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SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC LIFE IN AZERBAIJAN UNDER TSARIST RULE: DEMOGRAPHIC, RURAL, AND URBAN PERSPECTIVES (1840–1917)

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Etik bəyan: Bu çalışmanın ərsəyə gəlməsi prosesində elmi və etik prinsiplərə riayət olunduğu və istifadə olunan bütün mənbələrin ədəbiyyat bölməsində göstərildiyi müəllif (lər) tərəfindən bəyan olunmuşdur.

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Social and economic life in azerbaijan under tsarist rule: demographic, rural, and urban perspectives (1840–1917)

Abstract: This study employs the historical research method and is based on a qualitative, descriptive, and comparative analysis of archival documents, statistical data, and relevant scholarly literature to examine Azerbaijan's demographic development, rural society, and urbanization during the Russian imperial period (1840–1917). The study analyzes demographic developments, rural social structures, and urbanization processes that shaped Azerbaijani society during this period. The research demonstrates that Russian colonial policies, agrarian reforms, industrialization, and migration significantly altered the region's demographic composition and socio-economic relations.

The study reveals that Azerbaijan experienced considerable population growth during the nineteenth century, although wars, epidemics, forced migrations, and political conflicts continuously affected demographic stability. The population remained ethnically and religiously diverse, with Muslims constituting the majority. Religion continued to play a central role in social life despite Tsarist efforts to reduce the influence of Islamic institutions through educational, judicial, and administrative reforms.

In rural areas, agriculture remained the dominant economic activity, and most people lived in villages. Although the abolition of serfdom and agrarian reforms formally improved the legal status of peasants, they failed to resolve fundamental problems related to land ownership, taxation, and economic dependency. Consequently, many peasants faced poverty and were forced to migrate to urban centers.

The article also highlights the rapid urban growth stimulated by the expansion of the oil industry, particularly in Baku. Industrialization fostered the emergence of new social classes, including workers, entrepreneurs, and intellectuals. However, economic progress was accompanied by severe social inequalities, poor working conditions, and inadequate public services.

The study concludes that the period marked a significant transition from traditional feudal structures to capitalist economic relations and laid the foundations for the modernization of Azerbaijani society in the twentieth century. By integrating demographic change, rural social structures, and urbanization within a single analytical framework, the article contributes to the existing literature by providing a comprehensive interpretation of Azerbaijan's socio-economic transformation under Tsarist Russian rule and offers a basis for future comparative studies on the South Caucasus.

Keywords: Azerbaijan, Tsarist Russia, demographic change, rural society, urbanization, industrialization, agrarian reform, social history.

Çar Rusiyası dövründə Azərbaycanda sosial və iqtisadi həyat: demoqrafik inkişaf, kənd cəmiyyəti və şəhərləşmə prizmasından (1840–1917)

Xülasə: Bu məqalədə 1840–1917-ci illərdə Azərbaycanın Rusiya imperiyasının tərkibində olduğu dövrdə baş vermiş əsas sosial və iqtisadi dəyişikliklər araşdırılır. Bu tədqiqat tarixi tədqiqat metoduna əsaslanır və arxiv sənədləri, statistik materiallar və mövzu üzrə elmi ədəbiyyatın keyfiyyət (qualitative), müqayisəli və təsviri təhlili əsasında hazırlanmışdır. Tədqiqatda Azərbaycanın demoqrafik inkişafı, kənd cəmiyyətinin quruluşu və şəhərləşmə prosesləri təhlil edilir. Araşdırma göstərir ki, Rusiyanın müstəmləkə siyasəti, aqrar islahatlar, sənayeləşmə və miqrasiya prosesləri ölkənin əhali strukturuna və sosial-iqtisadi münasibətlərinə ciddi təsir göstərmişdir.

Tədqiqat nəticələrinə görə, XIX əsrdə Azərbaycanda əhali artımı müşahidə olunsa da, müharibələr, epidemiyalar, məcburi köçürmələr və siyasi qarşıdurmalar demoqrafik vəziyyətə mənfi təsir göstərmişdir. Əhali etnik və dini baxımdan rəngarəng olmuş, müsəlmanlar əhalinin böyük əksəriyyətini təşkil etmişdir. Çar hakimiyyətinin təhsil, məhkəmə və idarəetmə sahələrində həyata keçirdiyi tədbirlərə baxmayaraq, din və dini institutlar cəmiyyət üzərində mühüm təsirini qoruyub saxlamışdır.

