

The Languages of Caucasian Cosmopolitanism: Twentieth-Century Baku at the Crossroads

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Empires forge unique urban spaces at their conquered peripheries. Populated by different ethnic groups, they enable numerous encounters between people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Empires are also multi-ethnic and multi-confessional entities: throughout their existence, their complex stability rested not only on a fabric of complex relationships and agreements between very different kinds of community, but also, on a rich cultural production leading to what historians and anthropologists have described as processes of cosmopolitanisation.¹ Nowhere do these complex interrelationships and the languages

¹Cf. Walter Mignolo, ‘De-colonial cosmopolitanism and dialogues among civilizations’, in Gerard Delanty (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Cosmopolitanism Studies* (London: Routledge, 2012), 85–101; For a longer view, see Myles Lavan, Richard E. Payne, and John Weisweiler (Eds.), *Cosmopolitanism and Empire: Universal Rulers, Local Elites, and Cultural Integration in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

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of self-description which reflect this complexity stand out more clearly than in urban spaces.² Wars, revolutions, and civil wars tend to bring out these tensions and relationships even more clearly. In the modern era, imperial urban societies gave rise to two contradictory but interwoven mentalities: nationalism and cosmopolitanism, both of which thrived on the new intellectual opportunities which presented themselves in conflict situations. Urban intellectual communities developed new ideas of their own cosmopolitan constitution, which can be usefully analysed through the notion of the ‘cosmopolitan moment’, as used by Ulrich Beck and Martha Nussbaum.³

This paper focuses on the place of writers in fostering cosmopolitan moments in the city of Baku, throughout the twentieth century and in the post-Soviet era. Comparable with other peripheral imperial port cities like Thessaloniki the case of Baku provides a fascinating case study for the way writers and intellectuals have contributed to a ‘self-cosmopolitanisation’ of their community. Unlike Thessaloniki, however, Baku also stood out with its unusual level of industrial development, as the centre of the Russian Empire’s oil industry. Along with other Muslim feudal principalities north of the river Araxes, Baku, a city on the shore of the Caspian Sea, had been incorporated into the Russian Empire in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, giving rise to a military conflict with Persia. These principalities were administratively reorganised into provinces: Baku became the local centre of the ‘Bakinskaia gubernia’ or Baku guberniate. Due to the aggressive centralisation of the Russian Empire in the second half of the nineteenth century, the local Shia population of Baku formed an absolute majority of the city’s residents at that moment. During the oil boom at the turn of the century, this

²On cosmopolitan cities in imperial peripheries, see Caroline Humphrey and Vera Skvirskaja, *Post-cosmopolitan Cities. Explorations of Urban Coexistence* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2012), especially Panos Hatziprokopiou, ‘Haunted by the Past and the Ambivalences of the Present: Immigration and Thessalonica’s Second Path to Cosmopolitanism’, 194–216. Another impressive overview on urban cosmopolitanism, its failures and re-emergences can be found in Pnina Werbner, ‘Thedialectics of urban cosmopolitanism: between tolerance and intolerance in cities of strangers’, in *Identities*, 22: 5 (2015), 569–587.

³For the term ‘cosmopolitan moment’ in the context of global society, see Ulrich Beck, ‘Living in the world risksociety’, in *Economy and Society*, 35: 3 (August 2006), 329–345, 331. See also Marilyn Fischer, ‘A Pragmatist Cosmopolitan Moment: Reconfiguring Nussbaum’s Cosmopolitan Concentric Circles’, in *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 3 (2007), 151–165.

traditional population then experienced an immense immigration of Russian, Ukrainian, and Armenian families from other parts of the Empire to Baku—a change which was not always welcome. Within several decades, Baku had undergone a transformation from provincial town with almost no industry at all to the leading source of oil, both within the Empire and internationally, with the city's streets transformed from an ancient citadel into an Haussmanian modern city modelled after Paris. The number of Baku's residents grew rapidly; the oilboom went hand in hand with galloping urbanisation. The infrastructure necessary to service the oil industry emerged first. Perhaps unusually, it was the oil industry which gave the first push for the emergence of multi-confessional spaces, leading to the establishment of Russian schools and Russian Orthodox, German Lutheran, and Armenian Gregorian churches. The oil boom and the imperial setting brought different cultures, religions, languages, and lifestyles into one space. In this way, Baku became not just a microcosm of the Russian Empire, but an experimental area where traditional and modern societies were confronted with a unique mixture of cultures.

While Baku's cultural cosmopolitanism had formed as a result of long-term economic and political trends in the Russian Empire, therefore, the revolution and civil war provided their own impulses for a cosmopolitanisation of the city—albeit not without violent conflict. Before the Russian conquest of the Caucasus, the Shia intellectuals of Baku, Karabakh, Shirvan, and other khanates had been an integral part of the Persian and Ottoman intellectual spheres. But during the turmoil years of the Russian Revolution, Baku briefly turned into a communist *polis* in 1917, witnessing significant clashes between its Armenian and Muslim populations by March 1918. By May 1918, it had become the capital of the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic and opened the first European-style university in 1919, with Russian as the main language of instruction. Among this university's lecturers was Mammad Amin Rasulzade, the first (and only) president of the Democratic Republic.

What brought the cosmopolitan community of Baku into a state of decline was, therefore, a cumulative set of factors: World War I, the following years of political turmoil and first post-imperial statehood (the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic, 1918–1920), followed by the Bolshevik occupation of Azerbaijan (April 1920). As a result of these upheavals, the cultural plurality that had been so characteristic of its imperial urban space had been greatly reduced. However, several decades later, a renewed, post-war cosmopolitanism emerged in Soviet Baku.

