

A Critique of Tadeusz Swietochowski's Works on the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (1918-1920) under the Prism of Edward Said's Orientalism

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Abstract: The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (1918-1920) (which shall, henceforth, be referred to as ADR) was an independent state which existed for 23 months and laid the ground for the future of Azerbaijan. Today's Azerbaijan is the inheritor and successor of the ideals and values of the ADR. In 2018, Azerbaijanis around the world celebrated the 100th anniversary of the ADR that showed the importance of this political event in the socio-political life of the nation. This article investigates the "Orientalist" points of view on the ADR in the works of "Azerbaijanist", Tadeusz Swietochowski. It analyses the standpoints that relegate the importance of this political event. The article provides a contextual analysis in order to find those points. The research found that not all the points on the ADR in Swietochowski's works are reliable. Some of Swietochowski's works were written decades ago before the USSR's dissolution, when the archives were under Soviet confidentiality. Despite the monopoly of Swietochowski in this field, the research suggests taking into consideration the newly discovered documents while studying the political events of the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries for the objective outcomes.

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Introduction

The ADR was the first democratic republic of the Muslim East which was a part of the Orient and subjected to Said's concept of Orientalism. It is enough to see Russian, i.e. Western historians' works related to the earlier 20th century, where they identified Azerbaijani people as Muslims of the Russian Empire, and at the same time, depicted them as a people of the Orient.

This article deals with the problem of the distortion of the history of the ADR in Tadeusz Swietochowski's works. This article aims to answer the following question: Is there any misrepresentation of the history of the ADR and reduction of the political importance of this political event in Swietochowski's works? The main thesis of this study is that the ADR is the achievement of the Muslim world that is studying in the West through the prisms of "Orientalism".

The significance of the study is that the ADR is one of the significant accomplishments of Muslim societies. The ADR was the first democratic republic in the entire Muslim East. Despite existing for only 23 months, the ADR reached great achievements regarding democracy, human rights, education, and diplomacy (Mahmudlu, 2005, p. 17), and if it had not been for the military intervention by Soviet Russia, the ADR could have been a role model of a state for the other Muslim countries that emerged at the beginning of the 20th century.

In order to provide an accurate picture of the ADR and its environment and to imagine it accurately, a short review of the historical background of the ADR is required.

Said's "Orientalism" as a Theoretical Approach

Usage of the term "Orientalism" above implies Said's concept of "Orientalism", which was introduced in 1978. Said's "Orientalism" is not simply as it seems from the name. It is not a specialisation, career, or field of study. Said's "Orientalism" is the scholarly created angle of view by the systematic conviction and set of beliefs which formed

with the influx of certain and uncertain indicators; indicators which were generated in its turn during the European colonialism under the influence of the idea of hegemony. The Orientalist point of view is the supporter and investor of the idea of privileged culture, i.e. European culture. Simply put, it is the attitude of the Occident to the Orient. This is also a discourse which defined a correlation between the West and the non-West. In other words, "Orientalism" is a misleading, distorting, misrepresenting, and stereotyping of the reality about life, culture, and politics of the East to justify colonialism of the West. It is a way to provide evidence of their colonial policy (Said, 1978, pp. 1-9). In the introduction of the book titled "Orientalism", Said quotes Karl Marx, where he says: They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented. ("They" refers to the Orient). This quotation demonstrates the reality of how the West is trying to give a justification for the colonial rule. What makes Said's "Orientalism" important is his (i.e. Said's) interpretation of the attitude of the colonial West to the East. For instance, Said stated: Orientalism is one of the forms of thinking which is based on the ontological and epistemological difference between East and West (Said, 1978, p. 2).

With consideration that the ADR was part of the Orient, there are some academic works where Said's "Orientalism" has its place, and they should be investigated in order to reveal the truth. In this sense, Orientalism is the theoretical framework for this article.