Kənd təsərrüfatı iqtisadiyyatın əsas sahəsi olaraq qalmış və əhalinin böyük hissəsi kəndlərdə yaşamışdır. Təhkimçiliyin ləğvi və aqrar islahatlar kəndlilərin hüquqi vəziyyətini müəyyən qədər dəyişdirsə də, torpaq mülkiyyəti, ağır vergi yükü və iqtisadi asılılıq kimi problemləri aradan qaldıra bilməmişdir. Nəticədə çoxsaylı kəndlilər yoxsulluq şəraitində yaşayaraq iş axtarmaq məqsədilə şəhərlərə köç etmişlər.

Məqalədə neft sənayesinin inkişafı nəticəsində, xüsusilə Bakıda sürətlənən şəhərləşmə prosesi də təhlil edilir. Sənayeləşmə yeni sosial təbəqələrin – fəhlələrin, sahibkarların və ziyalıların formalaşmasına şərait yaratmışdır. Bununla yanaşı, uzun iş saatları, aşağı əməkhaqqı, zəif sosial təminat və qeyri-kafi şəhər infrastrukturu kimi problemlər davam etmişdir. Nəticə etibarilə, bu dövr Azərbaycanın ənənəvi feodal münasibətlərindən kapitalist iqtisadi sistemə keçid mərhələsi olmuş və ölkənin gələcək modernləşmə proseslərinin əsasını təşkil etmişdir. Demoqrafik inkişaf, kənd cəmiyyəti və şəhərləşmə proseslərini vahid analitik çərçivədə birgə təhlil etməklə məqalə mövcud elmi ədəbiyyata Azərbaycanın Çar Rusiyası hakimiyyəti dövründə keçirdiyi sosial-iqtisadi transformasiyanın daha bütöv və sistemli şərhini təqdim etməklə töhfə verir, eyni zamanda Cənubi Qafqaz üzrə gələcək müqayisəli tədqiqatlar üçün nəzəri əsas yaradır.

Açar sözlər: Azərbaycan, Çar Rusiyası, demoqrafik dəyişikliklər, kənd cəmiyyəti, şəhərləşmə, sənayeləşmə, aqrar islahatlar, sosial tarix.

Introduction

From the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, Azerbaijan underwent significant political, economic, and social transformations as part of the Russian Empire. The consolidation of Russian rule in the South Caucasus led to profound changes in the region's administrative system, land relations, demographic structure, and economic life. In particular, the development of capitalist relations within the empire, the implementation of agrarian reforms, and the process of industrialization during the second half of the nineteenth century affected various segments of Azerbaijani society in different ways.

During this period, the population of Azerbaijan was characterized by considerable ethnic and religious diversity. The Russo-Persian and Russo-Ottoman wars, resettlement policies, economic migration, and natural population growth all contributed to significant changes in both the size and composition of the population. At the same time, religion continued to exert a strong influence on social relations, and Muslim clergy and religious institutions largely maintained their authority among the local population. However, the policies implemented by the Tsarist administration in the fields of education, law, and governance were aimed at limiting the influence of religious and traditional institutions.

Throughout the nineteenth century, agriculture remained the foundation of Azerbaijan's economy. Since the majority of the population lived in rural areas, agrarian relations constituted one of the principal factors shaping the social structure of society. Although peasant reforms formally sought to abolish serfdom, they failed to bring about fundamental changes in landownership patterns and systems of economic dependency. As a result, a substantial portion of the rural population continued to live under conditions marked by heavy taxation, limited access to land, and persistent social inequality.

On the other hand, the rapid development of the oil industry, particularly from the late nineteenth century onward, stimulated the emergence of new social and economic relations in Azerbaijani cities. Baku, in particular, experienced rapid population growth, the establishment of new industrial enterprises, the expansion of the working class, and an accelerated process of urbanization. Nevertheless, the development of urban social infrastructure lagged behind the pace of industrial growth, while harsh working conditions and inadequate social welfare mechanisms continued to characterize urban life.

The aim of this article is to examine the main features of social and economic life in Azerbaijan between 1840 and 1917 through the perspectives of demographic change, rural society, and urban development. Drawing upon archival documents, statistical records, and relevant scholarly literature, the study seeks to identify the

nature and consequences of the structural transformations that took place in Azerbaijani society during the period of Tsarist rule.

A. Demographic and Religious Structure

The wars between the Russian Empire and Iran, as well as between Russia and the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century, had significant socio-economic consequences for the Caucasus region. These conflicts led to high levels of mortality, captivity, and both forced and voluntary migration, which in turn caused noticeable changes in the local population structure. For instance, prior to the Russian occupation, approximately 10,000 families lived in Karabakh; however, by 1812 this number had declined to around 3,000 families (Bunyadov & Yusifov, 1994, pp. 581–582; Verdiyeva, 1999, pp. 45–50).

