that, for an undeveloped and recently colonized people like the Azerbaijanis, national self-determination was not an end in itself, but the only proper means to achieve socialism. No socialism worth its name could tolerate a Muslim community ruled by anyone other than the Muslims themselves. This was an imperative that he shared with diverse elements within the Musavat camp, from the radical Marxist, S. Ibrahimov, a protégé of Sultangaliyev and chair of the Baku Council of Trans-Volga Muslims, to the moderate S. Rustambäkov, nationalist icon from Ganja.<sup>23</sup> The

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Russian Azerbaijan, 1904–1920', *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique*, XIX/1–2 (January–June 1978), 123. For studies that stress the nationalism (rather than the socialism) of the Musavat, see Suny, *Baku Commune*, op. cit., 86–7; Altstadt, *Azerbaijani Turks*, op. cit., 78–81; Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917–1923* (Cambridge, MA 1964), 100; Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russia and Azerbaijan: A Borderland in Transition* (New York 1995), 52–3, 61–2; Richard G. Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road to Independence, 1918* (Berkeley, CA 1969), 72, 127; and Bennigsen and Wimbush, *Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union*, op. cit., 220–1.

22 Compare Räsulzadä's views in 'Azerbaidzhanskaia respublika, 1919–1920' in GANI f.894/o.10/d.148/l.1–17, with M. Sultangaliyev, 'Printsip proporsional'nogo predstavitel'stva natsional'nostei', *IKBOO*, no. 106 (16/29 May 1917). Historians tend to privilege the Georgian social democrats for raising such a political programme. See the articles by Ronald Grigor Suny, 'Nationalism and Class in the Russian Revolution: A Comparative Discussion', 231; and Stephen F. Jones, 'Georgian Social Democracy in 1917', 250–65, both in Edith Rogovin Frankel, Jonathan Frankel and Baruch Knei-Paz (eds), *Revolution in Russia: Reassessments of 1917* (Cambridge 1992). Anahide Ter Minossian, 'Nationalism and Socialism in the Armenian Revolutionary Movement (1887–1912)' in Ronald G. Suny (ed.), *Transcaucasia, Nationalism, and Social Change: Essays in the History of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia* (Ann Arbor, MI 1996), 181.

23 Räsulzadä proposed this notion in an article on Muslim socialism for the Musavat newspaper, *Achiq söz* (June 1917), cited by Rauf Khudiev, 'Idei sotsializma v programme i taktike partii Musavat 1917–1920 gg.', an unpublished paper delivered at the conference, 'Obshchestvenno-politicheskaia mysl' v Azerbaidzhane v nachale XX veka', Khazar University, Baku, Azerbaijan (12 May 1996). But it was also repeated throughout the press in the summer and autumn of 1917. S. Ibrahimov spoke of 'national self-determination' as a means to the 'ultimate goal of socialism' in a lecture to Musavat workers, cited in 'V partii 'Musavat'', *IKBOO*, no. 189 (24 August/6 September 1917). The same sentiments were repeated by the lead editorial in

Musavatists believed that these political platforms — indeed their very own ethnic, language and confessional bonds with the Muslims of the Transcaucasus — gave them the right and authority to speak for their mass electorate. We are not ‘beks and khans’, they exclaimed in 1917, responding to the slanders and accusations of their Menshevik and SR rivals. There are no ‘élites’ (*verkhi*) here. We are merely the ‘masses’ (*nizi*) who have become ‘élites’ over ourselves, who seek only self-rule and equal representation. This was an impressive political fiction: that only the Musavatists could legitimately speak for the Muslims, or for the Azerbaijani Turks, or for their mutual class interests. But it was also a conceit that exaggerated the party’s attraction and control over those masses, deluding the Musavatists into thinking that the masses were always and everywhere theirs, and that they might even govern multi-ethnic Baku by monopolizing representation of the Muslim population.<sup>24</sup>

During the summer and autumn of 1917, the Bolsheviks appreciated these platforms and realities, mostly out of necessity arising from their own isolation and vulnerability in Baku politics. So they mounted a tactical alliance with the Musavatists, who in turn looked to the Bolsheviks as their former comrades in the workers’ struggles between 1904 and 1907, as well as the least chauvinistic of all the social democrats of Baku. Their political interests united in a joint programme for labour reform, for federal autonomy and national self-determination, and for a quick and just conclusion of the war. The Musavat and Bolshevik parties shared common rivals in the dominant Menshevik-SR bloc in the Baku Soviet, joining together for one of the last times in October 1917 to protest against the bloc’s obstructionist politics in the anti-Bolshevik ‘Committee of Public Safety’. The two parties combined forces in their joint industrial strikes during October. The Himmät and Musavat even had their party headquarters in the same building, that of the Turan publishing house, on adjoining floors.<sup>25</sup>

But by late autumn 1917, there was little left to keep the Bolsheviks and Musavatists working together. Class war began to turn into national war. Class issues, upon which there was general agreement, became less clear; few rumours ever arose in the revolutionary Transcaucasus, as we are about to see, framed in predominantly class terms. The real issue was power, and power

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*IKBOO*, no. 241 (27 October/9 November 1917); and by Sh.b. Rustambekov, ‘Doklad delegata tsentral’nogo komiteta tiurkskoi partii federalistov’ ‘Musavat’ o s’iezd narodov rossii v Kiev’, *IKBOO*, no. 244 (31 October/13 November 1917).

24 Lead editorial in *IKBOO*, no. 115 (27 May/9 June 1917); ‘Musul’manskaia pressa’, *IKBOO*, no. 117 (30 May/12 June 1917); ‘Golos’ povolzhian’, *IKBOO*, no. 119 (1/14 June 1917); ‘Politicheskoe nedomyslie’, *IKBOO*, no. 128 (1/24 June 1917). Or as Ranajit Guha has said, ‘dominance’ was ‘doubly articulated’. As in the case of British colonial India, the Russian state ruled over its subject peoples; and the ‘indigenous élite’ ruled over ‘the subaltern among the subject population itself’. From *Dominance without Hegemony. History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, MA 1997), 100.

25 S. Belen’ki and A. Manvelov, *Revoliutsiia 1917 goda v Azerbaidzhane* (Baku 1927), 203.

hinged on which nation or alliance of nations would rule the city and the country in the name of the *demokratiia*. The Musavat, for its part, was virtually powerless. Poised against it was a force perhaps even more intractable than any political party or foreign army: the ‘political’ rumour. Driven by the crisis of war, the collapse of government authority and the heightened competition between political parties, the rumour took on a special currency in the marketplace of the revolution. There may be no better measure of the anarchy that settled over the country, or of the creative potential of the popular imagination. Revolutions are, after all, unpredictable and evanescent phenomena by their very nature. Participants have consistently portrayed the suddenness and surprise of being caught up in their midst. Räsulzadä remembered the events between 1917 and 1920 as if they were a brilliant moving picture — a strange and dazzling montage of the real and unreal — and he a displaced character within it. Both participants and historians have underscored the elemental forces of anarchy and ‘spontaneity’ (*stikhiia*) at work in the Russian Revolution. Trotskii took great pains to deny these ‘mystic’ forces, arguing instead for the inner logic of events. But even he, always with an ear for dramatic pitch, could not resist temptation. So he wrote of the February Revolution in Petrograd: ‘Everywhere aimless movements, conflicting currents, whirlpools of people, individuals astounded as though suddenly gone deaf, unfastened trench coats, gesticulating students, soldiers without rifles, rifles without soldiers, boys firing into the air, a thousand-voiced tumult, hurricanes of wild rumour, false alarms, false rejoicings.’<sup>26</sup>

Historians tend to diminish the ‘chaos and anarchy’ of the Russian Revolution to little more than obtuse background setting, or abhor it altogether as a vacuum, unsuitable for historical analysis. For it turns the past, as Hans Kellner has observed, into ‘meaninglessness’, into ‘history of a negative kind’. Historiography cannot abide by anarchy as a figurative trope of discourse. It reduces to no comprehensible plot line.<sup>27</sup> But rumour, the cultural condition of anarchy, gives anarchy a voice, renders it meaningful. Newspapers and soviets, bazaars and tea houses, railway stations and roadsides, soldiers’ barracks and mosque courtyards — all became seedbeds of tall tales and innuendo, of Trotskii’s ‘wild rumours’ and ‘false alarms’. ‘Russia has been transformed into one big chatterbox (*govoril’no*)’, wrote one editorialist in what became a cliché of the revolutionary era. Almost everyone had their own plot line, their own story to share or tell anew. In the half-literate society of revolutionary Russia, most people first received the latest news and political ideology not as an informed reading public but as whispering crowds, passing on bits and

26 M.E. Räsulzadä in ‘Vtoroi s’iezd partii Musavat’, *Azerbaidzhan*, no. 263 (4 December 1919). Trotskii, *The Russian Revolution*, op. cit., 143–5, 126, 137–8. As P.V. Volobuev has noted, ‘In a revolution, each new day carries new possibilities, new alternatives.’ V.Iu. Cherniaev et al. (eds), *Anatomiia revoliutsii. 1917 god v Rossii* (St Petersburg 1994), 167.

