



doi: 10.32612/uw.2543618X.2025.pp.85-110

Przegląd Środkowo-Wschodni, 10, 2025
ISSN 2543-618X eISSN 2545-1324

Nr art. 20251004

Data przesłania: 20.04.2025

Data akceptacji: 17.06.2025

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Tsarist Censorship of Azerbaijani Journalism at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries

Carska cenzura wobec dziennikarstwa azerbejdżańskiego na przełomie XIX i XX w.

Po ostatecznej aneksji księstw azerbejdżańskich do carskiej Rosji w 1828 r. populacja Azerbejdżanu doświadczyła radykalnych zmian społecznych, politycznych i psychologicznych. Autorka ukazuje uwarunkowania społeczno-polityczne, w których doszło do narodzin azerbejdżańskiej myśli intelektualnej i politycznej. W artykule przeanalizowano ustawodawstwo carskie i cenzurę, którą władze rosyjskie stosowały wobec autorów azerbejdżańskich, ich działalności dziennikarskiej i dzieł teatralnych. Intelktualiści azerbejdżańscy mierzyli się z licznymi restrykcjami prawnymi dotyczącymi ich publikacji. Specyfika cenzury rosyjskiej w Azerbejdżanie polegała na tym, że administracja rosyjska nie zakazywała publikacji książek o tematyce teologicznej. Jednocześnie ograniczała publikację o treści innej niż teologia, z wyjątkiem tłumaczeń z literatury rosyjskiej. Doprowadziło to do pojawienia się na azerbejdżańskim rynku książkowym większej liczby tłumaczeń, głównie z języka rosyjskiego i mniej z innych języków. W zaistniałej sytuacji tłumaczenia te odegrały zasadniczą rolę w podnoszeniu poziomu kulturalnego społeczeństwa.

Słowa kluczowe: Azerbejdżan, Kaukaz, dziennikarstwo, cenzura, „Əkinçi”

Introduction

To better understand the environment into which Azerbaijani independent journalism was born 150 years ago, it would be crucial to look at the situation in this field in the Russian Empire. The time frame for the historical background of journalism in Russia requires an overview of the period, which dates back to the beginning of the 19th century.

The new century in Russia was marked with the enthronement of Alexander I (1801–1825), bringing hope for reformist and progressive changes in various aspects of state structures and social life. Then, the import of books and periodicals from abroad was permitted, along with the opening of private printing houses.

Impressions proved to be elusive. In 1804, *Цензурный устав* (the Censorship Statute) was introduced to resume abolished in 1802 pre-cursive censorship. The charter would underline that “study of all kinds of truth related to faith, mankind, civil rights, jurisprudence, state governance, or any field of governance must be done “modestly and prudently”, without any free thinking”. The protection of the interests of the authors was declared but not carried out. Thus, advice was given to the censors: “When a subject has a double meaning, then it is better to interpret it in a way that is most beneficial for the writer than to persecute him,” yet it was immediately strictly forbidden to print works that “oppose the government, morality, the law of God, and personal honor of the citizens.” If there was a manuscript of an essay with criticism of officials and government actions, the censor was obliged not only to ban it but also to take measures “to find the writer and deal with him according to the law”¹.

At the beginning of the XIX century, journalism in Russia was still a kind of “hobby” for noble intellectuals and not a profession that provided a livelihood. Journalistic work was still not paid. This hindered the development of journalism. An important factor in improving the

¹ Л. Рублева, *История Отеческой Журналистики XVIII–XIX Веков*, Южно Сахалинск 2012, p. 161.

structure of the Russian press was the emergence of publications covering administrative, economic, scientific, and technical activities. A positive effect on the development of journalism had also the creation of specialised media publications: musical, theatrical, pedagogical, women's, children's, bibliographic, and others. A feature of the development of journalism in this period should be considered its censorship, a ban on open discussion of political issues and the most important problems of domestic life. That's why indeed informational journalistic genres in Russia then existed only in their infancy².

Likewise, newspaper printing was not a profitable business in Russia. There were few subscribers. Therefore, most newspapers strove to publish officially and semi-officially under some state departments and at their expense. Publishing private newspapers was a risky business.

Only a few periodicals were profitable. For example, «Северная пчела» (the “Northern Bee”(1825–1864))³ was cost-effective, yet as history has shown, its publishers worked closely with The Third Department, from which they received financial support for their “faithful service”⁴.

Tsarist Censorship of Azerbaijani Journalism

Precisely, the history of censorship at the Caucasus is correlated with the initiation of establishment of state schools primarily in Georgia. Then, the main center of activities was Tiflis. Obviously education was correlated with publishing. The 23 December 1837 “Law on reviewing

² Л. Рублева, *История...*, op. cit., p. 163–164.

³ «Северная пчела» “The Northern Bee”(1825–1864) Russian political and literary newspaper, founded in Saint Petersburg, by the reactionary writer Thadeusz Bulcharyn who starting from 1831 through 1849 cooperated with Nikolai Grech. It was a popular periodical of the time, yet controversial as the editor in chief was from time to time an advisor and cooperator with Section Three (the Third Section of His Imperial Majesty's Own Chancellery) responsible for censorship.

⁴ Л. Рублева, *Ibidem*, p. 164.

books printed in local languages in Tbilisi, subordinating to the viceroy of Georgia, Caucasus and Transcaucasus provinces” laid the foundation of censorship history in the region. This law was in force for 10 years, subsequently being extended on control of content of the press, permissions to new publications, lithographies, opening of printing houses and alike spaces⁵.

As for tsarist censorship versus Azerbaijani press, we find significant thoughtprovoking details in each of its historical aspects. An important step in the history of publishing in Azerbaijan was the first book allowed by censors to be published in the Russian Empire by an Azerbaijani author, which was “*Qanun-i Qudsi*” by Abbasqulu Aga Bakikhanov. The book was a grammar tutorial in Persian, written in 1829. The ultimate necessity of such a monograph for the whole Russia was fundamental, as there was a high demand for cadres with knowledge of language, so as to deal with newly acquired territories along with the foreign policy of the region.