Just as at the turn of the century, forged by the Empire, 1950s' Baku regained its cosmopolitanism, albeit Soviet in character. Post-war Baku became the birthplace of the supra-national and supra-confessional Russophone subculture of *Bakintsy* (Bakuvians). Bakuvians steadfastly defined themselves as cosmopolitan.⁴ While Russian had become the *lingua franca* of Baku-based nobles and Muslim, Christian, and Jewish high society by the turn of the century, the 1950s saw it become the common language for almost all Soviet residents of Baku. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Russian became the language not only of labour and of the emerging proletariat, but also of higher education. The Muslim elites, both Sunni and Shiite, were obliged to express their loyalty to the Empire by mastering its language and sending the own children to Russian high schools and universities. The imperial enculturation of the offspring of the Azerbaijani nobles happened quickly, especially in the context of the accelerated Russification of the Russian Empire during the late Romanov period.⁵ This process was made possible by

⁴Largely ignored by the international scholarship of cosmopolitanism, Baku became a topic of research of US-American anthropologist Bruce Grant. He titled his work 'Cosmopolitan Baku' and interviewed numerous current and former residents in Baku. Grant focused on the Bakuvites' views on the cosmopolitan essence of their city, which most of them praised as a special and an open-minded space, a real multinational and multi-confessional area. See Bruce Grant, 'Cosmopolitan Baku', in *Ethnos*, 75: 2 (June 2010), 123–147. The research of Baku-based historian Anar Valiyev demonstrates the chronology of Baku's demographical and architectural change over the decades. See Anar Valiyev, 'City profile Baku', in *Cities*, 31 (2012), 625–640. Noteworthy is the recent research of German ethnologists and anthropologists Melanie Krebs and Tsy pylma Darieva. See Melanie Krebs, 'Negotiating Cosmopolitanism in Baku', in Voell, Stéphane and Ketevan Khutsishvili (eds) *Caucasus Conflict Culture: Anthropological Perspectives on Times of Crisis* (Marburg: Curupira Workshop, 2013, 225–242; see also Melanie Krebs, 'From cosmopolitan Baku to tolerant Azerbaijan – Branding "The Land of Fire"', in *Identity Studies* 6 (2015), 110–129; Tsy pylma Darieva, 'Sterilizing the Public Space? The Baku Waterfront as History's Promenade', in *Russian Studies in History*, 55: 2 (2016), 163–179. The research of Bruce Grant and Anar Valiyev is of particular significance due to the authors' ability of using Azerbaijani sources.

⁵Russification was a strategy conducted by the Tsarist authorities as well as later on by the Soviet authorities under Joseph Stalin and Nikita Khrushchev aiming at the homogenisation of the multi-ethnic and multicultural population of the empire. The Tsarist government supported the spread of Russian language and Orthodox Christianity throughout the country. For more on Russification see Zaur Gasimov (ed.), *Kampf um Wort und Schrift. Russifizierung in Osteuropa im 19–20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012).

the extremely rapid urbanisation of Baku, by the Russification and Christianisation of its public sphere.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Armenian–Azerbaijani war over Karabakh (1988–1994), and the emigration of Armenian and most Russian residents of Baku throughout the 1990s, the Bakuvian subculture transferred itself into cyberspace.⁶ Being based nowadays throughout a vastly varied geography from Israel to Europe and Russia, former Bakuvites launched a large number of paperback publications, internet forums, and blogs reminiscing about their ‘cosmopolitan Baku’. I argue that the cosmopolitan moments which Russian and Soviet Baku enjoyed were both of an imperial character and emerged as a result of a post-war and post-violence search for normality and stability. However, driven by the state-backed homogenisation strategy of both the 1900s and the Soviet period, the imposition of the Russian language had an enormous alienating impact on the non-Russian ethnic groups residing in the city, including Azerbaijanis, Armenians, and Jews.⁷

Cosmopolitanism seems to have an additional meaning, too, as personal, rather than political identity. Indeed, reading Azerbaijani narratives, cosmopolitanism appears to be a key element of their self-description, particularly in the memories of the older generation of Baku’s population. Further, the state of Azerbaijan has been using the image of its ‘cosmopolitan capital’ in its attempts to attract tourists to Baku, inviting them to enjoy the ‘European charm of the Orient’.⁸ In this paper, I will try to look at narrated, recalled, and affected cosmopolitanism from the perspective of post-colonial theory, by focusing on Baku and by paying attention to Azerbaijani and Russian discourses in and about the city, as well as literary accounts of it. I will examine

⁶For more on the background of the Armenian–Azerbaijani war over Karabakh, see Heiko Krüger, *The Nagorno–Karabakh Conflict. A Legal Analysis* (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer, 2010); Thomas De Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War* (New York: New York University Press, 2nd edition 2013); Jafarova, Esmira, *Conflict Resolution in South Caucasus. Challenges to International Efforts* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Lexington Books, 2015).

⁷A similar process could be observed in post-Ottoman Alexandria and Cairo. See the paper of Sami Zubaida (1999) quoted by Pnina Werbner, ‘The dialectics of urban cosmopolitanism’, in *Identities*, 575.

⁸This seems to be a semi-official slogan of ‘AZ of Azerbaijan’, an internet portal maintained by the Azerbaijani Ministry of Tourism. <http://www.atoz.az/map-item/european-charm-orient> (accessed 25 July 2015).

Baku's cosmopolitan moments as reflected in the fictional memoir genre espoused by Baku-born writers of different ages, starting with Kurban Said (Leo Nussimbaum) and Umm-el-Banu Assadulaieff (Banine) who wrote at the time of the revolution and the early Democratic Republic, and ending with the late twentieth- and twenty-first century authors Ali Akper (Aleker Aliyev), and Olga Grjasnowa, published in German, French, and Azerbaijani between the 1930s and 2014.

COSMOPOLITAN INTELLECTUALS

According to the British historian of the Near East, Sami Zubaida, cosmopolitanism in the Near East was shaped by diverse persons, places, milieus, ideologies, and religions.⁹ By this token, a person who is 'multilingual, multicultural, at home in different milieus and who has wide interests across cultural and national boundaries',—such a person is, according to Zubaida, cosmopolitan.¹⁰ And indeed, at the turn of the century, Azerbaijani Muslim intellectuals, as well as Armenian merchants and the clergy of Baku, were multilingual. And their interests were spread wide, both across and far beyond of the borders of the Romanovs' empire.

But beyond the importance of language and common interests, the Azerbaijani intelligentsia at the turn of the century also developed awareness of discourses taking place in neighbouring Persia and the Ottoman Empire over the issue of legitimate rule in former imperial areas. Meanwhile, what it meant to be an Azerbaijani intellectual had changed dramatically during the Soviet period. Persian and Arabic were less often studied as foreign languages at schools in Baku after the Sovietisation of Azerbaijan. The displacement of the Persian-Arabic alphabet from the Azerbaijani language at the end of 1920s and again in 1930s damaged both personal and cultural bonds between Azerbaijani intellectuals and the Near East. Competence in Persian and Arabic had almost disappeared by the 1960 and 1970s. The Russification, imposed from the early 1930s and backed by Khrushchev's notorious school reforms in the

⁹Sami Zubaida, 'Cosmopolitanism and the Middle East', in Roel Meijer (ed.), *Cosmopolitanism, Identity and Authenticity in the Middle East* (Mittcham: Curzon, 1999), 15–17.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 15.