In addition to military conflicts, unfavorable socio-economic conditions constituted a major factor limiting population growth. Natural disasters and epidemic diseases also contributed to increased mortality rates (Huseynov et al., 1964, p. 271).

According to 1854 statistical data, the population of the region amounted to 504,098, showing an increase of 8,006 compared to the previous year (Azerbaijan State Historical Archive [ADTA], Fond 45, List 2, File 39, pp. 75–77, 131). By 1860, the population had risen significantly to 760,987 due to a higher birth rate than mortality and the incorporation of the Quba district into the province (ADTA, Fond 45, List 2, File 77a, pp. 1–2).

During the late nineteenth century, further population growth was driven by the expansion of the oil industry, which stimulated labor migration and intensified population mobility policies.[1] By 1897, the total population of the region (including Nakhchivan but excluding Zaqatala) reached 1,805,738 individuals (Verdiyeva, 1999, p. 254; Huseynov et al., 1964, p. 270).

The population of Azerbaijan was ethnically diverse. According to the 1897 census, in the Baku governorate (total population 826,806), the ethnic composition included 486,500 Turks, 77,700 Russians, 63,000 Caucasian highlanders (including Abkhazians, Circassians, Lezgins, etc.), 52,200 Armenians, 8,200 Jews, 1,700 Georgi-

[1]According to the 1894 statistics, the population of Baku alone had reached 113,391, including 63,717 men and 49,674 women. Of this population, 45,338 were Muslims, 33,612 Armenian-Gregorians, 28,028 Orthodox Christians, 3,282 Lutherans, 1,375 Catholics, and 662 Jews (Azerbaijan State Historical Archive [ADTA], Fond 311, List 1, File 27, p. 56).

ans, and 1,400 representatives of other ethnic groups (Verdiyeva, 1999, p. 254; Huseynov et al., 1964, p. 270).

In 1912, the population of Elizavetpol reached 878,185 inhabitants, of whom 553,848 were Muslims and 293,632 were Armenians (ADTA, Fond 311, List 1, File 61, p. 98). According to the 1917 statistics, Muslims—predominantly Turks—constituted 68.2% of the population of Azerbaijan, while Armenians accounted for 21.4%, Russians for 7.5%, Georgians for 0.5%, and other ethnic groups for 2.3% (ADTA, Fond 524, List 1, File 67, pp. 8–9).

An examination of demographic changes in Azerbaijan between 1886 and 1920 demonstrates a fluctuating pattern. Although the population increased by approximately 353,000 between 1886 and 1913, a decline of nearly 481,000 was recorded between 1913 and 1920. This dramatic decrease has generally been associated with the consequences of World War I and the massacres carried out in 1918 by Dashnak groups under the slogan of a "Turk-free Armenia" (Muradov & Bahish, 2013, pp. 15–19).

Regarding the religious composition of society, statistical records from districts and cities in 1843 indicate that the overwhelming majority of the indigenous population was Muslim (ADTA, Fond 31, List 1, File 35, pp. 2–24). Education among Muslims was largely centered on religious instruction, while members of the clergy were regarded as authoritative figures within society (Ganbarov, 2019, p. 66). Even after the Russian occupation, the population continued to follow the directives of religious leaders, and in many cases government announcements were communicated to the public through these clerical authorities.

According to the 1860 report of the governor of Baku, the majority of the population in Azerbaijan consisted of Shi'i and Sunni Muslims (Tagiyev, 2013, p. 383-384). In his assessment of the religious attitudes of the population toward non-Muslim communities, the governor described the existing social structure as follows:

> "The Shi'i population mainly resides in the districts of Shusha, Baku, and Lankaran, whereas the Sunni population is concentrated in Nukha, Quba, and Shamakhi. In terms of customs and social conduct, the former are closer to the Persians, while the latter resemble the mountain peoples. Both groups are generally polite, obedient, and capable of accepting progress; however, they have not entirely freed themselves from the fanaticism occasionally stimulated by neighboring states. During the war with Turkey, for example, such fanaticism was encouraged among the Sunnis by the Ottoman side and continues to be supported by certain secret agents who persuade peasants, particularly in the Nukha district, to migrate to Turkey. The middle classes show little interest in fanaticism, while among the upper classes it is almost nonexistent, with only a few exceptions. State service, education, administrative duties, and social relations have brought the beys and honorary citizens into close contact with Russians, particularly Christians" (ADTA, Fond 45, List 2, File 77a, pp. 7–8).