On January 13th (25th) 1830, Karl Nesselrode submits to Tzar Nicholas I of Russia a written report indicating high merits of A. Bakikhanov as a loyal subject of the Empire, along with peculiarity as a talented author in his literary output, stating agreement with count Ivan Fyodorovich Paskevich, who while informing about the project of publication underlined his own belief that Bakikhanov has to be praised for dedication to matters of country service specifically through the publication of a book within state funding. Emperor Nicholas I grants permission, orders 500 copies to be published in Petersburg, and bestows the author with a diamond ring⁶. Those were the official records on the matter. Yet, as indicated by Ağarəfi Zeynalzadə the same book of Bakikhanov was published in Tiflis in 1832 and Bakikhanov paid from his pocket the overall project of publication of 1000 copies to typesetter Araratov⁷.

⁵ A. Zeynalzadə, *Azərbaycan mətbuatı və çar senzurası (1850–1905)*, Bakı 2006, p. 3.

⁶ A. Бакиханов, *Сочинения, записки, письма*, Баку 1983, pp. 313–314.

⁷ A. Zeynalzadə, *Azərbaycan mətbuatı...*, op. cit., pp. 8–10.

Remarkably, when we look at the censorship situation in the Russian and in the Ottoman Empires we can see significant likeness. Tadeusz Bulcharyn, a man who'd chosen to cooperate with Russian authorities was writing in his letter dated October the 5th, 1849 to Leontiy Dubelt⁸:

Our current censorship has reached the highest degree of ridiculousness. A whole list of forbidden words has been compiled; the most useful and well-intentioned are prohibited. Anecdotes are circulating all over Russia, depicting censorship in a ridiculous way, and involuntarily, all its stupid actions are attributed to the government. I consider it superfluous to spread the harm from this⁹.

In his turn, Çağrı Çalışkan gives a detailed reference to the forbidden by censorship words in the Ottoman Empire, in which we find definitions such as nation, reform, freedom, equality, homeland, republic, bomb, nation, cruelty, justice, crazy, brother, sick, star, hill, beard, nose,¹⁰ paint, phrases like “get it done”¹¹ to mention just a few among the forbidden¹².

The territorial aspect of the matter is as follows. While censorship committees and individual censors in the main cities of Russia and provinces were equal and independent institutions, subordinate to the Main Directorate of Censorship (the central censorship institution), the equivalent institutions in Warsaw¹³ and Tiflis were organised differently.

⁸ Dubelt Leontiy Vasilyevich (1792–1862) from 1839 to 1856 – head of The IIIrd Department responsible for censorship in Imperial Russia.

⁹ А. Рейтблат А., Видок Фиглярин, *История одной литературной репутации*, <http://vivovoco.astronet.ru/VV/PAPERS/ECCE/BULGARIN.HTM>, Accessed: 21.04.2023.

¹⁰ Because it could have been bringing to mind facial features of the Sultan Abdülhamid II.

¹¹ Because it resembled the phrase used colloquially for the idea of dethronement of the Sultan.

¹² See Ç. Çalışkan, *II. Abdülhamid Döneminde Kitaplar Üzerinde Sansür Uygulamaları (1876–1909)*, Pamukkale Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Denizli 2019, p. 26.

¹³ The Warsaw Censorship Committee acted on the basis of the Charter on Censorship in the Warsaw Academic District (dated May 25, 1843) and was administered by the Trustee of the Warsaw Academic District and the Council of Public Education of

The Caucasian censorship committee in Tiflis was guided by the censorship laws that existed in the empire, but was subordinate to the Caucasian governor. It consisted of a chairman, whose duties were performed by the assistant trustee of the Caucasian educational district, and three censors appointed from the senior teachers of the Tiflis gymnasium. The duties of the censors consisted of examining periodicals and books published in the Caucasian educational district, as well as reviewing all books, newspapers and magazines in oriental languages, prints and other similar publications newspapers and magazines in European languages, published within Turkish possessions, brought from abroad to the Transcaucasian region. In addition, the Caucasian Censorship Committee received the right to allow travellers who came to the Transcaucasian Territory bringing “one copy of the books of nautical, commercial, economic, topographical and marine descriptions, road builders, prayer books”¹⁴.

To maintain the “unity of action” of the censors, the provincial institutions received catalogues and lists of allowed and prohibited books, which guided their work. Their reports on unknown books were approved at committee meetings in Saint Petersburg. Only the Warsaw and Caucasian censorship committees could make decisions independently¹⁵.

the Kingdom of Poland under the supervision of the Viceroy of the Kingdom of Poland and the Minister of Public Education of the Empire. The vice-president of the Council was the chairman of the committee. The Committee controlled all publications printed in the Kingdom of Poland and exported to its territory from abroad, that is how it carried out internal and external censorship. See Антонов В. В., Гринченко Н. А., Измозик В. С., Патрушева Н. Г. Материалы для биобиблиографического справочника «Цензоры Российской империи, конец XVIII – начало XX века»: [Казань, Царство Польское], [в:] *Цензура в России: история и современность*: сб. науч. тр. СПб., 2008. Вып. 4. pp. 390–395.

¹⁴ ПСЗ. Собр. 2. Т. 24. № 23608. См. подробнее: Н. Патрушева, *История цензурных учреждений на Кавказе в XIX – начале XX века*, [в:] *Книжное дело на Северном Кавказе: история и современность*: сб. Ст. Краснодар, 2004, Вып. 2, pp. 170–195.