1960s, resulted in the new generation of Azerbaijani intellectuals, mostly residents of Baku, having quite poor knowledge of the Azerbaijani language. In Baku, where the Azerbaijanis were outnumbered by the Russian and Armenian communities taken together until the 1970s, Sovietisation made Russian the dominant *lingua franca*. During Perestroika, fully bilingual Azerbaijanis were few and far between, even within the intelligentsia of Baku. The rest of the Azerbaijanis, whose academic and even vernacular Russian was much better than Azerbaijani, were called *russkoiazychnyi* in Russian or *rusedilli* in Azerbaijani, both meaning ‘Russophone’. The sizeable Armenian community of Baku shared a similar fate and became almost totally Russified. Most of Baku’s Armenians graduated from Russian schools and used Russian as their inter- and intra-communal language. Those Azerbaijanis, Armenians, and Iranian-speaking Talysh people from the provinces of Azerbaijan who moved to Baku but spoke Russian badly were pejoratively called *chushki* by the Bakuivians. *Chushki* is originally a Russianised plural form of *chushka*, an Azerbaijani word for ‘piglet’.¹¹ In the Baku context, however, *chushki* was a label of backwardness and boorishness. Russian-speaking Azerbaijani families, residents of Baku in the second or third generation who spoke Russian at home, considered the newcomers from the provinces to be backward. The level of Russian proficiency often played a greater role in determining belonging to the Bakuivians than did ethnic affiliation.

Occurring simultaneously, the acculturation, homogenisation, and integrationist tendencies of each empire are aimed ultimately at the elimination of deviation and difference. Neither the Ottomans nor the French or the British had planned to create cosmopolitan milieus in Alexandria or Beirut. Similarly, Russia had no intention of prolonging cosmopolitan moments in the cities under its control—like Baku, Tbilisi, or Riga. Functional and symmetrical multilingualism is a litmus test of any form of cosmopolitanism. In imperial cities, different ethnic, religious, and even social groups, develop encounters with each other which build up a more polyphonic fabric of society than in the centres. Yet it is enough for these polyphonic voices of the multi-ethnic urban community to become unified by a single enforced language to bring about a decline in cosmopolitanisation.

¹¹The Russian original is *чужка*, Azerbaijani: *çoşqa*.

MAKING THE BAKUVIAN GOLDEN AGE

The journalist and doctor Ali Bey Hüseyinzade (1864–1940) was born close to Baku, then attended a Russian school in Tiflis; afterwards he studied medicine at the University of St. Petersburg and at the Medical Institute of Tıbbiye in late-Ottoman Istanbul. He was the translator of some fragments from Goethe’s *Faust* into Azerbaijani, which he had published in his journal *Füyuzat*, founded in Baku in 1906. Hüseyinzade wrote extensively in Ottoman Turkish for Istanbul-based journals and translated from German literature.¹² He had returned from Istanbul to Baku after the Russian Revolution of 1905. He enjoyed the liberalisation in the Russian Empire and undertook various journalistic activities. The headquarters of his publishing house were quite close to the neighbourhood in which the Jewish writer Lev Nussimbaum was born in 1905. While Hüseyinzade was focused on reporting on political and cultural processes in the Ottoman Empire and understood the education of Caucasian Muslims as his main task, it was Nussimbaum who delivered a fascinating account of Baku years later. Hüseyinzade learnt German in St. Petersburg and in Tiflis. By translating Goethe and Schiller, Hüseyinzade was eager to popularise European culture among his compatriots. Nussimbaum mastered German in Baku and wrote extensively on the Caucasus, in German, for a European audience. Nussimbaum, who converted to Islam in interwar Austria and published under the penname Kurban Said, depicted a multinational Baku in his novel *Ali und Nino* (1937), where the interacting communities thought primarily in ethnic and religious categories. A love story between a Shia Muslim male, the Azeri Ali, and a Georgian Orthodox female, Nino, began in the classroom of a Russian gymnasium (Kaiserlich russisches humanistisches gymnasium), a unique place of imperial character where the offspring of upper-class families of Muslim, Jewish, Armenian, Georgian, and Russian background were brought, and educated, together.¹³ Nussimbaum’s book looked back on the years before, during World War I, as well as the years of Azerbaijani independence. The Bolshevik occupation caused the tragic end of the narrative; Ali was killed by the

¹²His translations of German romantic poets were published in Persian, which was an acknowledged literary language throughout Middle East, Central Asia, and even parts of India.

¹³Kurban Said, *Ali und Nino* (Munich, Berlin: Ullstein, 2003), 5.

Bolsheviks during the defence of the city of Gandja, while Nino managed to escape to Georgia with their new-born daughter. The geography of *Ali und Nino* encompassed the whole of the Caucasus and beyond. It involved Georgians, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Dagestanis, Turks, and Persians. Along with Baku as the locus of the initial encounter and the most essential *mise-en-scène*, Tiflis and Karabakh, as well as Tehran and Dagestan, are points of interest on the novel's map. Ali and Nino, born into wealthy families and educated in Russian, spoke it with each other. For Ali, Azerbaijani was the language of emotions and of his father. Nussimbaum stressed several times that Nino could speak Azerbaijani only poorly and that she communicated in Georgian only with her relatives in Tiflis. Kurban Said depicted the Baku of Ali and Nino as a place outside of any definite cultural or civilisational belonging. Notably, he described the identity-shifting of the new generation of Azerbaijani Muslim nobles—born into pious Shiite families but socially integrated into the Russian Empire. Ali confessed at the end of the novel: 'Ich selber war kein Asiat mehr' ('I was not an Asian anymore').¹⁴

Ali and Nino enjoyed the cosmopolitan moment during which their story begins, but their parents still cherished, respectively, Georgian authenticity and Islamic virtues. Seweryn Baryka, an agent of the Tsarist authority, was ordered to Baku around 1905; the voyage of the Polish diplomat and his wife, Jadwiga, from the imperial capital St. Petersburg to Baku was magnificently described by the prominent Polish novelist Stefan Żeromski in his last novel *Przedwiośnie* ('Early Spring', 1925). Jadwiga Barykowa spoke Russian poorly; born in Siedlice, she dreamt only of her Polish environment. Żeromski wrote with more than a hint of irony that for Jadwiga, everything was better and more colourful in Siedlice. In Baku, like Ali's and Nino's parents, Barykowa tried to insist on her native context. Barykowa, Ali's wealthy father, and the noble family Kipiani—Nino's parents—were at least literary residents of Baku at the turn of the century. They belonged to the generation born in the middle of the nineteenth century. All of them lived in a multi-ethnic but not cosmopolitan Baku.