In addition, descendants of sheikhs and sayyids, as in the khanate period, continued to enjoy tax exemptions during the Tsarist era. Nevertheless, several archival documents indicate that some individuals belonging to these privileged religious lineages—particularly in the districts of Shamakhi and Baku—were subjected to compulsory taxation. In a petition addressed to the governor of Shamakhi, Kahanov, in 1847, the complainants stated:

> "Neither under Muslim rule nor during Russian administration did we pay taxes to the treasury. Our descent from a sheikhly lineage has been certified by Shah Abbas, Shah Suleyman, Agha Bagir, and the Mujtahid. Furthermore, upon the administration's request for confirmation from the religious establishment, Akhund Molla Abdul Samet also issued two certificates. Yet, for reasons unknown to us, we are still being compelled to pay taxes..." (ADTA, Fond 30, List 1, File 9, pp. 99–103).

The fact that a similar petition submitted in the Baku district was resolved favorably within a short period suggests the arbitrary practices of Tsarist officials in implementing tax regulations.

Describing the Caucasus, Pokrovskiy emphasized the central role of religion in the region with the following remarks:

> "After the arrival of Islam, the people acquired a common language and legal framework. Just as Roman law represented a unifying legal system for medieval Europe, Sharia fulfilled a similar role in this region. It is particularly noteworthy that the Tsarist administration was compelled to use the language of religion—Arabic, usually known by the mollas—when communicating with the local population. Nevertheless, these religious figures were not considered a sufficiently reliable instrument for strengthening Russian authority in the Caucasus..." (Pokrovskiy, 18??, pp. 308–310).

Reports written by other Russian officials likewise emphasized the social influence of religion and the potential dangers associated with it. For example, Prince Varshavskiy expressed his views regarding the reform of the religious court system as follows:

> "Its influence on the people is harmful to Russia from the perspective of religious fanaticism. Although the Sharia court is not particularly unjust, it causes serious damage by distancing the population from the government and strengthening the influence of the mollas" (*Kolonialnaya Politika*, 2014, pp. 27–28).

Based on such reports and similar evaluations, the reform adopted in 1878 granted Sharia courts authority over matters of marriage, divorce, inheritance, and mediation in civil disputes, excluding criminal cases. In addition, these courts were responsible for supervising the fulfillment of religious duties and encouraging public loyalty toward the government. The reform also stipulated the collection of fifty kopeks from each household for the maintenance of mosques (İbragimova, 2012, p. 62; Tagiyev, 2013, 384-385; Ganbarov, 2019, p. 68-70).

Alongside the Sharia courts, Russian courts were also established in the region. Individuals dissatisfied with decisions issued by religious courts could appeal to the newly established Russian judicial institutions. All proceedings in these courts were conducted in Russian, while interpreters acted as intermediaries between state officials and the local population (*Kolonialnaya Politika*, 2014, pp. 73–74).

In this context, language policy occupied an important place in the educational strategy of the Russian administration during the early nineteenth century. The official emphasis on "prioritizing Russian-language instruction in all educational institutions" aimed not only to train Russian-speaking local officials and Russian administrators familiar with Turkish, but also to eliminate the perceived problem of "unreliable local interpreters" (*Kolonialnaya Politika*, 2014, p. 56). At the same time, the authorities considered the education of Russian children in traditional Muslim schools unacceptable and incompatible with the objectives defined by the state (Verdiyeva, 1999, p. 42). Consequently, the process of establishing new state schools accelerated. Furthermore, archival records indicate that in the 1840s knowledge of local languages, particularly Georgian and Turkish, was also regarded as important within military institutions (Azerbaijan State Historical Archive (ADTA, Fond 45, List 2, File 3, pp. 106–109).

Nevertheless, an examination of the number of religious institutions and clergy members in the region suggests that they were insufficient to fully meet the religious needs of society. In the districts of Quba, Derbent, Karabakh, Shamakhi, Baku, Shaki, Shirvan, and Talish, the Muslim population amounted to 466,214 individuals, including 250,913 men and 215,301 women. Across these districts, there were 7,519 religious officials and a total of 713 places of worship. This ratio indicates that there was approximately one imam for every 62 individuals and one mosque for every 653 Muslims (ADTA, Fond 31, List 1, File 35, pp. 2, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 17, 24; İsmailzade, 1991, p. 120).

According to the 1852 statistics, Shamakhi contained four churches and forty-two mosques; Shusha had seven churches, one convent for girls, and nine mosques; Nukha had four churches and fifty-one mosques; Lankaran had two churches and eighteen mosques; and Baku contained three churches and twelve mosques (ADTA, Fond 45, List 2, File 39, p. 46).