27 See the discussion in Suny, ‘Toward a Social History of the October Revolution’, op. cit., 43–5. Hans Kellner and Roland Barthes quoted in Hans Kellner, *Language and Historical Representation: Getting the Story Crooked* (Madison, WI 1989), 296–7.

pieces of information with their own creative twists and not a little confusion.<sup>28</sup> Amid the traumas of war and civil disorder, reliable information mattered. It was often a matter of life or death. All manner of social and economic and national groups were now speaking to one another as never before. Words took flight, but they were hardly transparent. There was no single language of public discourse. Freedom of speech was tempered by the variety of idioms, dialects and languages now intersecting the public square.<sup>29</sup> And freedom of speech degenerated, all too often, into the license of rumour.

The Transcaucasus was especially vulnerable to the destructive power of rumour because it was just then emerging from a century of Russian colonial subjugation, a regime of sustained censorship, civic alienation and ethnic rivalry. But the region was also now torn between several empires in collapse (the Russian, Ottoman and British) and their armies in the field, compounding the absence of a healthy civil society with the vagaries of war and deprivation. These were the perfect conditions for rumour to flourish.<sup>30</sup> The rumour of choice in the Transcaucasus, beginning as early as April 1917, was an impending insurrection by the Muslim Turks against the Christian Russians and Armenians. Concerned Muslim citizens, backed by sympathetic social democrats and liberals, even formed their own committees to search for and prosecute the disseminators of such inflammatory rumours, as if the guilty parties might actually be traced and brought to justice. But this particular rumour was

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28 Lead editorial, *IKBOO*, no. 220 (2/15 October 1917). For more on rumour during the war and revolution, see John T. Smith, 'The Influence of the Russian Military Communiqués on Public Opinion during the First World War', *Revolutionary Russia*, 11/2 (December 1988), 33; Orlando Figes and Boris Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution. The Language and Symbols of 1917* (New Haven, CT and London 1999), 9–29; and Roger Pethybridge, *The Spread of the Russian Revolution. Essays on 1917* (New York 1972), 170–5. Suny, *Baku Commune*, op. cit. and Kazemzadeh, *Struggle for Transcaucasia*, both show a special appreciation of the power of rumour to drive events.

29 For studies of the unstable 'discursive world' of the Russian Revolution and early Soviet Russia, see Figes and Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution*, op. cit.; Orlando Figes, 'The Russian Revolution of 1917 and its Language in the Village', *The Russian Review*, 56 (July 1997), 342–4; Donald J. Raleigh, 'Languages of Power: How the Saratov Bolsheviks Imagined their Enemies', *Slavic Review*, 57/2 (Summer 1998), 320–49; Jeffrey Brooks, 'Public and Private Values in the Soviet Press, 1921–1928', *Slavic Review*, 48/1 (Spring 1989), 25; and Michael S. Gorham, 'Speaking in Tongues: Language Culture, Literature, and Language of State in Early Soviet Russia, 1921–1934', unpublished PhD dissertation (Stanford, CA 1994).

30 For nuanced, comparative approaches to the study of rumour, with special relevance for colonial situations and empires in crisis, I have relied upon: Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*, op. cit., 220–77; Ann Laura Stoler, "'In Cold Blood": Hierarchies of Credibility and the Politics of Colonial Narratives', *Representations*, 37 (Winter 1992), 151–89; Mark Cornwall, 'News, Rumor and the Control of Information in Austria-Hungary, 1914–1918', *History*, 77/249 (February 1992), 50–64; Gregory Evans Dowd, 'The Panic of 1751: The Significance of Rumors on the South Carolina-Cherokee Frontier', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3/LIII/3 (July 1996), 527–60; Glenda Riley, 'The Specter of a Savage: Rumors and Alarmism on the Overland Trail', *The Western Historical Quarterly* (October 1984), 427–42; and Steven Hahn, "'Extravagant Expectations" of Freedom: Rumour, Political Struggle, and the Christmas Insurrection Scare of 1865 in the American South', *Past and Present*, 157 (November 1997), 122–58.

especially tenacious. With the breakdown of the Caucasus front on the borders with Turkey, Russians and Armenians saw themselves caught in a deadly vice between advancing Turkish troops (whose state had already exacted the Armenian genocide of 1915) and the ‘treacherous’ local Muslim populations. Muslim civilians saw the retreating troops as advancing against them.<sup>31</sup> Newspapers reported the ensuing attacks and atrocities, some real but others imagined, with a mounting sense of doom. The Muslims bore the slander of ‘treachery’ rather unjustly, since they had remained publicly loyal to the Russian Empire, like the Musavat, throughout the first world war; although by now they had become ever more susceptible to Musavat rhetoric about pan-Muslim unity, especially with the invading Turks and neighbouring tribes of the North Caucasus. During the ‘Turko-Armenian’ war of summer 1917, Armenian partisan troops, still dressed in their Russian army uniforms and under the sway of Armenian ‘Dashnak’ nationalism, exercised their own brand of vigilante justice, ordering the summary searches, detentions or executions of any suspect Muslims behind the front. In Baku, well-armed Russian and Armenian militias conducted demeaning house-to-house searches throughout the city, violating deeply-felt Islamic codes of privacy and decorum, largely based on rumours that the Muslim residents were hoarding grain, flour and foodstuffs.<sup>32</sup>

These wartime ethnic and religious divisions turned manifestly political in August 1917. The worst biases and fears of Russian social democrats and Armenian nationals seemed to come true during the Kornilov Affair, when elements of the infamous Savage Division (*Dikaia diviziia*), composed of Muslim troops from the Transcaucasus, marched against the Petrograd Soviet on General Lavrenti Kornilov’s orders. The division had been formed as a non-professional, ‘wild’ volunteer unit in 1914 — originally composed of the Chechen, Cherkess and Tatar (Azerbaijani) cavalry regiments and an Adjar infantry battalion — to serve in the first world war as part of the Third Cavalry Corps. But the name of the division, partly a term of chauvinist abuse and partly a badge of local honour, also called to mind nearly a century of wars for the conquest of the ‘wild,’ mountainous North Caucasus, fought largely between the Russians and the Chechens and Cherkess. Reports in the Muslim press, subsequently verified by leading historical accounts, held that the officers of the Savage Division, mostly Russians and Georgians, may indeed have been in league with Kornilov. But the troops, famous ironically

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31 W.E.D. Allen and Paul Muratoff, *Caucasian Battlefields. A History of the Wars on the Turco-Caucasian Border, 1828–1921* (Cambridge 1953), 446–82. On these rumours, see ‘Kavkaz’, *IKBOO*, no. 96 (2/15 May 1917); ‘Otgoloski provokatsii’, *IKBOO* no. 122 (4/17 June 1917); ‘Kavkaz’, *IKBOO* no. 132 (16/29 June 1917); Belen’ki and Manvelov, *Revoliutsiia 1917 goda v Azerbaidzhane*, op. cit., 45, 57.

32 Shaumian, ‘Bakinskaia kommuna 1918 goda’, op. cit., 72, 84. ‘Musul’manskaia zhizn’, *IKBOO*, no. 206 (16/29 September 1917). ‘K poval’nym obyskam’ (25 August/7 September 1917) in Stepan G. Shaumian, *Izbrannye proizvoedeniia*, vol. 2, 1917–1918 gg. (Moscow 1958), 77–8. Belen’ki and Manvelov, *Revoliutsiia 1917 goda v Azerbaidzhane*, op. cit., 67, 230.

for their strict discipline, were neither aware of nor sympathetic to Kornilov's designs. When they were stopped some 37 miles outside the city by Russian railway workers and left-wing Muslim (Volga Tatar) agitators, they immediately joined the anti-Kornilov defensive.<sup>33</sup> Sergei Eisenstein's acclaimed film, *October* (1927), captured well both the orientalist imagery and the historical reality of the division's role in the Kornilov Affair. Eisenstein parodied the popular conception of the Muslim troops, at first showing them in full Caucasus regalia, squint-eyed and grimacing, holy warriors draped in *Qur'anic* verses. But they, too, succumbed to the slogans of 'Peace, Bread, Land and Brotherhood', once the true words of the revolution finally reached them. Baku's progressive Muslim community proudly noted that the quick reaction of the Savage Division's troops helped to save the Petrograd Soviet and foil the crafty plans of Kornilov and company.<sup>34</sup> But the damage of the Kornilov Affair and the Savage Division's role within it was already done. It had proved what many Russian social democrats had believed since their first contacts with the Muslims of Baku at the turn of the century: that the 'eastern' masses were an 'inert' and pliable force in the hands of counter-revolutionary élites.