But aside from these elite perspectives, the main oil centre of the Russian Empire also became one of the birthplaces of the Russian, and later the Soviet, proletariat. Workers made up the core of the city's

¹⁴Ibid., 191.

growing population. Organised ethnically, the Armenian, Russian, Azerbaijani, Georgian, and other groups clashed regularly. Interestingly, while various nationalistic projects—particularly the Armenian and Azerbaijani—competed with each other by supporting national cultural activities, the Empire was quite successful in driving integration among the young generation of urban elites. Through the boost of primary and secondary education at Russian and mixed schools at the turn of the century, after a decade of notorious Russification under the Tsar Alexander III, the Russian language started to displace non-Russian languages at the Empire’s periphery. The Russianness of the non-Russian nobles became dominant as soon as they commenced to communicate with each other in Russian, even within their own ethnic groups. The imperial ‘come-together’ of disparate groups briefly gave rise to a cosmopolitan moment, but the imperial homogenisation strategies that quickly followed just as quickly extinguished it. The memoirs of Baku-born female intellectual Banine on her childhood and youth in Baku of the 1900–1920s reflect these developments.

BANINE’S ‘CAUCASIAN DAYS’

While Nussimbaum’s and Žeromski’s novels are important literary accounts of Baku at the beginning of the twentieth century, Banine’s memoirs are an essential autobiographical narrative and offer insight on high society cosmopolitanism in 1910s’ Baku. ‘Banine’ was the penname of Umm-El-Banu Assadoulaieff (1905–1992). Born to a wealthy family of oil tycoons Musa Nagiev and Shamsi Assadoulaieff, she received an excellent education in Baku. During the short-lived independence of Azerbaijan between 1918 and 1920, Umm-El-Banu’s father became Azerbaijan’s Minister of Commerce. After the Sovietisation of Azerbaijan, Banine left for Paris. In France, she joined the Russian émigré intellectual milieu and hobnobbed in literary salons in Paris. She was in touch with Russian emigrant poets such as Ivan Bunin, and many other European intellectuals. Ernst Jünger was among her close friends. Jünger wrote the foreword to her autobiographical account, *Jours Caucasiens* (1945). In this, Assadoulaieff described her childhood in Baku, just after the Russian Revolution of 1905. Being a scion of an extremely wealthy Azerbaijani family, Banine and her three sisters were raised by a Riga-born German nanny who shaped a ‘Central European

microcosm’ for the kids by celebrating Christmas and reading a lot from European literature for them. Fluent in German, French, and Russian, Banine reflected the rise of ethnic nationalism in the Caucasus and the Armenian–Azerbaijani clashes of 1905 and 1918 in Baku, as well as the political turmoil after the Russian Revolution of 1917. In the first half of 1918, the Assadoullaieff family moved temporarily to Enzeli (Persia) and was able to return to Baku only after the Ottoman troops re-captured the city in autumn of 1918. Banine described the British occupation of Baku as well as its short-lived period of independence from 1918 to 1920. Though the Republic of 1918–1920 embodied the political success of the Azerbaijani nationalism, and the new government in Baku led by the nationalist ‘Musavat’ party intended to nationalise the social and cultural life in the country, Banine sympathised and identified herself with the newly founded nation-state. After the Bolshevik occupation of Azerbaijan in April 1920, Assadoullaieff stayed shortly in Baku, then moved to Tiflis and, via Batumi, she made it finally to Constantinople. At the Bosphorus, Umm-El-Banu applied for a French visa in order to join her sisters, who had left for France right after the Bolshevik coup. She described in detail the Russian émigré community in Constantinople in the early 1920s, as well as the historic downtown of the metropolis. The narrative ended with a four-day voyage from Constantinople to Paris on the Orient Express.

Baku’s cosmopolitan moment at the turn of the century was restricted to the lives of these aristocratic circles. The Empire’s annexation of neighbouring territories had given rise to a new kind of nobility, which was cognisant of its non-Russian background but also fluent in Russian as well as in the important upper-culture languages of the region. For the Caucasian intellectuals in general, and for Azerbaijani intellectuals in particular, the supra-confessional cosmopolitan moment began shortly before the Transcaucasian Teachers Seminary in Gori was closed and lasted until World War I. Banine can be considered a shining example of this kind of cosmopolitanist. Baku’s imperial cosmopolitanism arose in a city still deeply torn on religious and cultural grounds and by ethnic tensions. It remained an ‘oriental town’, a backward and dangerous space not only for Russian and European observers, but also for Baku-born noble cosmopolitans. Both Nussimbaum (Kurban Said) and Banine described the Shiite ceremonies of Shakhsey-Vakhsey as an

embodiment of oriental backwardness.¹⁵ For Banine, Baku still remained ‘une ville encore tout orientale’, a city still altogether oriental.¹⁶ Both authors repeatedly noted that Baku had a European and an oriental quarter. In writing about her childhood, Banine devoted several pages to the description of the Novruz (an Azerbaijani celebration of the New Year),¹⁷ and Christmas festivities, as well as Shiite religious ceremonies in downtown Baku. About her family and its milieu, Banine wrote: ‘les Russes nous avaient colonisées depuis longtemps déjà; leur influence s’infiltrait partout, et avec elle le désir de culture, d’européanisation’ [‘The Russians have colonised us for a long time; with their infiltrating influence came the desire for culture, for Europeanisation’].¹⁸ As a child, she was aware of the Russian colonisation of the Eastern Caucasus, but understood her culture exclusively in the Russian context. The deep and century-old cultural ties between Baku and Persia were mentioned by Banine only on the margins. Indeed, she mastered neither Persian nor Azeri. Banine confessed: ‘l’aziri sonnait brutal et saccadé: je ne l’aimais pas et pour cette raison sans doute, je n’ai jamais pu le parler correctement’ [‘Azeri sounded to me abrupt and coarse: I never liked it, and for this reason was never able to speak it properly’].¹⁹ As her work shows, the process of alienation from the local culture—of self-exotification, of self-abnegation, among the indigenous nobility at the peripheries of the Empire—had already begun in Baku long before the Soviet period.