The same records indicate that the religious population of these districts consisted of 377,180 Muslims (201,462 men and 175,718 women), 100,183 Armenian Gregorians (54,997 men and 45,186 women), 2,148 Jews (1,141 men and 1,007 women), and four pagans (ADTA, Fond 45, List 2, File 39, p. 62).

Despite the passage of nearly a decade between 1843 and 1852, there was no significant improvement in the ratio of places of worship to population, which remained approximately one religious building per 690 inhabitants. A similar pattern

could also be observed in the statistics of religious institutions and clergy in the provinces of Iravan, Tiflis, Elizavetpol, and Baku between 1875 and 1890. In some areas, a single mosque served between three and ten villages, while in others villages possessed mosques without mollas, or conversely had one or more mollas despite lacking a mosque altogether (ADTA, Fond 291, List 1, File 739, pp. 114–204).

With regard to cultural and educational development, statistical data from 1860 indicate that the province contained one four-grade higher primary school with 125 students, five district (uyezd) schools with 570 students, four Ali and Omar schools with 248 students, forty-nine private schools in urban areas with 1,543 students, and 166 private schools in rural areas attended by 3,246 students. In addition, one Armenian religious seminary with 80 students was operating in the region. Overall, the number of students corresponded to approximately one out of every 132 inhabitants (ADTA, Fond 45, List 2, File 77a, p. 26).

Following the earthquake that occurred in Shamakhi, the higher primary school and the Saint Nina Girls' School were relocated to Baku, while the Ali school in Shamakhi was closed (ADTA, Fond 45, List 2, File 77a, p. 26).

According to the 1911 statistics, the Caucasus Educational District included 2,836 primary educational institutions. The total number of teachers was recorded as 4,141, of whom 2,307 were teachers of law and religious education. In terms of educational qualifications, four teachers (0.5%) possessed higher education degrees, 1,826 (44.2%) had specialized pedagogical training, 2,025 (48.7%) were graduates of primary or secondary schools, and 286 (6.6%) lacked formal diplomas. The number of female teachers reached 2,342, among whom nine (0.4%) had higher education, 802 (34.2%) had specialized training, 1,414 (60.04%) were graduates of primary or secondary schools, and 117 (5%) had no diploma (ADTA, Fond 311, List 1, File 61, pp. 77–79).

These statistics demonstrate that the majority of teachers consisted primarily of individuals with primary or secondary education as well as those who had received specialized pedagogical preparation. The relatively high proportion of female teachers within the overall teaching workforce is also noteworthy.

Regarding the condition of local press institutions and libraries in the mid-nineteenth century, the situation may be summarized as follows: although Armenian-owned printing houses existed in cities such as Shusha and Shamakhi, Muslims possessed neither a printing press nor a Turkish-language newspaper or public library. Furthermore, the region lacked municipal councils (Dumas) or local self-government institutions, and the socio-economic administration of urban areas remained under the authority of the city police (ADTA, Fond 45, List 2, File 39, pp. 90–93).

According to the 1860 records, the newspapers *Kavkaz* and *Zakavkazskiy Vestnik* were the only periodicals regularly reporting regional developments. At the same time, public libraries were operating in the cities of Baku and Shusha. The library in Shusha, established in 1859 by an Armenian organization, contained approximately 1,500 books and journals, the majority in Armenian and some in Russian. The library was open to the public free of charge (ADTA, Fond 45, List 2, File 77a, p. 27).

In the late nineteenth century, public libraries were also established within Russian-Muslim schools. However, because these libraries did not provide sufficiently broad public access, a group of intellectuals submitted a petition to the governor of Baku in 1896 requesting permission to establish a library for both adults and children. The petition stated:

> "With the increase in the population of Baku and the number of educational institutions, the demand for reading materials has also grown. Nevertheless, the existing libraries are unable to meet this demand either in number or in accessibility. Therefore, we have decided to establish a library in Baku where anyone may access books in various languages for a small fee..." (ADTA, Fond 45, List 2, File 282, pp. 1–21).

The request was approved, and the library officially opened in 1897. In the same year, Ali Abbas Orujov established another library in the city of Quba; however, after operating for only a few months, it was closed without any official explanation (ADTA, Fond 45, List 2, File 280, pp. 1–10).

During this period, libraries also functioned in cities such as Shamakhi, Quba, Lankaran, and Nakhchivan, and books from various Muslim countries were reportedly brought into these regions through unofficial channels. The fact that some mollas concealed their regular reading of newspapers and journals from the public may also be interpreted as evidence that certain local religious authorities opposed social and intellectual change during the period (Baykara, 2018, p. 14).