These aspects of the Kornilov Affair were emblematic of an even greater crisis in Baku. The Musavatists placed themselves, and the Muslim poor whom they represented, squarely within 'Russian revolutionary democracy', the realm of popular liberty and social democracy, the realm of the soviets and committees. Time and again in 1917 they put their political faith in numbers, fortified by the ranks of the 'rural Muslim proletariat' and by the thousands of Muslim women who were voting for the first time. Between late spring and late autumn, they won impressive gains in democratic elections to the city food-supply committees; to the Baku Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies; to the Baku City Duma; and to the Transcaucas bloc within the Constituent Assembly. Years of agitation and propaganda between 1905 and 1917, not to speak of injustice and oppression, had indeed energized the Musavat intellectuals and Muslim workers of Baku to social-democratic and class-conscious ideals. The Muslims were not 'the dark semi-peasant masses', terms which once coloured the Russian workers and peasants, too, as Diane Koenker has cautioned. They were not 'uniformly irrational, poorly educated,

33 The official title of the division was the 'Native Caucasus Division' (*Kavkazskaia tuzemnaia diviziia*). Chingiz Salakhly, 'Musul'mankaia diviziia byla gordost'iu russkoi armii', *Vyshka* (7 October 1995, Baku), 5. The following diverse sources all attest to the revolutionary credentials of the Savage Division: E.I. Martynov, *Kornilov (popytka voennogo perevorota)* (Leningrad 1927), 144–6; N.Ia. Ivanov, *Kornilovshchina i ee razgrom. Iz istorii bor'by s kontrrevoliutsiei v 1917 g.* (Leningrad 1965), 174–9; Alexander Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd* (New York 1976), 127, 148; and Jorgen Larsen Munch, *The Kornilov Revolt: A Critical Examination of Sources and Research* (Aarhus 1987), 118.

34 These arguments were expressed in the September and October issues of *IKBOO* and in 'Elizavetpol': *Pervyi kavkazskii musul'manskii voennyi s'iezd*', *IKBOO*, no. 254 (19 November/2 December 1917), 1.

and incapable of independent participation in the political process'.<sup>35</sup> Rather, they rapidly became a powerful electoral bloc, joining socialist and nationalist principles under the Musavat's guidance.

But acceptance into the democratic community was not automatic. The Baku Soviet had the arcane legislative powers to decide who belonged and who did not. The Musavat and its mass supporters, in its estimation, did not.<sup>36</sup> Under the direction of the popular Bolshevik commissar, S.G. Shaumian (an Armenian), the Baku Soviet gerrymandered and invalidated the Musavat's electoral strength, excluding it from legitimate power-sharing in the democratic community.<sup>37</sup> By December 1917, now allied with the young Soviet state to the north, Baku's Bolsheviks fully joined their social-democratic brethren in the paranoid style of Russian revolutionary politics: branding the Musavat as a 'counter-revolutionary nationalist organization', representing the 'dark forces' of class and ethnic hatred. The official policy of the Soviet centre favoured recognition and compromise, autonomy and self-determination, for the new national movements throughout the empire, as represented in the new state proclamations and decrees of November 1917. But local Bolsheviks in the 'provinces' (*na meste*), from the Transcaucasus to the Volga Urals and Central Asia, proved that they could be more statist, more centrist than the centre itself. They now turned to violence against minority nationalism, represented in Baku by the Musavat, rather than accommodation and compromise.<sup>38</sup>

In such an atmosphere of mutual mistrust and apprehension, the contenders had little choice but to arm and prepare for possible sectarian war. Rumours of Turkish, Armenian or Russian atrocities induced a 'great fear' and mad rush for arms and self-defence, much like the events of 1789 in revolutionary France.<sup>39</sup> The Caucasus front now joined Baku politics with disastrous conse-

35 Diane Koenker, *Moscow Workers and the 1917 Revolution* (Princeton, NJ 1981), 359–60.

36 'Musul'manskaia pressa', *IKBOO*, no. 113 (25 May/7 June 1917); Belen'ki and Manvelov, *Revoliutsiia 1917 goda v Azerbaidzhane*, op. cit., 55. 'Vybory v komitet bakinskikh musul'manskikh obshchestvennykh organizatsii', *IKBOO*, no. 155 (14/27 July 1917). Boris Kolonitskii, "Democracy" in the Political Consciousness of the February Revolution', *Slavic Review*, 57/1 (1998), 95–106, discusses the contentions of the very term, 'democracy'.

37 For more on this campaign of 'exclusion', see Suny, *Baku Commune*, op. cit., 77–104; Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan*, op. cit., 103–4; Altstadt, *Azerbaijani Turks*, op. cit., 81–7; and Aidyn Balaev, *Azerbaidzhanskoe natsional'no-demokraticheskoe dvizhenie, 1917–1920 gg.* (Baku 1990), 10. On the Baku Soviet's gerrymandering as a relic of the old 'divide and conquer' policies of the Russian empire, see the September and October issues of *IKBOO*; and Belen'ki and Manvelov, *Revoliutsiia 1917 goda v Azerbaidzhane*, op. cit., 174–5.

38 Belen'ki and Manvelov, *Revoliutsiia 1917 goda v Azerbaidzhane*, op. cit., 174, 179. On the 'colonialist' policies of the Bolsheviks in Turkestan, see Bennigsen and Wimbush, *Muslim National Communism*, op. cit., 22–4; Adeeb Khalid, 'Tashkent 1917: Muslim Politics in Revolutionary Turkestan', *Slavic Review*, 55/2 (Summer 1996), 270, 290–2; and Marco Buttino, 'Turkestan 1917. La révolution des russes', *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique*, 32/1 (January–March 1991), 61–78.

39 Georges Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France* (New York 1973); Clay Ramsay, *The Ideology of the Great Fear. The Soissonnais in 1789* (Baltimore and London 1992).



quences, culminating in the notorious 'March Events' of 1918. The Bolsheviks militarized over the winter of 1917–18, sealing their new statism with the support of the Russian soldiers from the Caucasus front, whom they mobilized with patriotic appeals to 'save Petrograd', to support the 'central authority' of the Council of People's Commissars, to 'defend a united Soviet power for all Russia' and to 'save the revolution and Russia from ruin'. By March, the Bolsheviks had 6000 fighters at their disposal, supplemented by another 4000 or so Armenian troops under nationalist Dashnak leadership.<sup>40</sup> Besides the random acts of self-arming by Muslim groups and defence committees throughout the winter, Muslim civic leaders in Ganja and Baku also began to prepare national militias to promote self-determination through self-defence, or what they also called the 'law and order and well-being of the region'. They now turned to the worst, but for them the only, possible alternative: the armed remnants of the Savage Division scattered throughout the Transcaucasus.<sup>41</sup> These tensions broke into open conflict in January 1918. Under the authority of both the anti-Bolshevik 'Transcaucasus Commissariat' at Tiflis and the Muslim National Committee at Ganja (represented in Bolshevik propaganda as counter-revolutionary institutions within the dual power), Muslim forces disarmed Russian soldiers at Lenkoran and Shamkor, killing over 1000 in the latter skirmish. Here was concrete proof that, in the words of the Bolshevik Commissar, Alesha Dzhaparidze, Muslim forces were 'closing a counter-revolutionary circle around' Baku, advancing eastward from the Caucasus front, threatening from the North Caucasus and Dagestan, from Ganja and Shemakha, from Mugan and Lenkoran.<sup>42</sup> The Bolsheviks had turned the ubiquitous rumours of Muslim insurrection into their own focused rallying-cry for defence of the revolution.

The basic elements were now in place for the infamous and contentious 'March Events', when Russian Bolshevik and Armenian Dashnak troops vied with armed Muslim units for control of the streets of Baku. For the Bolsheviks, the March Events began with a rumour on 30 March that the officers and

40 The topic of Bolshevik 'great-Russian' statism remains under-explored in the historical literature. See the nationalist appeals to Russian soldiers in Z.I. Ibragimov and M.S. Iskenderov (eds), *Bolsheviki v bor'be za pobedu sotsialisticheskoi revoliutsii v Azerbaidzhane. Dokumenty i materialy, 1917–1918 gg.* (Baku 1957), 185–238, Shaumian, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, op. cit., vol. 2, 111–48, and in Belen'ki and Manvelov, *Revoliutsiia 1917 goda v Azerbaidzhane*, op. cit., 240. Shaumian, 'Bakinskaia kommuna 1918 goda', 72; A.L. Popov, 'Iz istorii revoliutsii v Vostochnom Zakavkaz'e (1917–1918 g.g.)', *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, 5/28 (1924), 18; Suny, *Baku Commune*, op. cit., 137–8, 177.

41 'Elisavetpol'skiia vpechatleniia', *IKBOO*, no. 229 (13/26 October 1917). 'Elizavetpol': Pervyi kavkazskii musul'manskii voennyi s'iezd', *IKBOO*, no. 254 (19 November/2 December 1917).