History and Background

The ADR proclaimed its independence on 28th May 1918, in Tiflis, after the dissolution of the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic (Mahmudlu, 2004, p. 28). The reason why the proclamation of independence happened in Tiflis was because Baku, the capital city of the ADR, was occupied by the Bolshevik-Dashnak militants at that time. The liberation of Baku became possible later with the help of the Ottoman State. Nuri Pasha, with the military assistance in facsimile and with the 5th Caucasian Military Division, arrived in Ganja by the request of the President of Interim National Council of the ADR, Mammad Amin Rasulzadeh. The Army of the ADR and the 5th Caucasian Military Division were combined to the Army of Islam of the Caucasus, under the command of Nuri Pasha in Ganja. On 15th September 1918, the

Army of Islam of the Caucasus liberated Baku from Bolshevik-Dashnak militants (Isgenderli, 2011, pp. 164-165). The new era started in the history of the ADR.

Despite that, the capital city was under the occupation of the leaders of the ADR and continued to get international recognition. However, after the liberation of Baku, the foreign policy of the government jumped into the new phase. The ADR was recognised by the Ottoman State, Great Britain, France, Belgium, Iran, Sweden, Ukraine, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland, Switzerland, USA, Denmark, Greece, Georgia (country), Germany, Armenia, Romania, Crimea, and the Mountainous Republic (Mahmudlu, 2004, p. 11).

One of the main goals of the ADR was the convening of the Parliament (*Milli Məclis*). Parliament, which officially began to operate on 7th December 1918, comprised of all nationalities and classes of the country. The Parliament seats were distributed in the following order: Muslims (Azerbaijanis) - 80, Armenians - 21, Russians - 10, Germans - 1, Georgians - 1, Polish - 1, Baku Labour Union - 1, and the Baku Oil Industry Union - 2 (Mahmudlu, 2004, p. 151). During its existence, the Parliament held 145 meetings, though 15 of them failed due to the insufficient participation of the members. The biggest party at the Parliament was *Müsavət*, and the second biggest was the Pan-Islamist party, *İttihad* (*Azərbaycan Respublikası Nazirlər Kabinetinin Yanında Baş Arxiv İdarəsi*, 1998, pp. 10-12). During the existence of the ADR, *Müsavət* was the party in power, while the *İttihad* party was the main opposition.

The ADR made efforts to be recognised as a subject of international law. The ADR sent its delegation to the Paris Peace Conference. However, the delegation was stuck in Istanbul for a while under several pretexts. The Head of Delegation, Alimardan bey Topchubashov had narrated all these artificial barriers in his letters to the Prime Minister of the ADR. It was only after four months that the delegation reached Paris. The Peace Delegation had accomplished several objectives (Topçubaşov, 1998, pp. 10-12). For example, on 12th January 1920, the ADR was recognised as de-facto by the Allied states (*Azərbaycan Respublikası Dini Qurumlarla İş üzrə Dövlət Komitəsi*, 2018, p. 168). The ADR also planned to open several diplomatic missions. For instance, one of the orders says:

To establish from 1 April 1920 diplomatic missions under the government of the French Republic, His Excellency King of Great Britain, His Excellency King of Italy, United States of the North-America, Germany, Republic of Soviet and Republic of Poland for the next 6 months (ARDA, F. 895, op.3, d. 1.45, N81).

However, on 28th April 1920, the Eleventh Red Army entered Azerbaijan and the authority was surrendered to the local socialists. Additionally, the ADR fell on this date, but not the statehood of Azerbaijan.

The ADR, in its short lifetime, had achieved significant results related to all spheres of life. The ADR is the first country in the entire Muslim world that adopted a law regarding women's rights on political participation. The ADR presented to women the right to vote and to be a candidate. It was mentioned in Article IV of the Declaration of Independence of the ADR on 28th May 1918 that: The ADR guarantees to all people within its borders full citizenship, civil and political rights, regardless of ethnicity, religion, madhhab, class and gender (National Archive of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Declaration of Independence, 1918, Archive document, f.894, list.10, 192, p.3).³