¹⁵ See “Устав о цензуре и печати с позднейшими узаконениями, законодательными мотивами, разъяснениями Правительствующего Сената и администра-

In the second half of the XIX century reforms carried out in the empire began to spread to the Caucasian districts. On November 3, 1874, new establishments were approved for the Main Directorate of the Caucasian governor and administrative institutions of the Transcaucasian region, including the Caucasian Censorship Committee. The Caucasian governor was entrusted with the duties of the Main Directorate for Press Affairs regarding the Caucasian Censorship Committee¹⁶.

Censors monitored the press within the North Caucasus (Stavropol province, the regions of Terek and Kuban) and Transcaucasia (provinces: Tiflis, Kutais, Elisavetpol, Baku, Irevan, regions: Dagestan, Karakaya, Batum, Transcaspians districts: Novorossiysk, Zakatalsky and the region of Sukhumi), which was published mainly in Russian, Georgian, Armenian, and in lesser quantities in Persian, Arabic and Tatar (means in Azerbaijani) languages. Up to 290 book titles and about 35 periodicals per year were published then¹⁷.

In March 1881, the chairman of the Caucasian Censorship Committee, Lev Nikolayevich Modzalevsky¹⁸ prepared a draft of a new staff of the censorship committee. He noted that since 1874 the workload of the censors tripled. This happened mainly due to the increase in the number of local periodicals and the development of publishing. L. Modzalevsky asked to upgrade the post of junior censor of Oriental languages from the VI to the V class, to establish additional posts of junior censor of Russian and European languages: Armenian and Oriental languages, the post of inspector of printing houses (as in Warsaw), the post of secretary and his assistant¹⁹.

тивными распоряжениями” / сост. В. 17. Ширков. СПб., 1900, p. 110, in Patrusheva, p. 172.

¹⁶ See A. Зейналов, *Проблема взаимоотношений азербайджанской литературы и печати с цензурой (1850–1905 гг.)*: автореф. дис. ... д-ра филол. наук / Ин-т лит. им. Низами. Баку, 1990.

¹⁷ РГИА, ф. 776, оп. 20, д. 427, л. 120–121 in Patrusheva, p. 219.

¹⁸ Lev Modzalevsky (1837–1896) pedagog, writer, from 1867 an inspector and director of the Tiflis Women’s Gymnasium, then an inspector of the Caucasian Educational District and head of the censorship committee.

¹⁹ Российский государственный исторический архив (РГИА), ф. 776, оп. 20, д. 427, л. 11.

In 1882, the Commission for drafting regulations on the administration of the Caucasian region subordinated the Caucasian Censorship Committee to the Main Directorate for Press Affairs. It discussed the issue of oversight of the press. The representative of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, General R. A. Fadeev, who considered the existing system of supervision extremely unsatisfactory, proposed establishing a special position in the Main Directorate, in which supervision of the press would be concentrated in the Caucasus, and the candidate for it would be the Caucasian Censor Solomon Avakovich Melik-Megrabov. In his turn, S. Melik-Megrabov believed that due to the severity of Caucasian censorship, the Armenian and Georgian press were deprived of the opportunity to spread their political ideas to the masses. Therefore he tried to obtain permission to print their works in the capitals. Obviously, due to the fact that the chairman of the Caucasian Censorship Committee did not know languages, there was a systematic violation of censorship rules²⁰.

Modzalevsky had his own opinion about Melik-Megrabov. He believed that, using his official position, the latter patronised some authors and oppressed others. Fadeev's proposal was not accepted²¹.

One of the significant aspects of Russian censorship towards Azerbaijani authors was a consistency in denial to be published. In this respect, Bakikhanov, during his lifetime was able to see publication of solely one of his own monograph²² in Russia. The book which was mentioned above, was translated later on to the Russian language in 1842, yet with the date of publishing indicated as 1841.

Azerbaijani researcher Ağarəfi Zeynalzadə, who investigated the history of the Russian censorship towards Azerbaijani authors in 1850-

²⁰ РГИА, ф. 776, оп. 20, д. 614, л. 39–42.

²¹ РГИА, ф. 776, оп. 20, д. 427, л. 269.

²² Another one he presented to the Ottoman Sultan Abdulmejid I in 1846, this book subsequently being published after translation to Ottoman Turkish in Istanbul in 1848. The difference of attitude of Ottoman and Russian authorities to the same book and speed of publishing it on the part of the Ottoman court, despite the necessity of translation, is remarkable.

1905, presents numerous examples from which we are able to see how anonymous censors, were denying publication of textbooks for school children with explanations such as: “dangerous for formation of political thoughts of citizens of the Russian Empire”²³.

In 1851 New Charter on Press and Censorship was introduced, in which the 27th and 30st paragraphs were dedicated to the matter of publication of censored books. While the 27th mentioned the necessity of censorship in the context of all religious books, the 30st was indicating that the books on Christianity are exempted from the obligatory censorship. The 1851 Law didn’t remain in force for a long time and was followed with other legal acts, which proved not to be sufficient. As a result of discontent with the legal system preventing freedom of publishing, authorities manifested intentions for reforms, the way that a certain dose of debate is allowed even in journalistic publications.

In 1859 being taken from the authority of the Ministry of Education of Russia, the censorship committee became an independent body. New legislation redefining censorship acts of the Russian Empire followed on April the 6th, 1865. The entire authority responsible for press, printing and book trade passed under the responsibility of the Main Press Issues Department tied to the Ministry of Interior. According to the law of 1865, authorities had the possibility to stop publication of periodicals temporarily. Yet it was an aspect of discrepancy²⁴ of law with the factual situation, as censorship authorities were able to stop or shut down publications any moment without going through the law procedures. In this context, the process of termination of Azerbaijani periodicals such as “Ekinchi” and “Keshkul” is exemplary.

²³ A. Zeynalzadə, *Ibidem*, p. 15.