42 Dzhaparidze, 'Telegramma v Tiflis' (9 April 1918), and 'Doklad na chrezvychainom zasedanii soveta rabochikh, soldatskikh, i matrosskikh deputatov bakinskogo raiona' (8 April 1918), 223–6, in *Izbrannye stat'i, rechi i pis'ma*. A.B. Kadishev, *Interventsiia i grazhdanskaia voina v Zakavkaz'e* (Moscow 1960), 86–9. *Bolsheviki v bor'be za pobedu sotsialisticheskoi revoliutsii v Azerbaidzhane*, op. cit., 280–1. 'Lektsiia o kommune' (22–23 May/4–5 June 1918) in Shaumian, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, op. cit., vol. 2, 283–90.

soldiers of the Savage Division aboard the steamer, *Evelina*, were conspiring to lead a rebellion in Baku and were preparing to set off for Lenkoran to gather more forces. In Bolshevik propaganda, as in much of the later historiography, the ‘Musavat Mutiny’ of March 1918 was of a piece with the ‘Kornilov Mutiny’ of August 1917. The connecting link was the Savage Division. It had blindly served Kornilov’s notorious putsch attempt the year before. Now it provoked the ‘armed uprising’ or ‘mutiny’ of Musavat forces against legitimate Soviet power. In Bolshevik lore, the conflict brought 20,000 fighters to the streets of Baku, evenly matched between the 10,000 Russian and Armenian troops of the Baku Soviet and the 10,000 Muslim ‘troops’ of the Savage Division. This was an all-out ‘civil war’, in Shaumian’s words. The legitimate authorities representing Soviet power, intent on breaking out of the ‘circle’ of counter-revolution surrounding it, fought the good fight against the illegitimate rebels under the direction of the Musavat, intent on raising Baku as the capital of a renegade country (Azerbaijan) and uniting with the advancing Anatolian Turks. This was a civil war that, quite by coincidence in the Soviet version, also turned into the murderous ‘national war’ between Dashnak and Muslim forces between 1 and 3 April. The Bolsheviks freely admitted their inability to prevent the anti-Muslim pogroms that were perpetrated by renegade Dashnak troops and that spread to nearby cities and villages.<sup>43</sup>

To portray the March Events in these ways as a ‘mutiny’ is to lock them within the inevitability of class polarization, dual power and national enmity. It is to recapitulate the image of the Musavat as a treasonous, counter-revolutionary organization. Muslim sources contest these prejudices. They portray the March Events instead as initially an act of rather reckless violence, instigated by Muslim crowds frustrated by the Baku Soviet’s real policies of exclusion and patriarchy, angered by potent rumours that it was preparing to disarm and suppress them. Did the Musavat propagate the rumours so as to mobilize its rank and file? Perhaps some Musavatists were culpable. But there is also compelling evidence that the Bolshevik rumours of a mutiny were patently false, if however propitious for them. After all, Musavat representatives negotiated compromise solutions to the March crisis with the Baku Soviet. Musavat leaders later admitted that, rather than conspiring with them to mutiny, they had little if any control over the unrestrained zeal of armed Muslim civilians. Those very civilians, poorly armed and disorganized, comprised the vast majority of the so-called 10,000 strong Muslim ‘army’ that supposedly raised the mutiny at the behest of the Savage Division. There were

43 S.G. Shaumian, *Stat'i i rechi, 1917–1918 gg.* (Baku 1929), 154; Shaumian, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, op. cit., vol. 2, 208–15; and the background in Kadishev, *Interventsiia i grazhdanskaia voina*, op. cit., 84–8. This version was later recounted in I.A. Guseinov et al. (eds), *Istoriia Azerbaidzhana*, vol. 3 (Baku 1963), 103–8; and M.S. Iskenderov et al. (eds), *Ocherki istorii kommunisticheskoi partii Azerbaidzhana* (Baku 1963), 264–6. A. Popov, ‘Iz istorii revoliutsii v Vostochnom Zakavkaz'e 1917–1918 g.g.’, *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, 11/34 (1924), 153–5, affirmed ‘with complete certainty’ that the Musavat was responsible for the March Events.

likely no more than 200 members of the straggling Savage Division in Baku at the time. All of these factors bring the dominant Soviet interpretation of the March Events into question. It seems less an instance of class war against the Soviet, more a battle of rumours on national terms.<sup>44</sup>

The results of the March Events were immediate and total for the Musavat. Several hundreds of its members were killed in the fighting; up to 12,000 Muslim civilians perished; thousands of others fled Baku in a mass exodus. The Baku Soviet's policy of systematically polarizing and excluding the Musavat from the democratic community of the city was complete, with the Bolsheviks establishing the celebrated Baku Commune between March and June 1918.<sup>45</sup> From the Kornilov Affair to the March Events, the Musavat now bore the mantle of counter-revolution and mutiny, however ill-founded such accusations were. Against its own political designs, it now had no choice but to stake its future at the Transcaucasus Seim (diet) in Tiflis, joining the other side of dual power in the Russian Revolution, whence the Azerbaijani National Council soon proclaimed the foundation of the 'Azerbaijani Democratic Republic' (28 May 1918). It was, according to one of the Musavat's weightier claims, the first Muslim republic in the world. But this was an honour won more by default than by design. The Council itself was little more than those scattered members of the Muslim fraction of the Transcaucasus Seim assembled in Tiflis and Ganja. It identified the territory of the new 'Azerbaijani Democratic Republic' in vague terms as the 'southern and eastern lands of the Transcaucasus'. The chair of the Council, Fath 'Ali Khan Khoiski, announced the birth of the new state, where none had existed before, fraught with anxiety and disbelief, his face white and his hands trembling. Only the inveterate visionary, Mammäd Amin Räsulzadä, could fully imagine a world without empire, persuading his colleagues that Azerbaijan was a 'great and powerful nation', a 'most freedom-loving and revolutionary republic'.<sup>46</sup>

Räsulzadä spoke less as a politician, more as the moral authority of the

44 The English-language histories (although in agreement on many underlying facts) tend to divide in interpretation between those who see the March Events as an instance of Muslim counter-revolution and class war against a victimized Baku Soviet (Suny, *Baku Commune*, op. cit., 215–26); and those who see March as an instance of national war perpetrated by the Baku Soviet and Armenian troops against a victimized Muslim community (Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia*, op. cit., 75; Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union*, op. cit., 200; Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan*, op. cit., 112–19; and Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, op. cit., 85–6). My approach is to tap into several heretofore unused sources — including Dähshätli mart hadisäsinin mukhtäsar tarihchesi', *Azərbaycan*, no. 147 (21 March 1919), 3–4; and Seid Akhundzadä, *Mart hadisäsi 1918* (Baku 1919) — to highlight the rumours and mob violence behind the March Events, fundamentally a case study in national war.

45 Popov, 'Iz istorii revoliutsii', op. cit., 158–61; A. Mikoian, 'Bakinskaia organizatsiia bol'shevikov v 17–18 g.g.' in *Iz proshlogo: stati i vospominaniia iz istorii Bakinskoi organizatsiia rabochego dvizheniia v Baku* (Baku 1923), 33.

46 'Protokoly zasedaniia musul'manskoi fraktsii Zakavkazkogo siema i Azerbaidzhanskogo natsional'nogo soveta' (March to June 1918) in GANI f.970 (Ministerstvo Inostrannykh Del Azerbaidzhanskoi Respubliki) o.1s/d.1/l.43; and the official ADR 'Obraz pravleniia' (17 June 1918) in GANI f.970/o.1/d.3/l.12. Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan*, op. cit., 129.

new state and leader of the Musavat Party. Do not despair, he cautioned his colleagues; ‘Whenever you need us [the Musavat] you will find us here among you.’ This was a boast Räsulzadä might soon have come to regret. Over the next few years, the closer that the Musavat associated itself with the ADR, the more tarnished its socialist platforms became, and even more vulnerable to Bolshevik propaganda, which soon successfully conflated the popular Musavat Party with the manifestly unpopular policies of the ADR — separate in theory but equal in fact. Bolshevik propaganda turned into the Musavat’s own sad, self-fulfilling prophecies. The first blow came when the Azerbaijani National Council and Musavat returned to Baku in September 1918, several months after the fall of the Baku Commune. Turkish military forces and Azerbaijani militias carried out severe pogroms against the civilian Armenian community, vengeance for the March atrocities just a few months before. Even more insulting perhaps for the Musavat, most of its party activities ceased over the next few months as the country came under the occupation of Anatolian Turkish troops. Their general, Nuri Pasha, simply did not trust the Musavat’s left-wing, social-democratic programmes.<sup>47</sup> This situation improved somewhat under the British occupation, which replaced the Turkish army in November 1918 and lasted until early August 1919. In the unstable international arena of the Russian civil war, British troops contributed some stability and order to the brief experiment in the ADR. Major-General William Thomson, who supervised the occupation, caring little for the new government’s sovereign rights, and less still for the Musavat’s socialist platforms, allowed both wide latitude for self-government.

Yet self-government only brought the conflict between the two poles of Musavat politics — nationalism and socialism — into greater relief. Over the course of 1919, the ADR created all the formal markers of a western democracy: a provisional parliament, ministerial portfolios, diplomatic assignments and national flags and holidays. These were especially important signals to send to the Paris Peace Conference, whence Azerbaijani diplomats reported that few of the negotiators knew anything at all about Azerbaijan except that it was a ‘synonym for a savage country’, ruled by robbery and murder. How, then, to convince Paris that the Azerbaijani, too, deserved the gift of national self-determination, the promise of peace? Abroad, this called for a campaign to stress the country’s oil wealth and commercial traditions, expressly not its social-democratic tendencies.<sup>48</sup> At home, this called for the Musavat to reinvent itself as a governing party, a ‘populist’ party of the Azerbaijani nation, in Räsulzadä’s terms, sanctioning its newly-minted ‘liberal-nationalist’ platforms,

47 Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan*, op. cit., 130–2. Leftist members of the Azerbaijani National Council meeting in Ganja decried the ‘reactionary’ Turks as early as June 1918. ‘Protokol Azerbaidzhanskogo Natsional’nogo Soveta’ (17 June 1918) in GANI f.970/o.1s/d.1/ll.57–9.