Another notable decision of the ADR was about higher education. Despite *Ittihad* Party's struggle, after four months of heated discussions, the first university of the ADR, Baku State University, was established on 1st September 1919. The resistance of *Ittihad* was about the language issue. They claimed that there is a shortage of teachers who can teach in Azerbaijani language. However, the *Müsavat* Party's main concern was to start laying the foundations of education for further development (*Azərbaycan Respublikası Nazirlər Kabinetinin Yanında Baş Arxiv İdarəsi*, 1998, p. 9). The founding of the State Bank of the ADR (Mahmudov, 2004) and the adoption of the law regarding citizenship (ARDA, F.970, list.1, 201, p. 7, 7 arch., 8, 8 arch.) were eminent acts in order to strengthen an independence and to liberate the economy from the all-Russian economic system.

³ Translation by Elchin Huseynov.

The facts stated above were the grand events which were the achievements of the Muslims of Transcaucasia. However, historians, political scientists, Orientalists, and other experts of the study area of the West claim that all these achievements of the ADR were the result of the influence of Russia and the West, i.e. of the Occident (Swietochowski, 1991, p. 56). There is truth that colonialism by the Russian Empire (1828-1917) had its impact on the events which had been done; however, this impact was not a contribution to the development. The policy of the Russian colonialism resulted in the political awaking of the Azerbaijani people.

“Orientalism” on the ADR and Their Refutation in Swietochowski’s Works

There are a few researchers who wrote about the history of Azerbaijan during the early 20th century. However, the existing literature is enough to research on “Orientalism” on the ADR. It could be claimed that the monopoly of this field in the West was in the hands of Swietochowski. He wrote several works regarding Azerbaijan, especially about the ADR. Swietochowski was a Polish historian and Caucasologist who was born in 1934, in France, and died in 2017, in the USA. He received his degrees from Warsaw and Columbia Universities. His field consists of the history of the ADR and the process of making the national identity of the Azerbaijanis. He was a professor at Monmouth University.

Additionally, he worked with the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies at the Wilson Centre, and lectured at the Warsaw University. He was known as an “Azerbaijanist”. His doctoral dissertation also was about Azerbaijani history between 1905-1920.

Accordance of the Title with the Reality

Edward Said, in his book, “Orientalism”, mentioned titles as the indicators of Orientalist points many times. For example, he examined Lewis’s works related to Islam and the Arabs, and mentioned the retitled work from “Revolt of Islam” to “Return of Islam”, where Lewis intended his Orientalist views (Said, 1979, p. 316). In this regard, the title to be analysed below could be examples of the Orientalist’s points.

In 1985, Swietochowski published a book titled, “*Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920: the shaping of a National Identity in a Muslim Community*”, by the Cambridge University Press. The title of this book is what catches attention first because during the specified time interval, Azerbaijan was a member of the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic (the confederation that was established after the fall of the Russian Empire in Transcaucasia in April 1918), and then in May, Azerbaijan proclaimed its independence in 1918 (See p. 3). However, “Russian Azerbaijan” implies that Azerbaijan is a part of Russia or Azerbaijan under the occupation of Russia. No matter what was written in the book, the title of the book creates prejudices and has an undeniable influence on reducing the political magnitude of the time. It could be claimed that the title of the book depicts a standpoint of Swietochowski on Azerbaijan of a specified period.

Sectarianism in Political Orientation

The most interesting and disturbing fact at the same time, which should be taken into consideration, is Swietochowski’s method of study of the Azerbaijani society where he insistently stressed on the sectarian diversity of the Azerbaijani society. In Swietochowski’s works, sectarianism is the main reason for the differences of the political orientations. The reasons justified are that the Shia Azerbaijanis were on the side of Persia, but the Sunnis felt that they belonged to the Ottoman State. He also argued that Shia Azerbaijanis voluntarily joined the Russian Empire against the Ottoman State and the Sunnis supported the Ottoman State during the Russo-Ottoman conflicts (Swietochowski, 1980, p. 1). This is clearly stated in another work:

The Shiite—Sunni split ran deep, and it found its reflection in Azerbaijani attitudes toward the nineteenth-century Russian wars. The Tsardom was able to make use of the Shiites against Turkey not only in 1828 but also in 1853-1855 as well as against the anti-Russian resistance spreading from Dagestan. By contrast, the Sunnis showed signs of restiveness at the time of Russo-Ottoman conflicts, tending to give support - sometimes armed support - to the Dagestanis; finally, many of them demonstrated their disposition by joining the outflow of Muslim emigrants from Russia. (Swietochowski, 1985, p. 8)

However, Azerbaijanis, despite their madhabs, always felt sympathy for the Ottoman State. There is evidence in the memoirs of Ahmet Ağaoğlu, an Azerbaijani patriotic thinker, public figure, governmental official, and one of the founders of the ADR. He wrote in the book titled, "Sixty-Seven Years After" (edited by his son, Samet Ağaoğlu), that during the 1877-1878 Russo-Ottoman war, the Tsardom (Tsar residence) demanded guarantees from authority representatives of the Azerbaijanis, that the Muslims will not support the Ottoman State. Nobody dared to do this, except Ağaoğlu's uncle, Mirza Muhammed, who promised them guarantees. Fellow countrymen asked him, "Why are you risking so much with taking this responsibility?" He answered: "If our people (people of Shusha, the city in Azerbaijan) will have enough determination and courage to resist against Russia I am always ready to sacrifice myself for that" (Балаев, 2018, p. 21). Considering that Mirza Muhammed was one of the influential Muslim Shias of the Shusha, the myth about the influence of the madhabs on the diverseness of political orientations of the Azerbaijani Muslims failed. Substantially, what was mentioned in Ağaoğlu's reminiscence is a demonstration of the real face of Russian colonialism. Mirza Muhammed was convinced that people would not join the Ottoman State forces because of lack of determination and courage, and not because of differences in madhab. The lack of determination and courage was the result of the policy of the colonialism by the Tsar.

Sectarianism in Self-Determination

Moreover, Swietochowski divided Azerbaijani society into two main identification groups: Shia and Sunni. He argued that Shia people identified themselves with the Persian perspective, while the Sunnis are with the Ottoman State perspective. While investigating the literary renaissance of Azerbaijan, he mentioned that:

As opposed to the case of the Shiites, there are no clergy in the Sunni branch of Islam. Also, the Sunnis were more receptive to the idea of a Turkic revival, given their cultural gravitation toward Turkey, even though it was weaker than that of the Shiites toward Persia. (Swietochowski, 1985, p. 27)

He then concludes by saying: “While the intelligentsia experienced an evolution that took it in quick succession from Pan-Islamism to Turkism to Azerbaijanism, the masses remained on the level of *umma* consciousness with its typical indifference to secular power, foreign or native” (Swietochowski, 1985, p. 193).

Thus, by saying that people remained to be under the *ummah* consciousness, it means that the theory of the separation of the society by identifying themselves with madhabs towards the Ottoman and Persia failed because the ideology of belonging to the *ummah* rejects this kind of identification.

However, it is the common trend in the works of Western scholars or the way of seeing Muslim society by the West, such as by dividing Muslim society into madhabs that are reflected in Swietochowski’s works. Despite that, the Russian Empire always tried to divide the Muslims of Transcaucasia into madhabs, conforming with the principle of “divide and rule”. The Pan-Islamic way of thinking was widely spread among people.

Sectarianism in Publishing

Furthermore, Swietochowski categorised publishers of the journals and newspapers of the early 20th century by their madhabs. He mentioned that, at the end of the 19th century, publishers of the journals and newspapers were Sunnis. He then mentioned that the newspaper, “Kaspi”, was sponsored by Haji Zaynalabdin Tagiyev (Swietochowski, 1991, p. 56). However, Haji Zaynalabdin Tagiyev, who was one of the famous millionaires in Azerbaijan, was a Shi’ah Muslim. Therefore, the ownership of newspapers had no sectarian significance.