Banine’s youth in Baku prepared her, to some extent, for a later cosmopolitan life in Paris. Fluent in French, German, and Russian, she gradually moved between the numerous clubs of Russophone intelligentsia in Paris, finding herself similarly at home in French and German intellectual

¹⁵Shakhsey-Vakhsey is a notion for chants accompanying the mourning rituals of Shia men. During Ashura, the tenth day of the month Muharram, the Shias commemorate the martyrdom of Hussein in 680 in the city of Karbala (Iraq). Hussein, the son of Muhammad’s son-in-law Ali, was killed at that date and this murder deepened the schism between Shia and Sunni. Annually, the Shiites recall and mark the death of Hussein by passion plays in public and other mourning rituals. Some Shia men flagellate themselves with iron chains.

¹⁶Banine: *Jours Caucasiens*, Paris 1945, 16.

¹⁷Besides Azerbaijan, Novruz has been celebrated in a large geography throughout Iran, eastern Turkey (predominantly by Kurds and Alevis), Central Asia, and Afghanistan.

¹⁸Banine, *Jours caucasiens*, Paris, 1945, 18.

¹⁹Ibid., 38.

environments. She was a prolific writer and translator, and therefore wandered easily between the different *aires culturelles*. As an admirer of European-ness and connoisseur of French, German, and Russian cultures, a Baku-born female intellectual of Muslim origin, Banine felt completely out of place in Near Eastern Baku. Her preoccupation with Europe lent itself to steady opposition toward the local Muslim and Azerbaijani cultures, but not to integration or mutuality.

Kurban Said and Banine both spent decades in exile. They both had to leave Baku after the end of the World War I and the following political turmoil, in order to escape violent outbreaks in the region. Being far from Baku, and culturally quite well integrated into the societies in which they respectively found themselves, both underwent profound personal metamorphoses by rediscovering their own ‘Orientalness’. Lev Nussimbaum converted to Islam, assumed the name Kurban Said, and adopted a demonstratively orientalist style of dress in his everyday life in Berlin.²⁰ Banine looked for every possibility to get in touch with Azerbaijani immigrants in France. In the conclusion of her *Jours Caucasiens*, Banine wrote about her dreams of ‘returning’ to the land of her ancestors.

Banine, enjoying a rigorous private education with a German nanny in her palace in Baku, was in many ways a microcosm of Russified Azerbaijani elites. The ties between Muslim intellectuals and Persian civilisation, as well as the Ottoman Empire, were diminished but not destroyed after the Crimean War and particularly in the 1880–1890s; Tsarist Russia was not modernised enough to exert efficient control over its southern borderlands. These circumstances gave birth to a sort of Muslim cosmopolitanism.

MUSLIM COSMOPOLITANISM

Rasulzade was the head of Parliament at the time, and was in many ways very characteristic of Baku’s Muslim elites. Born in 1884 to a family of clerics in a village close to Baku, he graduated from the so-called Russian-Tatar school and wrote extensively for Russian and Azerbaijani

²⁰For more on this issue, see Tom Reiss, *The Orientalist: Solving the Mystery of a Strange and Dangerous Life* (Random House, 2005). In German: *Der Orientalist. Auf den Spuren von Essad Bey* (München, 2010).

newspapers in Baku in the early 1900s. Fascinated by the Russian revolutionary writer Maxim Gorkii, he translated his novel *Mat'* (Mother) into Azerbaijani and identified as a socialist. Facing pressure from the Tsarist authorities, Rasulzade had to leave the Tsardom. He migrated to Tehran, where he edited the first Persian socialist paper, *Iran-e-nou* (The New Iran), and then he moved to late-Ottoman Istanbul. The circulation of people and ideas between Baku, Tehran, and Istanbul at the turn of the century was not so surprising. One key feature that distinguished the Azerbaijani Muslim intellectuals from the intellectuals of the Ottoman Empire and Persia was their competence in Russian, in addition to Ottoman Turkish and Persian. The education of Russian-Tatar schools and socialisation in a Russified environment caused a certain awareness of Russian literature and culture among Azerbaijani Muslim intellectuals. Moving between Baku, Tehran, and Istanbul, Rasulzade—like Hüseyinzade—did not complain of Shiia and Sunni tensions, but rather advocated for socialist development as the main source of progress.

This type of a multilingual intellectual emerged at the peripheries of the Empire such as the post-Ottoman and post-QadjarCaucasus under Russian rule, where multinational urban spaces like Baku and Tiflis provided a very fruitful framework for multilingualism and for Russian—and therefore European—education. Children of Muslim families could attend the Russian schools, or traditional *madrasa* and *mekteb*, or both. The Arabic-Persian script facilitated contact with the neighbouring countries. Since the 1930s, however, the situation has changed dramatically. The Latinisation, and a decade later the Kyrilisation, of the Azerbaijani language under Joseph Stalin; the state-enforced curtailment of cultural and personal contacts between Soviet Azerbaijan and both Turkey and Iran; as well as the introduction of Russian, German, and French as the first, second and third foreign language at the secondary schools in Azerbaijan drove a cultural wedge between that generation of Azerbaijani intellectuals of Muslim origin, and Turkey and Iran.

Soviet Baku

The Azerbaijani intellectuals born and socialised in the 1930s and during World War II were still quite familiar with Near Eastern cultures, even though they lacked competence in Persian and Arabic. Writers like Anar Rzayev (b. 1938) and Chingiz Guseinov (b. 1929) exemplify this generation. Born and raised in Baku, both studied in Moscow and went on

to write in Russian and Azerbaijani. Deeply familiar with both Russian and Azerbaijani literature and intellectual discourse, Anar and Guseinov wander between the two cultures, being at home in each of them.