48 The letter memorandum to Woodrow Wilson from the Azerbaijani Delegation at Paris in GANI f.970/o.1d.143/l.32; and the report of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (ADR), ‘Organizatsiia propagandy v zapadnoi evropy’ (1919) in GAPPOD f.277/o.2/d.31.

much to the consternation of younger, more radically socialist members. The party set out to create a new rank and file amongst provincial schoolteachers, boasting that it could 'register all the teachers and young progressives of Nukha and Arem'. Under the patronage of N. Usubäkov, the Ministry of National Education mounted an ambitious programme of modernizing the schools with native-language teaching and renovated curriculums, what he called the 'heart of the social organism' and of national life.<sup>49</sup>

At the same time, the socialist left wing of the Musavat made impressive gains among Baku's Muslim workers, reaching an all-time membership high of 7000. The core labour activists of the party — J.M. Eganov, Piri Mursulzadä, A.K. Kazimzadä, A.V. Mammäzadä and N. Usubäkov — centred the party programme around what they called 'neo-Islamism', uniting national and class values through the slogan, 'Equality, Brotherhood and Justice'. Azerbaijani nationalism, in other words, was a necessary and proper stage along the path to Islamic and socialist internationalism. Workers' sections of the party debated the struggle between 'labour and capital', even preparing to take control of their factory floors. In Baku, some sections called themselves the 'Musavat Socialist Party'.<sup>50</sup> Räsulzadä and Usubäkov had invented the party anew, in more moderate, statist tones, yet much of the party's rank and file remained true to a class-based revolution. The party was dividing against itself.

These national and social values complemented each other the most in mid-1919 during the ADR's political and military battles against Denikin's Volunteer Army, then occupying most of the North Caucasus and Dagestan. For months the official ADR and Musavat newspapers, along with the Bolshevik opposition press, rallied the population against Denikin. Their purposes were varied: defence of either the Azerbaijani homeland or of the young Soviet state. But they had the same foe. The common struggle brought the Musavatists and Bolsheviks together as never before, working side by side in the trenches of Baku's poor neighbourhoods. The Musavatists rallied Muslim workers in support of the Red Army, now an important, if indirect, element in the territorial defence of Azerbaijan. The Bolsheviks of Baku finally aligned themselves with the pro-national policies of the Moscow centre, recognizing *de facto* Azerbaijani independence in their major revisionist platforms and in their anti-Denikinist appeals to the Muslims of Baku. It was this common struggle that also brought the Himmätist (and later victim of the

49 Communication from N. Usubäkov to the Council of Ministers of the ADR (29 December 1918) in GANI f.51 (Ministerstvo Narodnogo Prosveshcheniia Azerbaidzhanskoi Respubliki) o.4/d.9/l.3. 'Doklad o partiinnoi organizatsii v Nukhe' (1918–1919) in GANI f.894/o.10/d.77/l.23. The Musavat shared power in several weak ADR coalition governments with a variety of independent politicians and smaller political fractions, especially the Socialist Bloc and Islamicist Ittihad (Union) Party.

50 'Raboचाia konferentsiia Musavata' (29 April 1919) in GANI f.894/o.10/d.83/l.1–5; 'Voprosy sotsial'no-politicheskoi zhizni' (undated), in GANI f.894/o.10/d.35. 'Protokoly obshchikh sobranii musul'manskikh rabochikh' (1919) in GANI f.894/o.10/d.6/l.2–4; d.22/l.1–18; d.1/l.4; and 'Protokol biuro sotsialisticheskoi partii Musavat' (1 July 1919) in GANI f.894/o.10/d.79/l.5.

New Light Café), Mir Fattah Müsəvi, into the ADR's own government, as assistant to the head of its counter-espionage unit, largely responsible for monitoring and defending against Denikin's agents operating in the country.<sup>51</sup> By late spring 1919, the Bolsheviks and Musavatists were essentially speaking the same language of mass mobilization: a combination, to varying degrees, of working-class interests and Azerbaijani national identity. For a moment, Bolshevik and Musavatist interests combined once again upon a shifting ground of national and social values. The Bolsheviks had made room for national principles within their broader, universalist platform for a socialist revolution. The Musavatists had remained true to their original socialist principles, if subsumed within their own particularist model for a national revolution. But events were about to prove just how untenable the Musavat paradigm was.

This all brings us back, in a roundabout way, to the early morning of 6 September 1919 and the murders at the New Light Café. The focused rumours about Musavat duplicity and Denikinist conspiracies revolving around the murders did not arise in a vacuum. They had been shaped long before in the contradictory platforms of the Musavat Party; in the complex relations between the Musavat and its rivals; in the crucibles of the Kornilov Affair and March Events. The sum total of these circumstances defined the Musavat, in social-democratic propaganda and rumour, as an engine for political treachery, for counter-revolution, and for anti-Soviet mutiny. Present circumstances aggravated the issues even more, with September 1919 turning out to be one of the ADR's most anxious months. British troops had evacuated the country only weeks before, leaving the government to rely on its own poorly trained and unreliable forces to defend against the border wars with Armenia to the west and the threat of Denikin to the north. Rumours raced through Baku that the ADR would collapse into chaos after the last British soldier had left. At the same time, Turkish representatives of Mustafa Kemal began to negotiate, through Himmät intermediaries in Baku, for their own anti-Entente alliance with the Soviet regime. The ADR government was well aware of these threats. Isolated militarily and diplomatically, it desperately sought foreign patrons, in Italy and Persia, although studiously avoiding any formal alliance with the Soviet Red Army, believed to be a menace to the ADR in its own right. In this setting, it is quite conceivable that some members of the government (especially people like Gudiyevev and Mirzayev) set out to negotiate a rapprochement

51 'Miting protesta', *Azerbaidzhan*, no. 121 (13 June 1919); original sources in *Bor'ba za pobedu*, op. cit., 152–3; and Dz. B. Guliev, *Bor'ba kommunisticheskoi partii za osushchestvlenie leninskoi natsional'noi politiki v Azerbaidzhane* (Baku 1970), 278–81, 300–15. A.I. Mikoian, *Dorogoi bor'by* (Moscow 1971), 471, 515; and the commentary by the Himmätist, S.A. Agamalioghli, in GAPPOD f.1/o.85/d.298/l.73–4, which discusses the Bolshevik-Musavat alliance against Denikin. 'For an Independent Soviet Azerbaijan' (2 May 1919) and for a distinct 'Communist Party of Azerbaijan'. Quoted from *Bor'ba za pobedu*, op. cit., 257. Stephen Blank, 'Bolshevik Organizational Development in Early Soviet Transcaucasia: Autonomy vs. Centralization, 1918–1924' in Ronald G. Suny (ed.) *Transcaucasia, Nationalism and Social Change: Essays in the History of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia* (Ann Arbor, MI 1983), 305–38.

with Denikin's numerous agents in Baku. At this difficult moment, such an alliance of convenience was certainly within the realm of the possible, just as the Bolsheviks claimed, although they were never able to prove it with any concrete evidence.<sup>52</sup>

The preponderance of circumstantial evidence suggests that the ADR was committed to waging a defensive war against Denikin's Volunteer Army throughout the summer and early autumn of 1919. The imperial principle animating Denikin's cause — 'Russia one and indivisible' — certainly militated against any ADR alliance with him. In June, the government decreed martial law, largely in response to his threats.<sup>53</sup> The ADR also allied with the Georgian Republic in a defensive pact against him, mobilizing military support among Azerbaijani Turks and other Caucasus Muslims for a broad-based insurrection against his forces occupying the North Caucasus. In Baku, the ADR found Denikin's army and his agents, not the Bolsheviks, to be the primary threat to Azerbaijani independence. During the month of September (1919), its 'Organization for the Struggle Against Counter-Revolution' (on which the Bolshevik-Himmätist Müsävi served) was exclusively dedicated to suppressing agents of the Volunteer Army: jailing its spies, obstructing its recruitments and arms purchases, and censoring its propaganda in Russian-language newspapers.<sup>54</sup> In his own memoirs, Denikin gave no hint of any ADR gestures for a secret alliance, a fact that he would have had no reason to hide. He even displayed some leniency and willingness to compromise with the regime, recognizing its independence until such time as the Russian empire was once again whole, and willing to grant some autonomy to the region in the future. But the ADR showed no patience at all, only 'malice and hatred' toward the Volunteer Army, in Denikin's words.<sup>55</sup>

These background factors mitigate Bolshevik rumours that the murders at the New Light Café were part of some grand pro-Denikinist conspiracy by ADR officials. The details of the crime, their 'anatomy' of rumour, are even more exculpatory. Bolshevik and Menshevik newspapers, describing the events 'as they really happened', reported the actual crime in minute detail as the unexpected result of a series of otherwise disconnected actions and reactions.