²⁴ The extensively known situation of Russian poet Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837) from the early decades of the XIX century comes to mind. Poet was enthusiastic when he was told that his censor would be no other than the Tzar Nicolas I himself. Yet, the enthusiasm transformed into frustration and fury when Pushkin found out that his private letters to wife Natalia Goncharova were presented to be read by the monarch.

Severe appears to be the censorship policy towards theatrical performances. Authorities introduced the obligation of obtaining permission before each play. Authors had to send their works to Saint Petersburg, which was bringing forward prolonged dates of evaluation and response.

Akhundov's *Monsieur Jordan* staged with a permission in 1873, was obliged to apply for renewal of permission on March 7th, 1891. For the *Vezier of the Lenkaran Khanate* there was a permission dated December the 17th, 1891 in which the report stated: "The play doesn't include anything subject to censorship and can be staged on the stages of the Caucasus region". In this context, Akhundov's play *Haji Kara* was banned in 1893 and 1895 despite being staged in previous years²⁵.

Likewise, the matter of Nariman Narimanov's *Nadir Shah* dramatic theatrical performance transformed into a sort of censorship scandal. Narimanov applied for permission for the above-mentioned drama in 1898. "The reply received by the author was announcing that the drama must be absolutely destroyed upon the order of the Caucasus governor." Narimanov meets the main censor of the Eastern languages department Kishmishov, who indicates that despite the fact of two padishahs being overthrown by the commoners and the new padishah having a commoner background is a historical fact, yet not all historical facts can be written. As a result of the meeting with Kishmishov the censorship committee evaluated the matter once more in January 1899, deciding that the drama can not be staged, yet, the play can be published as a book. The publication appeared the same year in print at the Baku Aror printery with 1200 copies.²⁶ Narimanov applied once more for the permission of staging the play in 1904 and received following official opinion, prepared by Professor Smirnov, the main head of the Eastern Languages Censorship Office in Saint Petersburg, who stated:

Obviously, the play contains connotations with some contemporary to us political motives, despite being depicted in the past times. Though those

²⁵ A. Zeynalzadə, Ibidem, p. 46.

²⁶ A. Zeynalzadə, Ibidem, p. 47.

motives are not clearly presented, in its turn the individuality of Nadir, first bandit and a thug, then suddenly a vice ruler and patriot is to a known extent appears to be an apotheosis of the Caucasian bandit, which are nowadays in the Caucasus and Trans-Caucasus²⁷.

Therefore, due to the existence of such a phenomenon in the contemporary reality, staging the play of Narimanov at the Caucasian-Tatar dialect, would influence the local population, already distressed with the recent unrest and civil strife, dubiously. This is how my opinion on this matter is²⁸.

After 1891 the number of books allowed to be published by the Russian censorship authorities in Azerbaijani language increased. Number of published in 1891 was 4. One of them is of a religious content, another a theatre piece, the third one was Aleksandr Pushkin's fairy tale *The Fisherman and the Fish*, the fourth on agricultural cultivation of silkworms²⁹.

In between 1892–1898 the number of published books was alternately rising and falling:

1891 – 4

1892 – 9

1893 – 6

1894 – 5

1895 – 6

1896 – 8

1897 – 5

Since 1898 minimally increasing:

1898 – 12

1899 – 15

1900 – 17

1901 – 18

²⁷ Here the relevant verb seems to be missing in the text. It is unclear if this is due to the typo in the monograph, or the reflection of the original text.

²⁸ A. Zeynalzadə, Ibidem, pp. 46–48.

²⁹ Looks like the agenda of Russian authorities was predetermined and limited to awareness of precise thematic quota.

As for numbers of premises related to printing and distribution of various types of printed materials we can see that in 1901, in Baku, there were: 22 printing units and lithographies, 23 book shops, 17 libraries or alike places where particular periodicals could be read free of charge, additionally there were also 18 photography shops³⁰.

Numerous examples and facts presented by Zeynalzade prove that by censoring and preventing severely for decades publishing of educational materials in Azerbaijani language, Russian authorities were blocking access to education in mother language for ordinary Azerbaijani children from families deprived of means. As the available for masses schools were in Russian language, Azerbaijani children could go solely³¹ to local religious schools, if at all. Specifically, education was reserved for years only to those Azerbaijani individuals who could afford homeschooling on the contemporary world standards, or preparation at home for being able to go to Russian school. In addition, authors whose works were censored and denied publishing, would never learn the reason for delays, being additionally punished³² if they would dare to submit another of their works for publication. Such attitude of Russian authorities reveals planned and established exclusion policy versus Azerbaijani population. In this respect we understand that if the ordinary people were excluded, those who were able to obtain the education thanks to their financial possibilities, should have been seen as potentially dangerous³³ even more.

After the resolution of the Council of Workers' Deputies *On Newspaper Workers* from October 19, 1905, which called for winning freedom of speech, periodicals began to appear in Saint Petersburg, Mos-

³⁰ A. Zeynalzadə, *Ibidem*, p. 51.

³¹ This matter was emphasised by Hasan Melikov Zardabi, constituting his and majority of Azerbaijani intellectuals' concerns. See memoirs of Hanifa Melikova, T. Aydinoglu, *Hanife Xanım Melikova-Abayevanın xatireleri*, pp. 24–25.

³² A. Zeynalzadə, *Ibidem*, p. 16.