In addition, the newspaper *Ekinçi*, first published by Hasan bey Zardabi in 1875, became recognized as the first Turkish-language newspaper in the Russian Empire. After its closure in 1877, periodicals such as *Ziya*, *Ziyayi-Kafkaziyye*, *Keshkul*, and *Sharqi-Rus* made important contributions to the development of the national press (Kerimov, 2017, pp. 10–11).

B. Rural Society and Agrarian Relations

In the mid-nineteenth century, a significant portion of the population in Azerbaijani cities resided in rural areas. According to statistical data from the 1840s, the rural population constituted 68.6% in Shamakhi, 96.5% in Derbent, 92.4% in

Shusha, 87.4% in Baku, 93.4% in Guba, and 76% in Lankaran (Ismailzade, 1991, p. 146).

Statistical indicators for 1897, 1913, 1917, and 1920 show that the share of the rural population in the total population ranged between 76% and 83% (Muradov & Bahish, 2013, p. 13). Compared to the 1840s, these figures indicate a relative decline in the proportion of the rural population.

As in earlier periods, during the second half of the nineteenth century, the Azerbaijani rural population was divided into two main categories: state peasants living on crown lands and landlord (ağa) peasants living on bey-owned estates. State peasants generally lived under relatively milder conditions. Although they were subject to certain pressures from local officials of the State Property Administration, they were not forced to work on landlord lands, could not be sold or exchanged as property, and were not required to pay as many as 35 different types of taxes (Pokrovskiy, 2014, p. 10; Ismayilov, 1995, p. 286).

According to the 1836 estimates, during the period of serfdom, the number of landlord peasants was approximately 11 million (only males), while state peasants numbered around 5 million (Pokrovskiy, 2014, p. 10).

In the post-reform period, 84.4% of male peasants in the Baku governorate lived on state lands (ADTA, Fond 45, List 2, File 77a, fol. 7). According to 1853 data, approximately one-fifth of the peasants, and by 1860 about one-third, consisted of landlord (ağa) peasants (ADTA, Fond 45, List 2, File 77a, fol. 7).

During the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the Russian Empire began to follow a path of capitalist development, and changing economic relations increasingly necessitated the abolition of serfdom. Russia's defeat in the Crimean War, the expansion of peasant movements, and the intensification of class tensions throughout the empire highlighted the need for agrarian reform (Milman, 1966, p. 142; Huseynov et al., 1964, pp. 145–146).

Between 1859 and 1861, a revolutionary atmosphere emerged across the empire. Peasants, whose living conditions and resources were considerably inferior to those of Russian citizens, together with other exploited social groups, increasingly demanded the abolition of the existing order, particularly the transformation of the landlords' system of landownership (Milman, 1966, p. 142).

In order to avoid large-scale social unrest, Tsar Alexander II (r. 1855–1881) signed the Manifesto of 19 February 1861 on the abolition of serfdom and the status of peasants emancipated from serf dependence (*Polnoe Sobranie Zakonov Rossiyskoy Imperii*, 1863, Vol. XXXVI, No. 36657, pp. 141–169). According to the manifesto, peasants were granted personal freedom, and landlords could no longer buy, sell, or exchange them as property. Although the decree was initially regarded as a major

achievement in the struggle for popular emancipation, it did not provide peasants with complete economic independence.

While the 1861 reform was implemented in the central provinces of the Russian Empire, its application in the Caucasus remained considerably more limited. Dissatisfied with this situation, local populations expressed their demands for reform through various forms of protest, including threats against landlords and imperial officials, attacks on property, and refusal to perform their obligations. The government recognized that suppressing peasant unrest by force could provoke an even greater danger in the form of intensified class conflict among the peasantry (Milman, 1966, pp. 144–145).

As peasant activism grew and capitalist relations continued to develop, the imperial government extended the abolition of serfdom to Azerbaijan on 14 May 1870 (*Polnoe Sobranie Zakonov Rossiyskoy Imperii*, 1874, Vol. XLV, No. 48357). However, as in other parts of the empire, the reform ultimately led to a deterioration in the socio-economic conditions of many peasants rather than a substantial improvement.

Before the reforms, peasants were dependent upon landlords and were provided with only small plots of land sufficient for basic subsistence. Although the Reform of 1861 formally ended the status of peasants as the movable property of landlords, the state enabled landowners to sell their lands to peasants at prices exceeding their actual value (Pokrovskiy, 2014, p. 9; Abelov, 1887, p. 37; Ismail, 1995, p. 83). As a result, many peasants who lacked the means of production were compelled either to lease landlord-owned land under burdensome conditions (Ibragimov, 1955, p. 18) or to migrate to large urban centers in search of employment (Milman, 1966, p. 143).