52 Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan*, op. cit., 152–7, 161–2.

53 Denikin showed mostly contempt and 'great-power chauvinism' toward the newly independent states of the Russian empire. Anna Procyk, *Russian Nationalism and Ukraine. The Nationality Policy of the Volunteer Army during the Civil War* (Edmonton and Toronto 1995), 165–75; and Anatol Shmelev, 'The Legacy of White Foreign Policy', *Meeting Report of the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies*, XVI/8 (1999).

54 'Obiazatel'noe postanovlenie komiteta gosudarstvennoi oborony' (11 June 1919) in GANI f.894/o.1/d.28/l.1; 'Konspektivnyi otchet o deiatel'nosti organizatsii po bor'be s kontr-revolutsiei v sent'iabre mesiatse 1919 g.' in GANI f.894/o.10/d.57/l.21; the anti-Denikin piece, 'Natsional'nyia perspektivy', *Azerbaijdzhan*, no. 228 (24 October 1919); and 'Puppets of German Militarism', *The Times* (6 October 1919), 7c — all corroborate the priority fear of Denikin. Peter Kenz, *Civil War in South Russia, 1919–1920. The Defeat of the Whites* (Berkeley, CA 1977), 210–12. Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan*, op. cit., 152–3.

55 Denikin, *Ocherki russkoi smuty*, op. cit., 137–9, 164–71.

In essence, it was a pair of simple restaurant killings. According to these left-wing accounts, Gogoberidze met Müsävi and Aliyev at the café by coincidence. Seidbäkov and his party, too, sat down next to them innocently enough. They all began a polite conversation, chatting about the latest news of Denikin's army, jumping back and forth between Russian and Azerbaijani, speaking on 'friendly terms'. Then came a sudden remark from Aliyev, something about Seidbäkov's family, along the lines that he was indeed no 'comrade' of the Bolsheviks, since he was a cohort of the old regime, first cousin to the former imperial vice-governor of Baku (Museib Akhundjanov). Such an affront could not be ignored. Seidbäkov had no choice but to receive it as an insult, deserving 'blood vengeance'. The honour of his family was at stake, no small matter in Caucasus culture. Then a slap and a fist fight, the four suddenly entangled. Outnumbered, Seidbäkov shot rapidly and randomly. The whole scene lasted but a few seconds, eyewitnesses remembering the shots as if fired from a machine-gun.<sup>56</sup>

On these objective details, Bolshevik and Menshevik commentators' accounts varied surprisingly little from those of other journalists, partly undercutting their own claims of a political conspiracy, yet also crafting the murders within the chronology of received factual detail and the traditional syntax of newspaper scandal.<sup>57</sup> But they were disturbed by a few embellishments in the official ADR government newspaper. First, the claim that Seidbäkov was accompanied by a pretty young lady, as if he were simply out for a pleasant evening. Second, that the three Bolsheviks had consumed five bottles of wine between them, implying that they were drunk by the time Seidbäkov arrived. Third, that the two parties exchanged sharp words about politics, as if it were the Bolsheviks who provoked Seidbäkov to anger. All of these seemingly trivial details, according to the Bolsheviks, helped to prove their theory of a conspiracy, of a premeditated cover-up of a premeditated crime. The details, allegedly planted by the government newspaper to make the killings look as if they had happened 'by coincidence' (*sluchaino*), were actually concrete proof that they had been 'planned' in advance (*vymyshlenno*). The seeming 'restaurant murders' were something else entirely. Why else, asked the Bolsheviks, would the three have been shot by Seidbäkov, a cousin of the former vice-governor of Baku, a 'sorry criminal from the counter-revolutionary clan of Azerbaijani khans?'. Why else would Seidbäkov have shot all three of his assailants, not just his tormentor, the indiscreet Aliyev? Why else would the wounded Gogoberidze have overheard the police creating a false story to cover up the incident and Seidbäkov's eventual escape?<sup>58</sup>

56 'Däkhstätli bir fajia', *Zähmät sädasy*, no. 8 (10 September 1919), 2–3.

57 On the syntax of scandal, see Joan Neuberger, 'Stories of the Street: Hooliganism in the St Petersburg Popular Press', *Slavic Review*, 48/2 (Summer 1989), 180; and Louise McReynolds, *The News Under Russia's Old Regime. The Development of a Mass-Circulation Press* (Princeton, NJ 1991), 56.

58 'Ubiistvo', no. 8, *Rabochii put* (7 September 1919), 1. 'Zhertvy belago terrora' and 'Pravda ob ubiistve', *Rabochii put*, no. 9 (9 September 1919), 1–2. *Bor'ba za pobedu*, 270–1.



These were all provocative questions. Each had its own equally reasonable answer. The fact that Seidbäkov was a relative of the former vice-governor seems poor evidence indeed of any grand conspiracy. Almost all newspaper accounts reported the actual facts of the case as four armed men engaged in a fist fight and shoot-out, a case of self-defence all around. The cover-up was probably nothing more than a favour to Seidbäkov's family; Gudiyeu and Mirzayev likely turning a blind eye to his flight from justice because they saw his action as a blameless crime and were otherwise predisposed to his high clan connections. But all these reasonable answers were irrelevant at the time of the murders. For if they are to be believed, 'rumours must have plausible plots'; and the Bolsheviks crafted their version of the murders with scandalous plausibility.<sup>59</sup> The climate of fear, suspicion and rumour at work in Baku, backed by perceived Musavat treachery, gave precedence to the worst possible scenarios, and credence to Bolshevik claims that in 1919 nothing was unconnected with politics, not even some simple restaurant murders.

There is a surreal quality to the murders and scandal that perplexes as much as it entertains. We can map out all the available facts, but are we really still within the realm of the historical? Or have we already entered the realm of the theatrical? The Himmät leader, Nariman Narimanov, was honest enough to admit, in his report to the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Moscow, that the story of the New Light Café was based 'upon rumours' (*po slukham*). But he then went on to make a whole set of his own fantastic accusations, as, for example, that the murders of Müsävi and Aliyev were deliberately 'organized by the Azerbaijani railway workers', probably on no more exact information than that Seidbäkov worked for the state railway (as a telegraph agent, we remember).<sup>60</sup> It was as if it did not matter whether or not Müsävi had discovered a conspiratorial ADR–Musavat–Denikin alliance, whether or not Seidbäkov was really a spy and assassin. It all seemed to be true. It all sounded plausible. That was enough to invest the rumours with a currency of truth. The murders of Müsävi and Aliyev were too poignant a dramatization of the true and just cause of the revolution, too powerful an imposition of Bolshevik values in the ebb and flow of everyday life. The mundane coincidence of a restaurant killing could not hold true.

Sergei Kirov's letter to Vladimir Lenin, sent almost three weeks after the murders from his distant listening post in Astrakhan (Russia), is most revealing in this regard. In it he showed a reckless disregard for the facts of the case, in the haste of the moment confusing the names of most of the historical actors almost beyond recognition. Müsävi became Musiev, Aliyev became Ashumov, Seidbäkov became Saltbekov, Gudiyeu became Guliev. Eager to show his party leaders in Moscow that Bolshevik fortunes were rising in Baku, Kirov scripted a familiar story of counter-revolutionary intrigue (Gudiyeu's plotting to ally with Denikin) and ripening revolutionary struggle (an ADR approaching

59 Stoler, 'In Cold Blood', op. cit., 179.

60 *Bor'ba za pobedu*, op. cit., 289–90. Narimanov may also have been referring to the fact that several battles between the Red Army and Muslim militias had taken place at railway stations.

collapse), all neatly packaged under the heading of Musavat betrayal.<sup>61</sup> The names were irrelevant, mere devices in a richer tableau, so long as the plot line remained the same. The Bolsheviks rewrote history just as they were making it.

Perhaps the biggest losers in this episode, besides the victims, were the Musavatists themselves. The logic of their national revolution and of ADR politics demanded that they accede to the official government version of the events as a pair of restaurant killings. But instead, left-wing Musavatists quietly recognized the Bolsheviks' very own plot line to the murders. They not only attended the funerals for Mūsāvi and Aliyev but also marched in protest with the Bolsheviks and Himmätists through the streets of downtown Baku. The Musavatist, Ali Yusufov, even delivered a short speech at the gravesides, honouring the fallen comrades as his 'dear friends' in the socialist movement.<sup>62</sup> The very party accused of conspiring to kill them was not only present but welcome at their funeral, a fact Soviet historians universally chose to forget. In Bolshevik propaganda and Soviet historiography, the Musavatists were counter-revolutionary thugs. But the events at the New Light Café show them as allies in the revolutionary struggle, revealing much closer co-operation between the parties than we have previously known. In their telegrams to the Musavat and ADR, councils of Muslim workers and peasants in the Baku city region also explained that they were moved by the murders, sympathizing almost unanimously with Mūsāvi and Aliyev, and with Bolshevik propaganda in defiance of Denikin's Volunteer Army. The Musavat's propagation of social-democratic values over the years had paid off in the Bolsheviks' own favour. Even Baku's apolitical 'Council of the Muslim Intelligentsia' pleaded with the authorities for a quick and just settlement of the counter-revolutionary crime, fearing the incendiary and de-legitimizing power of the rumours and accusations swirling about it, which the prime minister, N. Usubäkov, warned were 'suffocating' Baku.<sup>63</sup>

By late September, governor-general Gudiyeu was so perturbed by the festering New Light scandal that he closed down the Bolshevik newspaper, *Molodoi rabochii* ('The Young Worker'), for continuing to report and spread rumours about the conspiratorial dimensions of the event, thereby 'creating anarchy in the region'. He simultaneously increased surveillance and controls on Bolshevik underground activities. Gudiyeu based his decision on the Decree on Martial Law of 11 June 1919, originally designed against Denikin, which outlawed 'any public proclamation or dissemination of information or rumour with the potential to excite national hostility or hostility between different parts or classes of the population'.<sup>64</sup> Rumour had served as a bridge from the

61 *Bor'ba za pobedu*, op. cit., 288.

