

THE AZERBAIJANI TURKS

Power and Identity
under Russian Rule

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pressure from the militant Armenian Dashnaksutun party's territorial ambitions, the Azerbaijan Turks of that region were to have had a clear national identity. They called themselves *Azerbaydjanis*, when the population around Baku still perceived the use of *Tatars*.¹⁰ Large political debates and organizations were more generally directed against Russian rule than those in Baku. Apparently a small *Tatar* group first advanced the slogan of "*Mustaqim, Cavanqam, Azerbaycan ismi*" against Russian rule early in 1905.¹¹ *Tatars* would become the center of the national movement.

Difai (Defense) was a secret Ganje organization formed in 1905 in the wake of communal violence. According to one of its leaders, Nuri Kuchukov,¹²

Difai was created by local intelligentsia as a counterweight organization to improve to the well-organized Dashnaksutun and the Russian support for the Armenians. Among the founders were prominent *Tatar* intelligentsia Hacıgazi and Khalil Khosrovovskii, Nuri Kuchukov, and Dr. Husein Agajoghlu.¹³ These men were among the community leaders who had taken the lead in ending the conflict between their own community and the Armenians. The *Tatar* Azerbaijanis argued that the Dashnaks could not operate so freely without Russian backing and that the Administration, in fact, provided international clothes. *Armed Dashnaks*,¹⁴ observed in the first issue of *Difai* and possible cofounder of *Difai*, described Russian policy:

We, the Muslims were told by the administration . . . (Armenians) are saving themselves and plan to invade their own, now they have with the army with you. The Armenians were told that the idea of Pan-Islamism had got down long roots in all areas of the Muslim community, and now they the Muslims would massacre them. Such was the pattern of provocation. . . . In the past there had not been any armed clashes and if cases of murder happened, they were single exceptions and had never reached any large proportions.¹⁵

Difai efforts were therefore directed against the Russian Administration. The Ganje governor's cousin, Karapinski, was assassinated first, then in Yikhi General Kabanov, who had been division commander in Karabagh. He was believed to have driven Armenian soldiers from his division to commit clashes in other Azerbaijan Turks. *Difai* took responsibility for the assassinations by displaying posters with the *Difai* seal. These deaths, Kuchukov wrote, shook the Russian Administration and "caused them to be more reasonable." Despite some murders and a reward of 50 gold rubles, the authorities were unable to discover the identity of the *Difai* leadership. Apparently, *Difai* had members in the Russian Administration and a representative in the Russian secret service office. The latter revealed to *Difai* a plan to use a phone mailbox to penetrate the community and give information about *Difai*. When the "mailbox" was discovered, no local mailbox would