CHANGING IDENTITIES: ARMENIA, AZERBAIJAN, GEORGIA

Collection of Selected Works

HEINRICH
BÖLL
STIFTUNG
SOUTH
CAUCASUS

2011

Changing Identities: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia

CONTENTS

PREFACE

he Heinrich Boell Foundation South Caucasus Regional Office seeks to contribute to the formation of free, fair and tolerant societies with inclusive and participative political systems in the region. To this end, the Foundation encourages in-depth analysis of current civic and political processes in the region so that it can understand the civic and political context to support democratic processes.

It is very difficult to realistically measure the specific effect of so-called democratization measures. Such activities are oriented at effecting long-term changes in systems and societies. The HBF Regional Scholarship Programme is one of the means of measuring these changes in the South Caucasus. Under this programme, operating since 2004, the HBF has observed political, social and cultural processes in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia through encouraging young generations of social scientists. In addition, the programme seeks to create networks among young experts in the South Caucasus. The selected articles in this publication represent the best research conducted in 2004-2007. They illustrate scientific ideas and methods that have been applied within the framework of the HBF Regional Scholarship Programme.

The past 20 years have clearly shown that in three countries of the South Caucasus, as well as in other countries of the former socialist camp, the formal establishment of democratic and civic institutions cannot ensure real democratic transformations and the rule of law. When determining whether a certain political system is truly democratic or merely has a democratic facade, two aspects are especially important: on the one hand, political culture and the quality of the development of civil society and on the other hand, the influence of ethno-political conflicts on political processes in these countries.

In 2011 many important analytical materials were published in connection with the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Soviet Union. The vast majority of

these publications focused on the building of state institutions and economic processes. With this collection of works, the Heinrich Boell Foundation South Caucasus Regional Office offers readers an analysis of the social and cultural transformation under way in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia and documents phenomena that have recently emerged in the South Caucasus.

Nino Lejava
Director
Heinrich Boell Foundation
South Caucasus Regional Office

INTRODUCTION

I t is my honor to present this collection of selected articles by scholars of the Heinrich Boell Foundation South Caucasus Regional Office (HBF). Seven years ago the HBF, led by Walter Kaufmann and Nino Lejava, took a decision that I would call life-changing for the social sciences in the South Caucasus. The HBF did not follow the path by international foundations and Western organizations. They did not spend their resources on loud and demonstrative actions that would have had little impact on actual developments in local communities. Instead, the foundation ambitiously began building a new community of social science researchers oriented towards contemporary world-class scholarship. The decision was made to support concrete research projects. Such support, due to many reasons, is rare in the South Caucasus region.

A scholarship competition was announced for young academics from the South Caucasus countries. Candidates submitted applications to the HBF to conduct research in the fields of history, sociology or urbanism. Those selected worked hard under a personal mentor chosen from among well-known foreign or Caucasian academics for the course of a year and wrote articles based on their findings.

Why do I consider this programme so important? I already wrote about the state-of-art of social sciences in the region in the issue of the magazine "Laboratorium" devoted entirely to research in the South Caucasus. My viewpoint about the landscape of research in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia may be a little biased, but in the early 2000's I depicted it as a desert with very small number of stunted oases. There was a lack of money and a lack of relevant education and job opportunities for researchers; what survived were mainly fragments of the Soviet social sciences, which did not try to develop to the international level, but rather only sought to portray their backwardness as supremacy.

Today I see how smart and timely the design of the programme was. In several years it formed a network of social researchers of the new generation with modern professional standards. The programme started out a number

of successful scientific carriers, new directions and research methods. The fellows selected previously had no chance of finding support for their research inside their own countries but the HBF gave them access to foreign funds. There was no opportunity to receive a qualitative education but the programme facilitated more active engagement in self-education, which included reading foreign literature and searching for opportunities to receive education abroad. There were no jobs – but then they were created by, for example, independent research organizations like the Institute of Contemporary Social Research in Yerevan, the Center of Research of Social Practices in Tbilisi, and the Novator Research Center in Baku. The names of alumni have started to appear more frequently in foreign academic journals.

In 2004, as a result of the first application procedure, 28 applications were short-listed. Despite the fact that the number of scholars has decreased (recently only 10 applications were supported) over the years, the number of outstanding projects has not reduced. Over time the selection committee became wiser and the selection process – tougher. In addition, the quality of applications improved, and the scholarships are granted to the most highly motivated young researchers.

With this publication, we offer readers several selected articles from the last four annual collections of essays (with 60 articles already published by the HBF), which already have became a bibliographical rarity. Articles in this collection are of interest not only to social researchers, but also to those who want to understand social processes that have taken place and are still ongoing in the South Caucasus.