The shift within the Azerbaijani intelligentsia occurred at the time when the second cosmopolitan moment was taking place. During the Brezhnev era, the majority of secondary schools in Baku were still taught in Azerbaijani, and the Azerbaijani language—unlike in Central Asia, Ukraine, and the Baltics—became the second official language of Azerbaijan after Stalin’s death. Simultaneously, during the Brezhnevite stagnation, a new social stratum emerged in Baku, the so-called *Bakintsy* (Bakuvians). It comprised the Russophone residents of Baku of Azerbaijani, Armenian, Jewish, Ukrainian, Lezgian, and other ethnic descent, as well as ethnic Russians who made up a quarter of the city’s entire population. Bakuvians communicated, read, and wrote primarily in Russian. The subculture of *Bakintsy* flourished during the Brezhnev era. This culture resulted in the emergence of Azerbaijani bilingual chanson from Muslim Magomayev (1942–2008) and Polad Bülbüloğlu (b. 1945), ethnojazz from Vagif Mustafazade (1940–1979) and his daughter Aziza (b. 1969), and Baku-based Russophone literature and journalism. Interestingly, the majority of those Azerbaijani journalists, born mostly in Baku of the 1950–1970s, possessed a marvellous knowledge of Russian, but were somewhat deficient in Azerbaijani. While Magomayev, Bülbüloğlu, and Aziza Mustafazade performed the majority of their songs in Azerbaijani, they preferred to give their interviews in Russian. Despite having been socialised and having pursued their professional careers at the Empire’s periphery, this generation of intellectuals had almost completely assimilated to the Russian *Leitkultur*.

According to the research of Bruce Grant from 2010, when asked about the cosmopolitanism of Baku, residents between 30 and 70 years old often recall the ‘good old days’ (mostly the Brezhnevite period) and talk a lot about the multinational common life.²¹ In reality, it was a very one-sided cosmopolitanism in which inclusion (and exclusion) was a function of one’s knowledge of Russian and often being at least a second-generation Bakuvian. Newcomers to Baku from the rest of Azerbaijan spent decades in Baku’s suburbs dreaming of being accepted.

²¹ See the contribution of Bruce (2010).

On the one hand, the *Bakinty*, who intellectually produced fascinating pieces in the field of Russian-Azerbaijani bilingual song-writing and music culture, included individuals who had different confessional, ethnic, and professional backgrounds. The unifying feature was the mastery of Russian with a distinct Bakuvian accent. The integration of numerous Azerbaijanis, Jews, and Armenians into the *Bakinty* community meant their partial or complete linguistic and cultural deracination. Educated at the Russian schools of Baku, Armenians and Azerbaijanis had immense linguistic and cultural problems when communicating with their compatriots from Azerbaijani or Armenian provinces. The Bakuvian subculture lent itself to elitist thinking, excluding everyone who spoke Russian poorly. Thus, while late-Tsarist Baku at the turn of the century enriched the cultural and linguistic competences of Azerbaijani Muslims and Armenian intellectuals to some extent, Soviet Baku brought the demise of its traditional multiculturalism.

Post-Soviet Baku

During the Armenian–Azerbaijani war over Nagorni Karabakh in 1988–1994 and during the first post-Soviet decade, almost the entire Armenian community of Baku, as well as two quarters of Baku’s Russian and Ukrainian residents, left the city. Hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis from the provinces migrated to Baku in search of jobs and better futures. At the same time, Baku became the most important destination for thousands of Azerbaijani refugees from Georgia during the presidency of the nationalist Zviad Gamsakhurdia (1990–1992), and for hundreds of thousands of ethnic Azerbaijanis and Kurds from Armenia and Armenian–Azerbaijani borderland. The war over Karabakh and the collapse of the Soviet Union damaged the Bakuvian subculture, which had emerged partly in reliance on the Soviet policy of so-called *Druzhbba narodov* (friendship of peoples). The collapse of the USSR terminated the ideological bias. After the dismemberment of the Soviet Union and the war over Karabakh, the Bakuvian subculture largely left Baku and spread to Russian cities, Germany, Israel, USA, Turkey, and to the internet. The internet project OurBaku.com, ‘a meticulously curated and edited online encyclopedia which aims to catalog and commemorate Baku’s past’,²² has

²²Lassin, Jacob (2015) ‘The Digital City in Post-Soviet Identity Formation: The Case of OurBaku.com’. *Digital Icons: Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media*, 13, 149–150.

hosted Bakuvian’s discourses for several years. The portal www.baku.ru is another example of Bakuvians’ refuge in virtual space. It hosts an enormous message archive of former and current Bakuvians hoping to stay in touch and reminiscing about old Baku again and again. Partly, the Bakuvian subculture underwent a certain nationalisation.

If we can imagine the Baku of today as a house, around half of its residents were born outside of it. Russian media, Russophone literature, and Russian theatres remained in Baku, which became the nationalised capital of post-Soviet Azerbaijan. The country itself became a prominent space of competition between Turkish and Iranian soft powers. Turkish television has been transmitted since the early 1990s throughout Azerbaijan. The new generation of Baku’d downtown—socialised with the modified Latin alphabet—is fluent in modern Turkish, aware of Turkish pop culture and politics, but remains competent in Russian.

This post-Soviet cosmopolitan moment gave birth to the multi-cultural intellectual interaction that might be best exemplified by the young writer Alakbar Aliyev. Born in Baku in 1978, Alakbar attended a prominent Russian school, Nr. 134, in central Baku. In the early 1990s, shortly after the collapse of the USSR and liberalisation of the border regime, his family decided to send Alakbar to Istanbul to complete his education there. Aliyev was enrolled into a conservative secondary school, Imam Hatip Lisesi, with much of Islam-related disciplines in the curriculum. Afterwards, Aliyev studied journalism at the state-run Marmara University and worked as a Russian and Turkish translator in Istanbul. After a decade in Turkey, he returned to Baku in the early 2000s, and became famous through his gay romance novel *Artush and Zaur* (2009).²³ Published under the penname Ali Akbar, the novel explores a love story between two fictional Bakuvians, an Azerbaijani young man named Zaur and an Armenian named Artush. Both of them were born in Baku and attended the same Russian school at the end of 1980s. Their parents often visited each other and celebrated holidays by cooking Azeri, Armenian, and Russian cuisine together. The start of the Armenian–Azerbaijani confrontation over Karabakh drove Artush’s family to emigrate from Baku to Armenia. After the war, both Zaur and Artush worked for local NGOs in Azerbaijan and Armenia, respectively.

²³Eli Ekber: *Artus ve Zaur. Mehebbet efsanesi (böyükler üçün konfliktologiya dersliyi)*, Ulaanbaatar, 2009.