The Ottoman Language Issue

The literary language and its impact on the creation of national identity was one of the main paths of Swietochowski’s researches. He studied various newspapers and journals from the 19th-20th centuries. His classification of the newspapers, as mentioned above, were based on madhabs and the language differences. It is true that there were published newspapers and journals in Russian and Turki (Azerbaijani). However, Swietochowski’s points linked the activities of the newspapers in the

Turki language to the missionary activities operated by the Ottoman State. For example, he mentioned that the newspaper, “*Füyüzat*”, was published by Ali Bey Huseynzadeh, an Azerbaijani patriotic thinker and one of the founders of the ADR. He described the newspaper “*Füyüzat*” as the main project of the programme of “Ottomanisation” (Swietochowski, 1991, pp. 57-58). He did not mention the fact that, at that time, the Azerbaijani language which was called Turki was almost the same as the Ottoman language. However, the Russian Empire tried to show that they were different languages because the Tsardom was afraid of rapprochement of the people. This evidence is shown by an Azerbaijani scholar and the father of the satirical genre in Azerbaijani literature, Mirza Alakbar Sabir, in his reactions and attempts of translating the Ottoman language to Turki. In one of his poems, which was later published in the book titled, “Hophopname”, he wrote:

“Osmanlıcadan tərcümə Türkə” bunu bilməm
(I do not know (I do not recognise) the translation from Ottoman to Turki)

Gerçək yazıyor gəncəli yainki hənəktir
(Ganjali writes true or ridicules it)

Mümkün iki dil birbirinə tərcümə amma
(It is possible to translate two different languages into each other, but)

“Osmanlıcadan tərcümə Türkə” nə deməkdir?!”
(What does it mean to “translate from Ottoman to Turki”?!)⁴ (Sabir, 2004, p. 343)

Swietochowski also, in another work, mentioned that in the 1919’s programme of the Müsavat party (the party in power during the existence of the ADR), it stated that, the teaching of the “Ottoman dialect” was obligatory and the ADR was heavily dependent on the Ottoman State, in terms of imported teachers and the educational system (Swietochowski, 1991, pp. 59-61). All these factors were called “Ottomanisation” by Swietochowski. However, it should be considered as the help of the brotherly country to the newly established state. Moreover, there is a difference between language and dialect.

⁴ Translation by Elchin Huseynov.

Swietochowski's Evaluation of the Ottoman State's and the British Presence in Baku

In Swietochowski's view, the politico-historical assessment of the military assistance of the Ottoman State to the ADR for the liberation of Baku from the Bolshevik-Dashnak militants in September 1918 is fascinating. Even though the Ottoman State soldiers were invited by the Interim National Council of the ADR to liberate Baku and stop the genocide of Muslims by the Armenians (Kazımzade, 2016, p. 11-13), Swietochowski, like most Western scholars, described this political event in his books and articles as an occupation. Generally, Swietochowski divided the history of the ADR into three main phases, where the first phase is the Ottoman State's "occupation" (Swietochowski, 1980, pp. 20-21). However, the invitation in itself denies the notion of occupation.

Additionally, Swietochowski wrote that: "Unlike Georgia and Armenia, Azerbaijan was not recognised by the Istanbul government, and the brotherly occupiers regarded her as a territory to be joined to Turkey" (Swietochowski, 1980, pp. 20-21).

However, there was a signed agreement between the ADR and the Ottoman State in Batum, on 4th July 1918. In order to support the idea of the Ottoman State's "occupation" of Baku, Swietochowski did not recognise the Batum agreement of 4th July 1918 as a recognition of the ADR by the Ottoman State. Nevertheless, the agreement was signed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the ADR, Mammad Hasan Hajinski, the Head of Interim National Council of the ADR, Mammad Emin Rasulzadeh, and the Minister of Justice of the Ottoman State, Khalil Mentesh. This agreement was the first international agreement which was signed by the ADR. It is enough to look at articles of the agreement to prove that this agreement was a recognition of the ADR independence by the Ottoman State. The agreement says that the ADR and Ottoman State will build peaceful, friendly, and good neighbourly relations. Also, coordinates of the borders between the two countries were given. The most important article here for the ADR was the 4th Article which stated that, in case of the need of military help, the Ottoman State can undertake the task of sending military assistance to the ADR. Furthermore, the agreement was mentioned about preparing a legal base for the opening of diplomatic missions (Hasanli, 2009, pp.