³³ In this respect, understandable even more seems to be the reality narrated by Ahmed Bey Agayev, in which he reveals facts of extreme dissatisfaction of masses with the tsarist regime on all levels of educational institutions of the Russian Empire, starting from school for 10 years old up to universities.

cow, Odessa and other cities, bypassing censorship institutions. In the struggle for freedom of the press, the unions of workers in the printing industry and book publishers, formed in the summer and autumn of 1905, played an important role. The Union for the Defence of Freedom of the Press formulated the main requirements: a secret procedure for the establishment of publications, the abolition of all types of censorship, responsibility for crimes in court. Pending the issuance of a new law, it was proposed to abolish the requirement to submit to censorship freshly published issues of magazines and newspapers before they were sent to the post office, books and brochures before they were published, so as to abolish administrative penalties and the right of the Minister of the Interior to prohibit the discussion of various issues in the press. Publishers and printers declared that no censored publication would be published, and booksellers promised not to accept such books and magazines for sale.

In a vast country, freedom of the press began to be exercised in secret, despite existing laws and attempts by the authorities to maintain censorship control. Yet in various cities such a freedom had its own originality and duration. Sergey Rudolfovich Mintslov, for example, believed that in Saint Petersburg these events took place over a period of 14 months. In some provinces, even the administration considered censorship abolished by the Manifesto of 17 October. In Warsaw, in response to an attempt to exercise freedom of the press without permission, all newspapers were suspended, while in the Caucasus, the local authorities allowed all periodicals to be published without censorship³⁴.

³⁴ See: С. Р. Минцлов *14 месяцев свободы печати: 17 октября 1905 г. – 1 января 1907 г.: заметки библиографа*, “Былое” 1907, № 3, с. 123–148; *Свобода печати при обновленном строе*. СПб. 1912. с. 217; Голубева О., Д. *Издательское дело в России в период первой русской революции, 1905–1907 гг.*, [в:] Книга: исследования и материалы, Москва 1972, с. 119–120; В. П. Мельников, *Революционная борьба московских печатников за свободу печати осенью 1905 г.*, [в:] *Общественнополитическая проблематика периодической печати России (XIX – начало XX в.)*. М., 1989. С. 45–53; О. А. Омельченко *Формирование и развитие системы законодательного регулирования печати в России*, [в:] *Право*

Another important aspect in the history of censorship of Azerbaijani journalism is the following: along with extensive limitations on access to being published, most of the writers were deprived of the right to receive royalties for articles and other similar works of theirs published in newspapers and magazines³⁵.

Poet Muhammad Hadi would not receive a penny for his poems published in newspapers and magazines. Drowning in great need, so as to make some money for living, Hadi was forced therefore to print his poems with help of his friends, in the form of separate leaflets and sell them personally on the streets and squares³⁶. In this context one of the prominent poets of Azerbaijan, Abdulla Shaiq wrote in his memoirs:

One day, I happened to meet him on the street. He was drunk. Extending his hand with the sheet titled *My Spirited Poetry* he said: "Take this! Give me 5 rubles!" I took out ten rubles, this was all that I had in my pocket and gave it to him. He looked closely in my face and only then recognised me. Putting the money back in my palm, he hugged me. He was very moved: "Şaiqciğim,³⁷ forgive me, I didn't recognise you", he said. No matter how much I insisted, he didn't take the money³⁸.

Censorship towards the newspaper "Əkinçi"

The Azerbaijani newspaper "Əkinçi" The Plowman (1875–1877), while being the first independent and fully self funded by its editor periodical, was shutted down forcefully. Obviously, this happened due to the concern of authorities versus impossibility of implementing their

культура: проблемы исторического взаимодействия: сб. науч. тр. Москва 1990. p. 52–53. In Patrusheva, Ibidem, p. 332.

³⁵ M. Huseyin, *Overview of the Origins of National Journalism in Azerbaijan*, „IRS – Heritage – Наследие, The International Journal of History, Anthropology and Culture” 2022, Number 52.

³⁶ See İ. Q. Musayev, *Bakı və Bakılılar*, Baku 2006, pp. 233–234.

³⁷ Turkish, refined expression and a way to say: "My beloved..." including the name of the addressed person. In this case it means: "My beloved Şaiq...".

³⁸ See A. Şaiq, *"Xatirələrım"*, Baku 1973, p. 84.

control mechanisms on it. Zardabi describes the situation around his newspaper and himself followingly.

The first misfortune of the “Əkinçi” began with departure of the governor Staroselski from Baku. After him, his deputy became a fierce censor. The second misfortune was the initiation of the Russo-Turkish war³⁹.

Before the war, I was somehow able to get through difficulties. Once the war started I was instructed to publish information on the war by taking it from other newspapers. Yet none of the news selected by us were permitted to be published, while our readers were eagerly waiting to be able to read about the war. I applied to censor⁴⁰ with a request to indicate other newspapers from which the news on war can be republished in my periodical. He didn't agree to that, instead allowing me to publish governmental information that was coming daily. Surely, it was not possible to publish in a periodical that would appear once a week all the news of 200-300 lines that would pile up during the whole week, while selection of the main important ones by me was also not allowed. At the end publication of the news on political developments was blocked and my readers became dissatisfied with me.

Those enemies of the newspaper that were not able to do their job at the times of Staroselski initiated their fierce attacks. The colonel of gendarmerie started receiving daily denunciations “danoses” (донос)⁴¹

³⁹ Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878.

⁴⁰ Russian authorities attitude towards contacts with Ottoman lands can be traced back to the mid XIX century, so to speak Tadeusz Bulcharyn was reporting to Leontiy Dubelt, Imperial Russian Army general, Head of the Third Section secret police under Nicholas I as follows: “No power, no force, not even the most vigilant persecution can stop the spill of ideas, and the most cruel and reproachful execution cannot prevent the importation of prohibited books into a state that has an immense land border adjacent to states where free printing has been introduced. It is surprising, but true, that even from Turkiye, through the countries of the Transcaucasus, forbidden books were imported into Russia. Harmful ideas spread quickly by word of mouth and hints in the press. It is impossible to destroy all this.” Bulcharyn Tadeusz, from the letter dated 5.10.1849 addressed to Leontiy Vasilyevich Dubelt, А. Рейтблат, В. Фиглярин, *История одной литературной репутации*, <http://vivovoco.astronet.ru/VV/PAPERS/ECCE/BULGARIN.HTM>, Accessed: 21.04.2023

⁴¹ Denunciation here is written as “danos” because Zardabi transcribes the vocal form of the Russian word, so as to define the act of denouncing.

without signatures on me and on the “Əkinçi”. Jandarmerie assigned two guards karavuldju (караульщики).⁴² One of them, as a brother of my Russian servant, would sleep at night in my house. The second one, would be waiting in front of my house entrance door on the street and going with me around.