62 'Däfin mäsasimi', *Zähmät sädası*, no. 8 (10 September 1919), 3.

63 'Baky khäbärläri', *Azärbaijan*, no. 272 (13 September 1919), 2. 'N-b. Usubbekov o politicheskoi moment', *Azerbaidzhan*, 36 (22 February 1920).

64 *Bor'ba za pobedu*, op. cit., 285, 309. The decree in GANI f.894/o.1/d.28. The communication from the Minister of War (ADR) to the Committee of State Defence (12 October 1919) on the need to mount an anti-Bolshevik campaign, in GANI f.894/o.7/d.25/1.15.

anarchy of an empire in collapse to the anarchy of a failing new state, from the anarchy of the March Events to the anarchy of the New Light Café. Gudiyeiev, like the colourful Scotland-Liddell, saw rumours as but symptoms of a deeper pathology, the plague of Bolshevism on the city's body politic. To root out rumour was to stamp out Bolshevism.

But who was besieging whom? Only a year after its 'liberation' by Turkish troops, the country was beset by bread crises and food riots from the loss of its grain suppliers in the North Caucasus; by inflation and unemployment from a lack of production and distribution lines for its oil; by cholera and typhoid from the migrations of refugees and the breakdown of public hygiene; and by border wars to the west from continuing antagonisms with Armenia. The Musavat, once so proud to locate itself at the centre of the ADR, instead found itself at the centre of this whirlwind of economic and political collapse. By the time of the Second Congress of the Musavat in December 1919, the party's own challenges were indistinguishable from the government's: the struggle against bribery, corruption and opportunism; the struggle against faltering parliamentary coalitions; the struggle against 'stagnation' (*zastoi*), or what Räsulzadä called the absence of 'firm authority' within the Musavat and a 'strong government' within the ADR. Circumstances had defiled the Musavat's precarious balance of nationalism and socialism, at once alienating it from the ADR government above and the Muslim masses below. The Muslim poor, who suffered from these deprivations more than anyone else, expected their party to represent them in the ADR government, to fulfil their demands for social order and everyday subsistence. But the Musavat proved incapable of delivering on nearly every one of its platforms, crippled by the contradictions of a party torn between social democracy and liberal nationalism, the contradictions of a revolutionary party wielding new and unpopular state power. Its rhetoric began to unravel into ever more caustic anti-Armenian and anti-Russian diatribes.<sup>65</sup>

The Bolsheviks exploited these crises at every possible turn, highlighting the actual bribery and corruption within the 'Musavat government'; or the isolation and vulnerability of 'the small, ragtag states' of the Transcaucasus (Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan); or their dependence on new colonial masters (the Turkish, British or French) to back up their claims to sovereignty.

65 'Protokol zasedaniia organizatsionno-propagandicheskogo otdela Musavat' (23 May 1919) in GANI f.894/o.10/d.77/l.3; Räsulzadä's views in 'Azerbaidzhanskaia respublika, 1919–1920' in GANI f.894/o.10/d.148/l.61; 'Vtoroi s'iezd partii "Musavat"' in GANI f.970/o.1/d.201/l.1–2; and 'Vtoroi s'iezd partii "Musavat"', *Azerbaidzhan*, no. 265 (7 December 1919). For more on these contradictions, see Donald J. Raleigh, *Revolution on the Volga: 1917 in Saratov* (Ithaca and London 1986); William G. Rosenberg, 'Social Mediation and State Construction(s) in Revolutionary Russia', *Social History*, 19/2 (May 1994), 169–88; Michael C. Hickey, 'Local Government and State Authority in the Provinces: Smolensk, February–June 1917', *Slavic Review*, 55/4 (Winter 1996), 863–81; Suny, 'Nationalism and Class in the Russian Revolution: A Comparative Discussion', op. cit., 225; and Jones, 'Georgian Social Democracy in 1917', op. cit., 259–64, both in Frankel, Frankel and Knei-Paz (eds), *Revolution in Russia: Reassessments of 1917*, op. cit.

Propelled by the momentum of the New Light scandal, Bolshevik propagandists spread rumours on all these scores into late 1919 and early 1920, according to the ADR's Ministry of Internal Affairs, moving public opinion with images of an ADR in collapse. Common economic sense dictated, in Bolshevik propaganda terms, that the region belonged back with its natural 'centre', that Azerbaijan should restore its most valuable and accessible market for oil in Soviet Russia.<sup>66</sup> The murders at the New Light Café raised Bolshevik confidence about such agitation. The rumours of conspiracy and betrayal so expertly traded on the news markets of Baku had their effect, highlighting the ADR's weaknesses before Denikin and its isolation in the world community. Emboldened by the propaganda success of the murders, and by their revived support among Muslim workers, the Bolsheviks now began to plan in earnest for an overthrow of the ADR government. In the immediate wake of the New Light scandal, the Himmätist Hamid Sultanov wrote to Nariman Narimanov that the moment was precisely right to transform the Himmät into an independent 'Azerbaijani Communist Party', to 'co-opt the Muslim masses to our side and painlessly resolve the Azerbaijani question by restoring Soviet power here'.<sup>67</sup> By early October, the Bolsheviks had also formalized negotiations with agents of Mustafa Kemal, promising financial and military support to the Turks in exchange for a joint Turko-Soviet alliance in the Caucasus and Near East against the British and their former Azerbaijani client state.<sup>68</sup> Bolshevik propaganda was becoming quite prophetic, joining the ADR and Musavat as equal in imagined effect. The 'Musavat government' was faltering just as predicted. Even the very same pro-Denikin accusations that the Bolsheviks had levelled against the ADR during the New Light scandal eventually came true. By January 1920, in a vain attempt to break out of its international isolation and its vulnerability before the recovering Soviet state, the ADR regime finally approached Denikin in search of a mutually beneficial trade and military alliance. Both Denikin's White government and the European Entente powers, fearful of the mounting successes of the Red Army, finally recognized Azerbaijan's de facto independence in mid-January 1920. Top ADR officials celebrated by treating Oliver Worthrop, the British emissary in Baku, to a grand banquet. 'We English love facts', he pronounced to an adoring crowd. Amid the many crises surrounding it, the independence of the Azerbaijani

66 Bolshevik materials of May and June 1919 in *Bor'ba za pobedu*, op. cit., 115, 133–8, 158. Communication from the Ministry of Internal Affairs (ADR) to workers of the Baku region (22 April 1920) in GANI f.894/o.10/d.188.

67 'Svoboda narodov, Nezavisimost' natsii' (13 October 1919) and the 'Obrashchenie prezidiuma bakinskoi rabochei konferentsii' (6 September 1919), both in *Bor'ba za pobedu*, op. cit., 308–9, 270–1. Sultanov's letter of 25 September 1919 in GAPPOD f.609/o.1/d.53/l.5. For confirmation that Bolshevik support among Muslim workers rose steadily during and after the Mūsāvi and Aliyev burials, see V.G. Egorov, 'AKP(b) v podpol'e', *Bakinskii rabochii*, no. 25 (2 February 1922); Mikoian, *Dorogoi bor'by*, op. cit., 515, 553–4; and Guliev, *Bor'ba*, op. cit., 463.

68 Richard Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia. The First Year*, op. cit., 443–4; idem, *The Republic of Armenia. From London to Sèvres, February-August 1920* (Berkeley, CA 1996), 177–81.