The welfare of the rural population was further undermined by various agricultural and monetary taxes payable to the state treasury. The government imposed taxes even on everyday commodities such as kerosene, matches, salt, and sugar (Huseynov et al., 1964, p. 195). In addition, a special school tax was collected in villages to support state educational institutions.

Discussing educational issues in the Caucasus, Abelov drew attention to this tax and emphasized the discriminatory practices that accompanied its implementation:

> "The school tax of one ruble collected from each household was intended to finance the fully equipped school established in the city of Elizavetpol for the benefit of the rural population of the province. The local inhabitants, namely Muslims and Armenians, were obliged to pay this tax, whereas Russians and Germans were, for some reason, exempt from such an obligation" (Abelov, 1887, p. 100).

The new reform also modified the 1847 Regulation governing relations between landlords and peasants. Under the revised arrangement, the right to elect the village headman was transferred to the village community without the participation of landlords. The responsibility for resolving disputes among peasants, as well as conflicts between peasants and landlords, was assigned to local administrative councils. Through these measures, the government sought to maintain control over rural communities through its own institutions while simultaneously reducing the influence of the local elite social strata over the rural population (ADTA, Fond 45, List 2, File 63, fol. 72).

C. Urbanization and Socio-Economic Transformation

Following the reforms, the emergence and expansion of capitalist institutions in Azerbaijan contributed significantly to urban development. The growth of cities was reflected in increasing urban populations, which accounted for 12.2% of Azerbaijan's total population during the 1860s (Huseynov et al., 1964, p. 262).

Although the urban population grew rapidly during this period, it still represented a relatively small proportion of the overall population. For example, by the end of the nineteenth century, urban residents constituted only 17.7% of the population in the Baku Governorate and 9.5% in the Elizavetpol Governorate (Huseynov et al., 1964, p. 270). Between 1897 and 1920, the proportion of urban inhabitants ranged from 16.9% to 23.8% of the total population (Muradov, 2008, p. 15; Muradov & Bahish, 2013, p. 13; Farajov, 2023, p. 288). These figures indicate a gradual increase in urbanization and suggest broader social progress, particularly in the fields of education and culture. More generally, the urban population of the Caucasus increased by 49.8% between 1886 and 1897 (Ibragimov, 1955, p. 27).

As capitalist relations expanded, the social composition and physical appearance of many cities also underwent significant transformation. A large proportion of urban residents consisted of impoverished peasants who migrated from rural areas in search of economic opportunities. Cities also attracted numerous khans, beys, merchants, and representatives of the religious establishment. A relatively small but politically privileged segment of the urban population was composed of imperial officials and officers of the Russian army. By the late nineteenth century, members of the Russian intelligentsia—including teachers, physicians, workers, and craftsmen—had also begun to settle in Azerbaijani cities *(Huseynov et al., 1964,* pp. 264–265).

Rather than establishing municipal institutions based on social representation, the Tsarist administration entrusted urban governance to the city police. The urban police apparatus consisted of special officials, neighborhood supervisors, and secu-

rity personnel. Administrative affairs were carried out by two deputies known as "community representatives," who, together with government officials, maintained records of residential buildings, commercial shops, caravanserais, workshops, mills, and bathhouses; identified their owners; assessed their revenues; participated in the collection and allocation of taxes paid by urban residents; and oversaw the assignment of housing for military personnel (Ismayilov, 1995, p. 90).

To maintain effective control over local communities, the government assigned additional responsibilities to these representatives. They were expected to be familiar with all residents within their jurisdiction, monitor their loyalty to the Tsarist regime, conduct preliminary investigations when necessary, and closely supervise the activities of local communal institutions (Milman, 1966, p. 166).

The repressive policies pursued by the Tsarist administration, together with the persistence of feudal relations, significantly hindered the development of the urban economy. Since the principal sources of municipal revenue consisted of taxes levied on real estate, trade, and mining activities, opportunities for increasing urban income remained relatively limited.

As for municipal expenditures, a substantial portion of mandatory revenues was allocated to the maintenance of various imperial administrative institutions, the police, prisons, and the military. In contrast, education, healthcare, and other socially significant sectors received funding far below actual needs. For example, in 1877 only 5.4% of Baku's municipal budget was allocated to healthcare services, while public education received merely 3.4% of total municipal expenditures.