I want to emphasize that all the researches are based on a qualitative research methodology, entailing participatory observation and interviews with informants and experts. It is a pity that only 10 essays are presented in this publication. We could have easily selected and included additional 10 or more articles and the quality would have been the same. But this is how it is.

What can the reader find in this book? I would like to briefly introduce the essays:

Leyla Sayfutdinova studied a painful issue. She examined the image of Armenians in Azerbaijani literature over the last twenty years. The article reflects on the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict in contemporary Azerbaijani literature, where Armenians are generally portrayed as enemies. As we all

know, literature plays an important role in socialization and shaping of images of the world. It is a vicious cycle.

Sevil Huseynova sets a very difficult research task for herself. She managed to find Armenians who in spite of well-known events continue to live in Baku and agreed to talk to the researcher. The author describes strategies used by these Armenians to cope with their uneasy situation, in which open demonstration of being Armenian is impossible. Huseynova's thoughts about the role of ethnicity in everyday life are very interesting. She bases her example on detailed analysis of a biographical interview with one of the informants.

Gayane Shagoyan conducted a study on memory of the tragic earthquake of 1988 in Armenia, which killed some 25,000 people and devastated several cities. The author investigates the processes of "cooling off" of individual memories about the trauma, as well as the formation of a collective memory, which becomes history solidified in books, art and memorials. Particular attention is paid to practices of handling memories and memorialization of important places.

An article by Ruslan Baramidze about the special characteristics of Islam in Georgia's Adjara is based on a large amount of fieldwork. The author explains in detail the transformations traditional Islam is currently undergoing in the region. In particular, article examines differences in religious practices between mountainous and lowland villages of Adjara. Furthermore, it describes the influence of the factor of close proximity to the city in weakening traditional approaches to the religion.

Ia Tsulaia conducted her research in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge, where she tried to understand how members of the local community identified themselves in ethnic terms. I do not hesitate to say that the researcher refused to be led by a priori statistical groupings and made an interesting discovery. Under the influence of contemporary social and political processes, a deep crisis of identity has evolved in the local community, as a result of which the new ethic border coincides with the generational one. In this community, the older generation identifies itself as Kists and the younger generation as Chechens.

In her article, Aysel Vazirova presents an interesting analysis of the issue of hijab (Islamic dress code for women) in Azerbaijan. As in other countries, the struggle surrounding the wearing of headscarves not only initiated public

discussion, but also led to complex legal collisions. The author explores the linguistic aspect of the problem and emphasizes the ambiguities in the interpretation of relevant laws. The researcher concludes that the establishment of competing discourses may lead to serious conflicts in the society.

Tork Dalalyan addressed the issue of constructing the ethnic identity of Kurds and Yezidis in Armenia. The author illustrates how a part of the population in the republic that speaks the same language and shares the same religion builds an internal ethnic barrier, and how people cope with duel identity. Most interesting, in my opinion, was the researcher's assertion that the boundary largely coincides with the boundary of education (How bizarre ethnic boundaries can be! Let us recall Ia Tsulaia's article about the community in the Pankisi Gorge, where these boundaries coincided with the generational one).

On the example of a concrete district in Georgia, Giorgi Gotua provides a detailed analysis of changes that took place among district-level elites of Georgia in the years since Georgia's independence. The author investigated mechanisms of power redistribution at the local level following political changes at the top, depending on the establishing and obtaining of dominance by particular groups bound by common interests (economic, political and criminal).

Tatevik Margaryan conducted research in two rural communities of Armenia. Field materials revealed the dominance of informal practices over the formal in the self-governance bodies of the village. The author draws conclusions about the role of the family and kinship ties and the impact of special characteristics of "the already-taken path" on the functioning of governmental institutions in rural areas. It looks at the importance of traditional cultural attitudes when facing contemporary transformational challenges. The reader will be able to draw conclusions about prospects for the future of local self-governance in Armenia.

Tamar Zurabishvili conducted an enormous amount of fieldwork. She researched social networks of migrant workers from Tianeti, a village in one of Georgia's poorest regions, where a third of families have at least one member living and working abroad. The researcher committed an act of scientific heroism: a complete census of the village (the total population is about 3,500),

which allowed her to draw conclusions not from the representativeness of unknown samples, but from solid fieldwork. The article presents a mass of fundamentally new material that social researchers will be able to reflect upon.

The publication of this collection of essays is a huge success for the Heinrich Boell Foundation South Caucasus Regional Office. The present volume not only demonstrates the birth of a new generation of serious researchers in the South Caucasus oriented towards the modern constructivist paradigm in sociology, but also instills confidence in the future of the rapidly developing field of social science throughout the South Caucasus Region.