'nation state' was just such a fact. He might have warned his hosts that no facts stand alone, or that the facts can too often change for the worse, or that rumour and innuendo can overpower and eradicate them in an instant.<sup>69</sup> But this honoured guest from England did not even recognize that he was bearing witness to the destructive anarchy of revolution all around him. For within three months, Worthrop's admiring hosts were already witnessing the final collapse of the ADR, their party and government in ruins, besieged by the superior numbers of Soviet military forces from without, and by successful Bolshevik agitation from within, especially in the ADR's very own military forces. On 29 April 1920, the Red Army occupied Baku adorned with its own national symbols. The troops wore special armbands decorated with red stars and crescent moons (symbols of the Soviet state and of Azerbaijani nationalism respectively), marching together with their new allies, Azerbaijani Turkish troops.<sup>70</sup>

The Soviet re-conquest of Azerbaijan, now refashioned as the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic, signalled the end of the ADR state, its patrons dispersed to political imprisonment in northern Russia or to exile in Iran. A few elements of the socialist Musavat Party survived, mostly at work in the Muslim neighbourhoods of Baku, building support for Soviet power, a tacit recognition by the new regime of the Musavat's social-democratic credentials. This precarious realm of semi-legality lasted until August 1923, when a cabal of four leading left-wing Musavatists disbanded their 'pseudo-socialist, nationalist party', in the words of the official Soviet proclamation. The 'Communist Party of Azerbaijan' was the truer 'national liberation movement', defending the class and national rights of the non-Russian peoples, freeing the 'Peoples of the East' from the 'yoke of imperialism'.<sup>71</sup> It thus became the only legitimate successor to the Musavat. This was how some propagandists put it in 1923; later historians would never put it this way again. To their credit, many of the early official Soviet histories of the ADR did indeed recognize the complexity and depth of Bolshevik–Musavat relations, as well as the socialist content of Musavat Party platforms, albeit within a broader fabric of misinformation and defilement. But the full historical record of the ADR was eventually buried, together with all the messy narratives about revolutionary anarchy, and all the awkward national and social narratives of the Musavat Party.<sup>72</sup> Their files were stored away in the 'secret archive' of the Archive

69 'Banket v chest' O. Uordropa', *Azerbaidzhan*, no. 18 (1 February 1920). For background, see Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia*, op. cit., 210–12.

70 P.G. Darabadi, 'Aprel'skii perelom', *Zerkalo*, no. 17 (27 April 1996, Baku), 19. Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia*, op. cit., 177–81.

71 The four men were Novruz Agayev, A. Mammädzadä, Seid Huseynzadä and K.B. Mikayilzadä — all left-wing members of the Baku Committee of the party in the last months of the ADR. See 'Konets Musavata', *Bakinskii rabochii*, no. 181 (14 August 1923) and 'K razvalu "Musavat"', no. 186 (20 August 1923). Swietochowski, *Russia and Azerbaijan*, op. cit., 110–11.

72 For discussions of the Musavat's 'socialist' credentials (often termed its 'petty-bourgeois' tendencies), see: S.E. Sef, 'K voprosu o sotsial'noi sushchnosti "Musavata"', *Bolshevik Zakavkaz'ia*, 5–6 (1928); the selected commentaries in Ia. Ratgauzer, 'Sotsial'naia sushchnost'

Department of the Azerbaijani section of the Cheka, not to see the full light of day until after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Even the Musavatists themselves, both those engaged in illegal underground work at home and those writing their memoirs from abroad, contributed to this process of historical amnesia. What with the victory of Soviet socialism in their homeland, they suppressed the socialist character of the Musavat, highlighting its nationalist, pan-Turkic, and even Islamicist values instead.<sup>73</sup>

The Russian Revolution and Civil War had upset the delicate balance between state authority and civic obedience. Fear and rumour undermined the normal order of mutual trust and expectation. Nothing was what it seemed any more. In Baku this meant Armenian soldiers dressed as Russians; or Russian soldiers parading as Turks. It meant neighbour losing faith in neighbour, rent apart by the destructive power of rumour. It meant a simple restaurant killing transformed into a political conspiracy of the highest order. These were all measures of the anarchy which stunned so many of the revolution's participants and which has eluded so many of its historians. But the anarchy is not lost to us. For the rumour and agitation of the revolutionary era were transformed into the weighty certainties of Soviet historiography. Rumour served as a first draft of history. The power of Bolshevik propaganda lay precisely in its ability to reshape and explain circumstances as they were happening, to script them to its political advantage, to portray them as events of a higher magnitude. Soviet historians drew from the scripts to craft their basic lines of argument and styles of presentation, ready made and certain, centred on the themes of social polarization and dual power. By the later 1920s, one could still read about Mūsāvi and Aliyev in the history books. Their deaths were now remembered not as a set of puzzling restaurant murders but as straightforward counter-revolutionary executions, orchestrated by the Musavat government of the ADR. Anastas Mikoian reminisced about the murders at the New Light Café as if he had been an eyewitness to them. But his memoirs simply plagiarized the scandalous accounts from the left-wing newspapers of the day.<sup>74</sup>

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Musavatizma', *Trudy pervoi vsesoiuznoi konferentsii istorikov-marksistov (1928–1929)*, vol. I (Moscow 1930), 501–16; and A.L. Popov, 'Iz istorii revoliutsii v vostochnom Zakavkaz'e (1917–1918 g.g.)', *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, 7/30 (1924), 114–18. As Suny, *Baku Commune*, op. cit., xiv–xv, carefully notes, such pieces of early Soviet-Azerbaijani historiography were relatively objective and balanced, if always within the limiting confines of Soviet propaganda and ideology. Those confines are discussed in James D. White, 'Early Soviet Historical Interpretations of the Russian Revolution, 1918–1924', *Soviet Studies*, XXXVII/3 (July 1985), 330–52; and Larry E. Holmes and William Burgess, 'Scholarly Voice or Political Echo? Soviet Party History in the 1920s', *Russian History/Histoire Russe*, 9/2–3 (1982), 378–98.

73 B. Rafiyev, *'Ganj Azer': Istintak Materialari Üzre* (Baku 1993). Mirza Bala Mehmetzade, *Milli Azərbaycan Hareketi* (Istanbul 1991); Naki Keykurun, *Azərbaycan İstiklal Mücadelesinin Hatıraları* (Istanbul 1964); and Mehmet Emin Resulzade, *Azərbaycan Cumhuriyeti. Keyfiyet-i Tesekkülü ve Simdiki Vaziyeti* (Istanbul 1990).

74 Mikoian, *Dorogoi bor'by*, op. cit., 515–17; M.S. Iskenderov, *Iz istorii bor'by kommunisticheskoi partii Azerbaidzhana* (Baku 1958), 404–6; *Istoriia Azerbaidzhana*, 193–8.

The images that survived the Russian Revolution in Azerbaijan over the 70 years of Soviet rule were the images of the victors. They shaped the historical memories of Azerbaijanis and Russians alike. They were the images of the New Light Café: of the Muslim poor being betrayed by their very own Musavat, the party of beks and khans; of impressionable Muslims being swayed and led by wiser and more practical Europeans. Pillorying the Musavat became a cottage industry, testimony perhaps to the depth of loyalty to its national and social principles among Baku's Muslim population, and to the Bolshevik desire to adapt them as their own. Falsifications of the Musavat were inscribed into the major works on the revolution. It had never really been a party of the working masses or of socialism, but only of the smallest nationalistic élites and propertied classes. It had never been the party of true national independence, but was guilty of 'political prostitution' before occupying Turkish and British forces. The Musavat and ADR were each no better than the worst failings of the other.<sup>75</sup> In the major entertainment films of these years, Musavatists took centre stage as the arch-villains of the revolution, the greedy and profligate élites of the aristocratic and bourgeois past.<sup>76</sup> Official Soviet historiography, consumed with such ritual demonization, left no room for dissent. The Musavat, a counter-revolutionary party of feudal khans and nouveau riche capitalists, deserved little more than scorn. The Bolsheviks had effectively defined the past, just as they had once plotted the present and predicted the future, all on the wings of rumour. The official history, facts so vividly remembered, quietly overshadowed the hidden record, facts so conveniently forgotten.

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75 The Soviets published an impressive array of politicized historical monographs to promote this line: A. Raevskii, *Angliiskie 'druz'ia' i musavatskie 'patrioty'* (Baku 1927); Ia. Ratgauzer, *Revoliutsiia i grazhdanskaia voina v Baku* (Baku 1927); M. Kuliev, *Vragi oktiabria v Azerbaidzhane* (Baku 1927); A. Steklov, *Armiia musavatskogo Azerbaidzhana* (Baku 1928); Ia. Ratgauzer, *Bor'ba za sovetskii Azerbaidzhan* (Baku 1928); A. Raevskii, *Partiia musavat i ee kontr-revoliutsionnaia rabota* (Baku 1929); A. Raevskii, *Musavatskoe pravitel'stvo na versal'skoi konferentsii* (Baku 1930), and N. Pchelin, *Krest'ianskii vopros pri musavate (1918–1920)* (Baku 1931).

76 In the film *Sevil'* (1929), the Musavatist banker, Balash Nurizadä, is consumed by profane lusts, dull ambition, and traditional male chauvinism. *In the Name of God* (1924) finds the bek, outfitted in Caucasus regalia, conspiring with rampaging Musavatist soldiers and corrupt clerics (though he drives a European car and dresses his wife in western finery). *Peasants* ('Kändlilär' of 1939) shows the plump Musavatist parliamentarians of the ADR counting their money on their Muslim prayer beads, oblivious to the plight of the Muslim poor. I was able to view these films at Azerkinovideo (Baku) in 1996, with thanks to its director, Oktai Mirkasimov.