Then, I would go every evening to a club to play billiards for 1–2 hours and the gendarmerie colonel would play with me. However, this colonel a few times a week would ask me to be brought to him and would inquire if it is true that on this and that evening I have been at someone’s place and used particular expressions. I would reply to him, at those hours we were playing billiards with you together. He would say: “I know this very well myself, but what can I do, zakon (закон)⁴³ is this way, so I must take information.” If they would give this danos only to jandarmerie it would not be such a big deal, but they were sending it all around to main dignitaries, so replying to the requests of top officials would tire those poor jandarmerie people a lot. Nevertheless, I was able to publish the newspaper in time.

Once the unrest began in Dagestan, “Əkinçi”’s tale darkened. One day, I submitted to censor the article of Necef Bey Vezirov, which he’d sent from Moscow. In the article the author narrated about one dervish who was singing verses in front of the shops in a market place in Moscow, calling upon listeners to gain more knowledge and education. Censor put his signature on the paper allowing the text to be published. The newspaper was published and sold out, yet then I was notified that the number was collected and that the governor wanted to see me. I went there and have seen my Minasov⁴⁴ at the place. Governor pronounced that according to Minasov, the words of the dervish had an alternative meaning, saying: “This

⁴² Zardabi transcribes the vocal form of the Russian word so as to define the noun for a guard. It is a particularity of Azerbaijani language, which since the domination of Russian empire is showing itself in contaminations with Russian words, or words that changed form because they were adapted to the linguistic particularities of Azerbaijani language in time, taking Azerbaijani prefixes and suffixes to the Russian roots of the word, just as in this particular example.

⁴³ Zardabi transcribes the vocal form of the Russian word so as to define the noun for the law.

⁴⁴ The printing dealer, which was involved in technical matters of publishing the newspaper “Əkinçi”.

is why I urged the number to be collected and you are obliged to publish another one". I replied that I will not be able to publish another number. After I left, another number was published and distributed upon the order of the governor. As the number was published on my behalf I requested this never to be done again. My desire was to stop the publishing process and reestablish it after the war would be over. One day the director of the gymnasium informed me that upon the order of the viceroy I must transfer as a teacher to the gymnasium of Yekaterinodar.⁴⁵ This is why I submitted my resignation, leaving the service, as leaving Baku and staying far from Muslim affairs had a meaning of death for me. The war was over, but for me, not staying in Baku meant difficulties. I was not taken into service by the Tzar and none of the Bakuvians was willing to employ me either. In one or two places I tried to enter a service of the societies, but they discredited me prior to the elections and those who did it were the Baku Muslims, picking up the foreigners instead. Specifically, I was not able to resume publishing of the "Əkinçi", above that I was not able to stay in Baku and had to return to my hometown⁴⁶.

14 Years of Denial for the National Press in Azerbaijan

After the newspaper "Kəşkül" (1883–1991) was shutted down, Azerbaijani journalism was deprived of mother language periodicals for 14 years. This happened strictly due to the Tsarist Russia censorship policy, which aimed to slow down enlightenment and social, national development of the non-Russian language speaking population of Azerbaijan. During this time, authorities prevented Azerbaijani intellectuals' numerous attempts from publishing periodicals. Numerous periodicals in Azerbaijani language were not granted permission for publication⁴⁷.

During those years' numerical data of rejected applications is as follows:

⁴⁵ *Yekaterinodar* – presently Krasnodar, a city in the Russian Federation.

⁴⁶ Zardabi in "Həyat", No: 129, 28 December 1905.

⁴⁷ A. Zeynalzadə, *Azərbaycan mətbuatı...*, op. cit., p. 29.

In 1897 from 174 petitions addressed to the Minister of Interior of the Russian Empire with a request of publication of a periodical only 38 were accepted. Subsequently, those numbers in 1898 were: from 168 petitions with similar requests 132 denied. As we can see, among those numbers were petitions of Azerbaijani journalists and editors also⁴⁸.

Meanwhile, the number of Russian language periodicals published in the Caucasus was 20. Some were published in Baku. The information on main periodicals published in Russian language in Baku is presented below.

From March 19th, 1871 till June 3rd, 1872 the newspaper “Bakinskiy listok” was published in Baku Old Town, by Mikhail Volichkin. In 1876, the newspaper “Bakinskiye izvestiya” published in Baku thanks to Dmi-triy Semionovich Staroselski’s support, subsequently transformed into “Bakinskiy torqovo-promyshlenniy listok” in 1881. As of January 1894 the “Bakinskiye gubernskiye vedomosti” was published and appeared till 1916.

Slight relaxation in the severe censorship attitude of Russian authorities came with the 17 October Manifesto in 1905.

It should be noted that the publication of 63 newspapers and magazines in Azerbaijan between 1905–1917 as a result of the weakening of censorship also had a positive effect on the enlightenment process. Despite the fact that the literacy rate of the population was only 4.5%, Baku owes much to this factor, as it has become the centre of Russian Muslims, due to the growing development of the national press, which was a harbinger of the ideas of turkism, islamism, socialism and liberalism⁴⁹.