Years later, they met again at a conference in Tbilisi, rediscovered their feelings, and fell in love once again. The author described the Bakuvian milieu as a part of a bygone world: ‘Even scattered across four continents, they remain Bakuvians. Bakuvians make up a nation that possessed a unique culture born from the intersection of two tremendous and completely different geographies of East and West.’²⁴ The author touched the Bakuvian narrative by invoking its supra-national, supra-ethnic, and even supra-racial elements. His considerations and reflections concerning Bakuvians sound to some extent like an autobiographical account. As mentioned above, the writer himself attended a prominent Russian school and grew up within a highly Russified late-Soviet Baku.

Alakbar highlighted the ideological divisions inside the ethnic Azerbaijani population of Baku in the late 1980s, during the Armenian–Azerbaijani war over Karabakh—and therefore at the end of the cosmopolitan moment. Some Azerbaijanis assisted the Armenians of Baku and defended them from attacks by Azerbaijani refugees who, ousted from Armenia, sought asylum in Baku. Others quickly accepted the nationalistic rhetoric, advocated for the nationalisation of Azerbaijan, and shared the anti-Armenian mood. Alakbar’s novel has no happy ending. Artush and Zaur—both oppressed by belligerent, homophobic, and mutually opposed nationalisms—committed suicide. Post-Soviet Baku seemingly is not a place that can tolerate a love between an Azerbaijani and a former Bakuvian, an ethnic Armenian, let alone a love between two men.

Ali Akbar’s novel embodied a critique of the authoritarian regime of the current President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev (since 2003). The author was forced to leave Azerbaijan for Switzerland in 2012. His novel was banned in Azerbaijan, but was made available on the internet shortly after its first publication in Mongolia’s capital. Meanwhile, the novel has been translated into German and Dutch. A former Bakuvian himself, Akbar embodies the post-Soviet generation of Baku-born Azerbaijani intellectuals. Like Anar Rzayev and Chingiz Guseinov, he is fluent both in Russian and in Azerbaijani. It was Russian gay literature that inspired him to write the novel. Unlike Guseinov and Anar’s generation, however, Akbar studied not in Moscow but in Istanbul, the new centre of intellectual attraction for many of Azerbaijan’s post-Soviet intellectuals.

²⁴Ibid., 51.

The publication of *Artush and Zaur* caused a wave of heated debates on literature, homosexuality, and Armenian–Azerbaijani antagonism in Azerbaijan as well as in Armenia. Chingiz Guseinov, who himself left Azerbaijan for Moscow during the Brezhnevite period to escape persecution by the Soviet Azerbaijani leadership, gave a glowing review of Akbar’s novel.

The plots of *Ali and Nino* and *Artush and Zaur*, novels exploring Baku’s multi-ethnic and supra-religious love stories, were mirrored in the 2014 novel of Baku-born German writer Olga Grjasnowa. Titled *Die Juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe* (*The Legal Haziness of a Marriage*), the novel follows the homosexual and lesbian relationship of two Bakuvians, Altay and Leyla, and the young Israeli Jonoun, between Berlin and Baku. The author was born in Baku into a Russian-Jewish family in 1984 and left for Germany in 1996. The plot of her novel deals with post-Soviet Baku, which she had experienced herself. Grjasnowa writes:

Baku was an old and beautiful city, and one which has undergone a gradual resurrection: before the last war, it was a metropolis *par excellence*, with its intermingling peoples and languages, its bustling boulevards and stylish pedestrians, its cafes and colleges and libraries and concert halls. During the war, it was increasingly desolate. Life in the city was stricken by brutality, mass emigration, and crime. Now, life has returned to the city [, ...] and yet it has become another city altogether, with alien residents and alien customs and an alien language. But there is a remaining longing for the old, the only ‘true,’ Baku, especially in the households of the Bakuvian diaspora in Los Angeles, Moscow, Berlin, Yerevan, Seoul, and even in Baku itself.²⁵

²⁵Olga Grjasnowa: *Die Juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe* (München 2014), pp.164–165. ‘Baku war eine alte und zudem schöne Stadt und eine, die allmählich wieder zum Leben erwachte: Vor dem letzten Krieg war sie eine Metropole par excellence gewesen, mit einem Gemisch aus Völkern, Sprachen, belebten Boulevards und dandyhaften Flaneuren, Cafés, Hochschulen, Bibliotheken und Konzertsälen. Während des Krieges war sie zunehmend verödet. Brutale Gewalt, massenhafte Emigration und Kriminalität erstickten das Leben in ihr. Nun kam es wieder zurück [...] Und doch war es eine andere Stadt geworden, mit anderen Einwohnern, anderen Sitten und einer anderen Sprache. Was blieb, war die Sehnsucht nach dem alten, vermeintlich einzig wahren Baku, vor allem in den Wohnzimmern der Emigranten in Los Angeles, Moskau, Berlin, Jerewan, Seoul und sogar in Baku selbst.’

Grjasnowa points out that the war and exodus of non-Azerbaijani ethnic groups caused the end of multi-ethnicity. Even though life in the city eventually returned to the routine, Baku became ‘another city altogether, with alien residents and alien customs and an alien language’. And indeed, the end of the Soviet era, together with the Latinisation of the alphabet of the Azerbaijani language, caused a rapid de-Russification in almost all spheres of social and cultural life in Baku. Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia and Karabakh, mostly from rural areas, moved into the apartments of Armenians who had hastened to leave the city for Russia or Armenia. Many of the refugees and internally displaced persons were settled in the buildings of schools and sport halls. Baku lost at least a quarter of its urban residents and saw an influx of hundreds of thousands of villagers. However, it is debatable whether the shift from Russian to Azerbaijani as Baku’s lingua franca made the city less cosmopolitan than Baku has allegedly been. In reality, one *Leitkultur* was substituted for another. After the collapse of the USSR (1991) and as a result of the war over Karabakh (1988–1994), Baku became less multinational and less Christian. The Armenian–Azerbaijani war in particular damaged the cosmopolitan moment of the Soviet era and even overshadowed Armenian–Azerbaijani cultural exchange dating back to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The Russian conquest of Baku at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and discovery of its oil wealth in the second half of the century, transformed a tiny, predominantly Shia town into an industrial melting pot of the Empire. As the result of modernisation, forced industrialisation, and demographical boom, a cosmopolitan bohemia emerged in Baku at the turn of the century. Undermined by the ethnic clashes of 1905 and 1918 and by World War I, a cosmopolitan community of Bakuvians appeared paradoxically as a result of World War II and the large-scale Soviet internal migration process. Bakuvians consisted of ethnic Azerbaijanis, Russians, Armenians, Jews and other nationalities, and used Russian when communicating within their own ethnic community and with other Bakuvians. In the 1970–1980s, Bakuvian became a supra-national and supra-confessional identity with a setting of certain identity-building folklore such as anecdotes, songs praising Bakuvians and Baku, and even a specific Baku accent of Russian. The demise of the USSR in 1991, the restoration of the Azerbaijani nation-state, as well as the bloody military conflict with the neighbouring Armenia over Karabakh caused the emigration of hundreds of thousands of Baku’s Russians,

Jews, and Armenians and the immigration of ethnic Azerbaijanis from the rural parts of Armenia, territories around Karabakh, and from eastern Georgia throughout the 1990s. These processes diminished the alleged cosmopolitan atmosphere by damaging the milieu and changing the framework.

INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION: A LIFE IN BAKU

Tofiq Asadullayev was born in 1942 in Baku to a family of Azerbaijani emigrants from the northern Iranian city of Ardabil, not far from the Soviet–Persian state border. He was the fifth child of two poorly educated parents, a taxi-driver Seyfi and a housewife Shafa. The Asadullayev family received a plot of soil in a suburb of Baku, close to the century-old Muslim cemetery of Keshlia. The quarter in which they lived was called simply *posiolok*, Russian for ‘settlement’. Their neighbour to the right was an Armenian family, and to the left, a Russian-Azerbaijani couple with three children. The Asadullayevs sent their elder children and Tofiq to an Azerbaijani school in the centre of *posiolok*. While Tofiq completed his primary and secondary education, his parents got five more children. Tofiq grew up among the Armenian and Russian teenagers of his *posiolok* until he turned eighteen and was recruited to the Soviet Army. Tofiq conducted the military service in the Russian Karelia and then studied sport at the Institute of Physical Education and Sport in Baku and fell in love with an ethnically Russian classmate, Taisiya Polezhaeva (b. 1945), whose parents had moved to Baku from the small Russian town of Labinsk in search of work, approximately at the same time as his own parents left Ardabil. The sportsmen’s milieu of Baku was traditionally multinational and Russophone. Russians, Ukrainians, Armenians, Jews, and Azerbaijanis, as well as Lezgins and Talysh, came together as students at the Institute, as well as numerous summer camps during the so-called *sbory* (collective training). Tofiq and Taisiya married in 1970 and had a son two years later; they named him Ruslan, after Pushkin’s famous *Ruslan and Liudmila*, in an effort to find a name rooted in both Russian and Caucasian culture. Taisiya taught sports at a Russian secondary school. Tofiq worked as a wrestling trainer in a sports school in downtown Baku. Both Taisiya and Ruslan took Tofiq’s surname, Asadullayev, and Russian was spoken at home. Both parents being quite secular, Tofiq did not insist on Muslim circumcision. Ruslan graduated from a Russian school and entered the

Russian sector of the Institute of Physical Education and Sport, just like his parents did. Ruslan focused on fencing and finished his university education during the early years of the Perestroika. During the Perestroika, issues like official language began to matter. Ruslan was in his early twenties, born to an Azerbaijani–Russian family in Baku, but had poor knowledge of Azerbaijani. Ruslan belonged to the last post-Soviet generation of Bakuvians. He spent his childhood in Russophone Baku, in a neighbourhood inhabited by Russians, Azerbaijanis, and Armenians; he regularly read the Soviet daily paper *Sovetskii Sport* and watched only Moscow-based television. The gradual Azerbaijanisation of the street names in Baku throughout the early 1990s seemed ridiculous to him. However, mastery of Azerbaijani became important for pursuing a career of any type after Azerbaijan gained its independence in 1991. Additionally, unlike wrestling and boxing, fencing failed to become a popular sport in Azerbaijan. Throughout the 1990s, thousands of Bakuvians—cosmopolitan remnants of the bygone Empire—left the urban space of Baku. Israel, Germany, the United States, and especially Russia became the destinations for many, including Ruslan and many of his former classmates. The Baku of his childhood and youth had been vanishing; in Volgograd, he got married and had children. His daughters have Russian names and Ruslan himself changed his surname to that of his mother, becoming Ruslan Polezhaev—both post-Soviet Baku and post-Soviet Russia seem less hospitable to anyone of a different national and confessional background. The paternal grandparents of Ruslan were from Ardabil and were fluent only in Azerbaijani; until their deaths in the 1990s, they could not communicate in Russian. Ruslan’s father, Tofiq, is bilingual, fluent in both Azerbaijani and Russian. Ruslan himself can be understood as a regular product of the Russification of 1970s. This demands that we rethink the cosmopolitanism of urban spaces, like Baku, at the periphery of the Empire. The Russophone community of Baku after World War II made it possible for thousands of Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Jews, Ukrainians, and Russians to come together, marry inter-ethnically, share everyday life, and enrich each other. Russian, being the lingua franca of the Bakuvian community, became the mother tongue of Ruslan’s generation. Like Ruslan, the majority of Baku-born Armenians, Ukrainians, and Azerbaijanis considered Russian their mother tongue. In turn-of-the-century Baku, and in the 1920s and 1930s, the Armenian press flourished in Baku; Georgian was taught at the Baku State University; Azerbaijani intellectuals were fluent in

Persian and Russian, as well as in the Azerbaijani language. After World War II, the new wave of gradual Russification of the city began, and the Karabakh war and the post-Soviet search for identity caused the Azerbaijanisation of the urban space.

Taisiya died of cancer in 2011. Since then Tofiq has been living alone. He hosts his son when he comes to visit him once a year. Almost every evening, he checks his account on *odnoklassniki.ru*, a large Russophone Facebook-like internet portal, which he uses to chat with his son and his former colleagues. Both Tofiq and Ruslan are members of the portal's mailing group *Korennye Bakinsty*—True Bakuivians.

Tofiq, now 75, is retired and tries to visit his sisters still living in Baku. Once a month, he goes to his former *posiolok* to see his childhood friends. They reminisce. In that reminiscing, numerous Armenian and Russian names may be heard. They speak Azerbaijani with each other, but they often switch to Russian, mostly repeating jokes they have heard before. In the era which is simultaneously post-imperial and post-Soviet, Baku's cosmopolitan golden age has once again retreated into personal memory.