80-81). Based on this agreement, the ADR requested help from the Ottoman State for liberation of its capital city.

At the same time, Swietochowski described the British occupation of Baku as a rescuing it from the Ottoman State. After World War I, the Ottoman State had to withdraw military troops from the Caucasus as well as from the ADR. Instead of the Ottoman State's forces, the Allied countries sent British General, General Thomson, to Baku as a representative. Swietochowski also called this an "occupation" but described it differently. He described General Thomson's residence period in Baku as a development of the governmental institutions on the liberal-democratic line. Additionally, Swietochowski referred to reports regarding the decision of withdrawal of the British forces in 1919, where Thomson reported that the decision caused fear among the local people and they called this act an "act of perfidy" (Swietochowski, 1980, pp. 23-25).

It is interesting that Swietochowski also mentioned that the Azerbaijani people loved and believed in the Ottoman State's forces and mentioned how the people greeted the Army of Islam on the roads (Swietochowski, 1985, p. 131).

The standpoints stated above evoke interest, especially in the description of the stay of the Ottoman State's and the British Empire's troops in Baku. Swietochowski's arguments show the Ottoman State as an occupier of Transcaucasia and in the opposite, the Allied countries, i.e. Great Britain, as a rescuer and defender. It can be claimed that the points stated above are preconceived.

Moreover, Swietochowski's conclusion regarding the reasons for the fall of the ADR is debatable. He stated that the surrender of the authority by socialists was so easy because people did not understand the notion of a nation-state. He wrote:

The idea of an Azerbaijani nation-state did not take root among the majority of the population; the very term nationalism was either not understood by them or, worse, it rang with the sound of a term of abuse, a fact the Communists exploited in their propaganda against the Azerbaijani Republic. This might help explain why the overthrow of the republic was amazingly easy. (Swietochowski, 1985, p. 193)

His line of arguments tend to show that there was a big gap between the people and the leaders, and it is because of that that people did not fight against the Bolsheviks (Swietochowski, 1985, p. 193). However, the real reason for the fall of the ADR was the military intervention of Soviet Russia (Göyüşov, 1997, p. 123). The leaders of the ADR understood reality and could not just let people die in an unfair war without any assistance. The British occupation also had its impact on this. The presence of the British military troops prevented the building of a healthy defence system. That is why the leaders of the ADR allowed the power shift in the ADR to the local socialists. Furthermore, the Bolsheviks found social support in Azerbaijan, represented by local socialists and Armenians.

Conclusion

If you belong to the Orient, you are subjected to Said's concept of "Orientalism", thus being misrepresented. While a few international scholars have investigated the ADR's history, the existing literature is essential to understand how the West sees and evaluates the ADR and its activities. There is no doubt that at the time when Swietochowski did his researches about Azerbaijani history, there was a lack of primary sources and archival documents due to Soviet confidentiality. Most of the secondary sources which were used by Swietochowski were written in the first half of the 20th century after Sovietisation. As we now know, "Sovietisation" means changing the history of the nations in order to set up a new identity – Soviet citizenship. Therefore, the reliability of the sources is disputable.

There are some conclusions of the analysis above. It started from the book title issue to the assessment of the fall of the ADR. Swietochowski's method of investigation of the society, insistent separation of locals into madhabs, and putting this classification to the base of the social structure could be concluded as "Orientalist" points. Furthermore, Swietochowski's points analysed above showed jaundice on the Ottoman State and the ADR; the points, such as calling the liberation of Baku by the Army of Islam as an occupation, and blaming the Ottoman State in missionary activities by calling it "Ottomanisation".

This research suggests that while studying this field, owned especially by Swietochowski, the newly discovered primary sources and the written secondary sources after the USSR dissolution should be taken into account. Swietochowski's works have an undeniable significance related to the history of Azerbaijan. However, new researches are needed to make objective outcomes without misrepresentation of reality.

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