It would be thought-provoking to check, who were editors in chief of newspapers in the Russian language. On the example of “Kaspi” we can see that initially they all were predominantly non Azerbaijani. Precisely, from 1881 till 1896: Kuzmin, Startsev, Luchkus-Komotov, Qordyeyevski, Sokolinski. Since 1887 Əlimərdan Topçubaşov (1898-

⁴⁸ A. Aşırılı, Ibidem, pp. 40–43.

⁴⁹ M. Babaşlı, *XX əsrin əvvəllərində Azərbaycanda milli oyanış...*, op. cit., p. 2.

1907), briefly in 1907 Əli Bəy Hüseynzadə, (1907–1919) and Andrey Adrianovich Vaynberg.

In response to activities versus freedom of publishing, tsarist authorities took legal measures in terms of strengthening the headquarters of censorship, introducing such one directly in Baku. As a result, the first press censorship office was established in the city in 1905. State Councillor Yevgeni Alekseyevich Bogoslovski, graduate of Saint Petersburg University History-Philology department (in 1854), who worked as teacher in various schools in Russia, Caucasus, Shusha and Baku, was appointed as the office head.

Defined by his supervisors as “highly efficient and one who does not skip details”, Y. Bogoslovski didn’t hesitate to claim monopoly on evaluating the work of authors and deciding for them to be sent to court in situations of violations of rules. In this context exemplary is among others the situation of Əlabbas Müznib,⁵⁰ who in January 1912 was sent to court and charged to pay 25 Rubles along with a sentence of prison for two weeks.

Bogoslovski was fired from his post in 1913, upon publication in the “Baku” newspaper of an article related to the funeral of Piotr Montin, a revolutionary activist, which passed censorship control despite the law dated June the 8th, 1907 vetoing any publications related to revolutionary activities and individuals related to that movement⁵¹.

In addition, as we can see from “Molla Nasreddin” magazine numerous caricatures the censorship traces are easily trackable.⁵²

⁵⁰ *Müznib Əlabbas Mütəllibzadə (1883–1938)* Azerbaijani poet, publicist, literary critic and folklorist, historian of Islamic religion, translator. Initiated his activity after the 1905 revolution as lyric-romantic poet and as an imitator of the “Molla Nasreddin” literary school. In his works Müznib criticised tsarism, social inertia and religious fanaticism. Main columnist and editor in chief of such independent Azerbaijani periodicals as “Hilal” (1910–11), “Şəhəbi-saqib” (1911) qəzetlərinin, “Zənbür” (1909–10), “Dirilik” (1914–16), “Babayi-Əmir” (1915–16), “Övraqi-nəfisə” (1919). Müznib is a victim of stalinist repressions.

⁵¹ A. Zeynalzadə, *Ibidem*, pp. 57–59.

⁵² See an example of censorship, which is an empty page with the explanation that the content was blocked by the censor. Source: Molla Nasreddin: *The Magazine that*

Historically the existence of Imperial Russia censorship structures came to an end with political developments, which resulted in collapse of the country. The Censorship Committee of the Russian Empire established in 1849 was shutted down in October 1918.

Summary

The history of censorship in the Caucasus begins in 1837 with a relevant legal act introduced by tsarist Russia authorities. As a result of the censorship policy of the country after Akhundov's *Təmsilat* (1859) there was no book in Azerbaijani language published in the Russian Empire for over 20 years⁵³.

Likewise, there were 14 years when not a single newspaper was allowed to be published in Azerbaijani language. Intellectuals such as A. Bakikhanov, Sh. Vazeh, F. Akhundov, H. Zardabi were primarily keen on the establishment of a series of books as manuals for children and teaching the youth. Due to the lack of books for children and not only, all were brought from Iran and Türkiye, though those books were also subject to censorship. In this context, we can see a letter of Akhundov addressed to the governor of Caucasus Golovin⁵⁴.

The second half of the XIX century is also characteristic in terms of the history of journalism, book printing, and publishing traditions in Azerbaijan. All three fields were going through tough times, obliged to seek solutions in face of the severe bureaucratic, tendentious approach of the Tsarist administration, marked by postponement policy.

Prior to the second half of the XIX century, Azerbaijani books would be published outside of its geographical location in such cities as Bom-

Would've, Could've, Should've, Lithography by Tadeusz Miroisz, Ringier, Zürich 2011, p. 201.

⁵³ A. Zeynalzadə, *Azərbaycan mətbuatı və çar senzurası (1850–1905)*, Bakı, “Elm” 2006, p. 30.

⁵⁴ Ə. Səidzadə, *Mirzə Fətəli və Mirzə Şəfinin mətbəaa açmaq üçün çalışmaları*, “Ədəbiyyat qəzeti”, No: 31, 11.10.1940.

bay, Calcutta, Istanbul, Kazan, Saint Petersburg, Warsaw but primarily in Teheran. In the second half of the XIX century, Tiflis was introduced into the line of those cities. Subsequently, publications began in such Azerbaijani cities as Baku, Shusha, and Shamahi. As for Azerbaijani cities and Tiflis, the publications would appear in the printing houses of the Unsizadeh brothers⁵⁵.

Against severe conditions versus publishing of literature and school manuals for children we can see a publication of a pocket calendar by “Ziya” printery in 1879.

Iranian diplomat, intellectual and historian Mirza Riza khan Danish’s memoirs⁵⁶ followed. While Azerbaijani by origin, Daniş (1856–1937) became an Iranian dignitary, serving as a Consul in Tiflis, Saint Petersburg and Istanbul. What is remarkable, while the censorship authorities of Russia were severe on the publication of literature by Azerbaijani authors and manuals for children, in this particular historical period, they yet allowed publications of certain values not instrumental in terms of their specifics for the majority of the population. In other words, publications unable to have an extensive impact on society, precisely memoirs of a high rank dignitary published in a country scarcely literate were not considered dangerous.