With the rapid expansion of the petroleum industry, an increasing proportion of the urban population became employed in this sector. Compared with other branches of industry, the oil industry experienced a much faster growth in the number of workers employed *(Huseynov et al., 1964,* pp. 263–268). Although Azerbaijan accounted for only 0.4% of the territory and 1.4% of the population of the Russian Empire, by the beginning of the twentieth century it was responsible for approximately 5% of the empire's industrial output (Mamedov, 2012, p. 24).

Working and living conditions in industrial enterprises were extremely difficult. Laborers were exploited not only by Russian entrepreneurs but also by European and American capitalists. The standard working day generally lasted between twelve and fourteen hours, while in many mining enterprises workers labored fourteen to sixteen hours and occasionally as long as eighteen hours per day. Furthermore, miners often worked without weekly rest days. In the Baku oil fields, the annual number of working days reached approximately 360, whereas workers in other industrial centers of the Russian Empire typically worked between 230 and 300 days per year (Huseynov et al., 1964, p. 307).

Despite these long working hours and harsh conditions, wages remained extremely low and were often insufficient to meet even the most basic needs of workers and their families. Economic grievances of this nature contributed significantly to the growth of labor movements throughout the Russian Empire and ultimately played an important role in the revolutionary upheavals.

In terms of cultural and intellectual development, urban centers occupied a more advanced position than rural areas. Cities possessed a greater concentration of educational institutions, publishing houses, newspapers, and members of the intelligentsia. Although nearly every village maintained a primary religious school (*maktab*), secondary and higher educational institutions (*madrasas*) were generally concentrated in urban centers.

Regarding state-sponsored education, only a limited number of primary schools had been established in rural areas by the end of the nineteenth century. In subsequent years, however, the efforts of national educational reformers contributed to a gradual increase in the number of schools in these regions. Although cities contained educational institutions at various levels, their numbers remained insufficient to satisfy growing public demand. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the educational movement gained considerable momentum, leading to increased efforts to establish and expand secondary educational institutions—particularly gymnasiums and teacher-training seminaries—in major urban centers such as Baku, Ganja, Nukha (Shaki), Shamakhi, and Shusha.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that Azerbaijani society underwent a complex and multifaceted process of socio-economic transformation between 1840 and 1920. The administrative, economic, and social policies implemented by the Tsarist Russian government shaped the region's development while simultaneously deepening some of its existing challenges.

From a demographic perspective, the period was characterized by population growth, the preservation of ethnic and religious diversity, and the intensification of migration processes. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, industrial expansion and the growth of economic opportunities encouraged a portion of the population to migrate to urban centers. At the same time, wars, epidemics, and political conflicts negatively affected demographic trends, while World War I and the subsequent events resulted in significant population losses.

In the agricultural sector, the reforms introduced during this period formally altered the legal status of the peasantry but failed to bring about substantial improvements in their economic welfare. The unequal nature of landownership, heavy tax

burdens, and peasants' limited access to the means of production further aggravated rural social conditions. As a result, many peasants gradually abandoned the countryside and migrated to cities and industrial centers in search of employment and better living conditions.

In urban areas, the expansion of capitalist relations stimulated economic growth, particularly through the rapid development of the petroleum industry, which significantly increased Azerbaijan's strategic importance within the economic system of the Russian Empire. Baku emerged as one of the region's principal industrial and financial centers, while new social groups—including industrial workers, entrepreneurs, and intellectuals—began to take shape. Nevertheless, economic progress was not accompanied by a corresponding improvement in social welfare. Long working hours, low wages, inadequate living conditions, and weak mechanisms of social protection remained major challenges for the urban population.

The development of education, the press, libraries, and other cultural institutions reflects the growing influence of modernization within Azerbaijani society. However, the number of educational institutions and cultural facilities remained insufficient to meet the increasing demands of the population. Furthermore, tensions between the Tsarist policy of Russification and the modernization aspirations of local society constituted another defining characteristic of the period.

Overall, the period from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century may be regarded as a significant stage in Azerbaijani history, marked by the gradual transition from traditional feudal structures to capitalist economic relations, the reconfiguration of social hierarchies, and the strengthening of modernization processes. These developments laid the foundations for the political, economic, and social transformations that would shape Azerbaijan in the decades that followed.

This study contributes to the existing historiography by examining demographic development, rural society, and urbanization as interconnected dimensions of socio-economic transformation rather than as isolated historical processes. By bringing together archival evidence, statistical data, and secondary scholarship within a unified analytical framework, it offers a more comprehensive interpretation of the impact of Tsarist Russian rule on Azerbaijani society. These findings not only enrich the literature on Azerbaijan's modern history but also provide a useful comparative perspective for future studies of socio-economic change in the South Caucasus and other imperial borderlands.

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