While press and literature permissions were severely limited in Azerbaijan at that time, printing houses owned by the Unsizadeh brothers were publishing valuable books on religious topics such as Movlidi-Sherif, Sureyi-Fatihe ve Yasini-Sherif, Mersiye, Novhe and Qaside. In this context, the fact that one of the brothers had a religious education was a strong point for the family’s religious background.

When it comes to educational materials, Aleksey Osipovich Cherniayevski’s “Vətən dili” (Mother language, 1882) manual for learning the Russian language for children was published by Unsizadeh printing house Ziya. Subsequently, another Unsizade’s printing house, Ziya, pub-

⁵⁵ A. Zeynalzadə, *Ibidem*, pp. 33; 41.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 34.

lished the following book by A. Cherniayevski, *Əlifba* (1883). A second volume of “Vətən dili” (1889) followed, this time being published by the printing house “Keşkül”.

Numerous authors were applying to both “Keşkül” and “Ziya” printing houses of Unsizadehs so as to take advantage of their being acquainted with the procedure not solely of publishing, but primarily of censorship, hoping to avoid denial for their publications.⁵⁷

Evidently, the history of Azerbaijani publishing is exemplary in terms of severe censorship policy applied for decades, resulting in cases of some authors in years, decades of waiting and even rejections, which lasted during the entire lifetime of the author, all based on unfounded excuses or silence instead of reply⁵⁸. Not only Azerbaijani authors, publicists and journalists were suffering from severe censorship policy of Tsarist authorities, there were also other journalists, linguists that were active participants of the developing printing and journalistic environment of Azerbaijan, desiring to publish newspapers, magazines and books on their own or together with Azerbaijani partners. Their efforts also faced rejections, suspensions or segregation.

Due to the fact of limited individuals acquainted with Azerbaijani language (defined as Tatar⁵⁹ in the historical documents of the time), along with renowned professors of Kazan and Moscow university, initially there were primarily individuals of Armenian origin, Azerbaijani nationals joined the ranks of censor dignitaries in minimal numbers and much later⁶⁰.

Obstruction policy implemented by authorities of the Russian Empire towards publishing of periodicals in Azerbaijani language, was not able to slow down movements towards desire of enlightenment within Azerbaijani society. Looks like Russian dignitaries by oppressing Azerbaijani intellectuals of central and right political wing, such as

⁵⁷ Ibidem, pp. 41.

⁵⁸ Ibidem, pp. 15–66;

⁵⁹ See Aşırılı, Babaşlı, Патрушева, Səidzadə, Zeynalzadə.

⁶⁰ See Патрушева, Zeynalzadə.

brothers Kamal and Jamal Ünsizadə and Əhməd Bəy Ağaoğlu basically allowed a shift of their readers towards periodicals published by social democrats, as the periodicals of the latter had a better networking of Bolsheviks.

To understand the publishing capacities of Bolsheviks it is enough to recall the case of Nina typography in Baku, through which the entire Russia was benefiting.

At this point we are convinced that, the Russian authorities misjudged the social pattern of the region. Indeed, for centuries, inhabitants of the Caucasus have had the ease of operating in a few languages, as a fact of coexistence in a multicultural environment. Authorized or not, in Azerbaijani, Georgian, Armenian, or Russian, readers were able to find sources offered by Bolsheviks, which by giving direct messages of opposition, were steadily indoctrinating the population against the Tsar.

Therefore, the ban of Azerbaijani periodicals influenced solely the a priori intellectual impact among sophisticated readers, who out of patriotism would be willingly expanding publications of moderate content. Instead, those who couldn't read newspapers approved by authorities, switched to reading banned and openly loaded with criticism "Hummet", "Tekamul" and "Dəvət-Qoç", along with publications of progressive central right authors who were writing in Russian at Kaspi. As a result, the 12-year-long censorship on intellectual periodicals in Azerbaijani language hit back to the Russian censors as boomerang, contributing significantly to the spreading of Bolshevism.

Another aspect in which Azerbaijani intellectuals were trying to do their best so as to raise numerically and quality wise publications in their mother tongue were translations. In due course, as of the second half of the XIX century, a series of translations from Russian language were published in line with the conviction of intellectuals democratic approach to the matter⁶¹ of necessity of broadening the already poorly

⁶¹ Ibidem, pp. 39–41.

supplied domestic market of literature. From the permissions given we can understand that Tsarist authorities were dealing with the matter favourably. Nevertheless, here we can see that Azerbaijani intellectuals, while being aware of denial of freedom for national press and literature, were conscious of the overall benefits belles-lettres are introducing into the life of a reader, simultaneously opening to such a person the doors of culture. While undeniably such was indeed a door to certain extend assimilation, yet it was also giving chances to reach other western cultures, expanding horizons of Azerbaijani readers in general.

A significant particularity of the historiography of censorship in Azerbaijan, includes examples of censoring policy versus theatrical performances. Starting in 1879, every performance required obtaining permission from the governor, which was kept in force with various legal acts from the 1880s. In consequence, performances already staged prior to 1879 and those that were granted permissions were again due to one-time permission for a specific theater and the date when it would take place. The official lists with titles of performances were often incomplete without logical reasons, making restoration of omitted titles extremely difficult. This condition came forward as a strongly demoralising factor for authors and actors, who were finding a new field for professional development, shattering the perspectives of intellectuals who believed in the rapid efficacy of educating the public through theater.

In conclusion, we state that contemporary Azerbaijani society still bears traces of the Russian Imperial censorship policies, which partly were acquired by the communist regime. To this date, the intellectual starata of Azerbaijani nation is more informed and culturally shaped by undeniably important positions of Russian and world literature, while is much less aware of the heritage of its own cultural background. Luckily, the awareness of this condition in academic, intellectual and administrative elements of Azerbaijan is complete and the relevant strategic mechanisms oriented on rebuilding missing knowledge are gaining momentum.

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