September 2011
Viktor Voronkov
Director
Center for Independent Social Research
St. Petersburg

"GOOD" AND "BAD" ARMENIANS: REPRESENTATION OF THE KARABAKH CONFLICT IN AZERBAIJANI LITERATURE

Leyla Sayfutdinova

"We, Karabakh Armenians and Azerbaijanis, vallah, didn't have any differences" – these words by a character in H. Guliev's play *Besame Mucho or Karabakh Prisoners* in condensed form expresses many of the contradictions that accompany the Karabakh conflict and its perception in Azerbaijan. On the one hand, these words seem to establish a territorial community "we", united by a common home-land – Karabakh. This unity is further emphasized by the denial of differences be-tween two groups that comprise the community. And yet, the speaker at the same time establishes those very differences that he seems to deny by identifying the groups and giving them different names. Thus, in one sentence, both the unity and division of "Karabakh people" are declared. Even the exclamation "vallah", a word with obvious Islamic connotations, is used to emphasize the intertwining of Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Karabakh: it is pronounced not by an Azerbaijani and therefore Muslim character, but by an Armenian and therefore a Christian one. The speaker is Ashot, a native Karabakh Armenian and a fighter with the Arme-nian Karabakh militia forces; and he makes this contradictory statement in a half-destroyed Karabakh village during a short stand-down between the battles.

This play was first published in 1997, three years after the cease-fire agreement was signed between the sides. Yet, the end of the military actions did not mean the end of the conflict itself; both the basic contradiction – the territorial dispute – and the mutually irreconcilable positions of the sides remain unchanged even now, as I write this in late 2009. The Karabakh conflict, one of the earliest and most violent ethno-political conflicts to erupt amid the decline and collapse of the Soviet Union, has had an immense impact on the Karabakh region, the rest of Azerbaijan, Arme-nia and on the security situation in the wider Caucasus. The bitterest results of the conflict include thousands of fatalities and over a million refugees and displaced

persons on both sides. Yet this is not all; the conflict also brought many other less tangible yet profound changes at various levels, from everyday life to changes of thinking. The termination of everyday relations between Armenians and Azerbaijanis is especially significant: after the respective minorities were expelled from their homelands, the contacts between ordinary Armenians and Azerbaijanis have been minimal. Now they are limited, apart from the official conflict resolution negotiations, to some NGO and scholarly meetings, and some communication between diaspora communities. Apart from the rare exeption, these contacts take place on "neutral ground", outside both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Thus, normal communication that involves diverse interactions in diverse settings has been terminated. In this situation, imagination has come to play an increasingly important role in the shaping of representations of each other; they are becoming progressively more mythologized and depersonalized. This is especially true for the younger generation in the two countries, who have had little or no personal experience of communicating with each other and often no personal memories. The representations of each other, of the past, the present and the future of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations are to a large extent shaped by collective memory, transmitted both orally and through media.

In this respect, the role of literature in the reproduction and transmission of collective memory becomes especially relevant. On the one hand, literature, along with other forms of media, becomes an important source of representations of each other and of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations. On the other hand, the literary representations themselves reflect and express those that already exist in the social imagination. Yet these literary images are not simply blueprints of social representations: literature provides space for contestation, creative transformation and (re-)construction of representations, both by writers and readers. Literature allows for re-personalization of representations and stereotypes, when remembered or imagined characteristics of people of the respective ethnic origin are attributed to the characters of stories or novels. Literary representations also make it possible to show interactions between and changes of the characters under various imagined circumstances. Literary representations are emotional and are constructed with the purpose of evoking an emotional response from the reader. Finally, literature has an important role in the imagination of a nation (Anderson, 1991). All of these make literary representations a valuable means for understanding the social process of identity and nation building.

The relations between literature and society are diverse and complex, and so are the scholarly approaches to studying them. Milner, for example, identifies at least eight analytical strategies of literary and, more broadly, cultural studies, ranging from hermeneutics to Marxian studies to post-modernism and politics of difference (Milner, 2005: 43). My own approach in this article is largely informed by structuralism and semiotics, with their emphasis on textual analysis and the study of the relationship of signification between literary representations and social facts.

This article is an attempt to explore such literary representations of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations in Azerbaijani literature. It is based on a study of Azerbaijani literature undertaken in 2005 in the framework of the individual research scholarship program of the Heinrich Boell Foundation. In particular, I am concerned with the literature written and published after the consummation of the conflict in 1989. The study included 20 works of Azerbaijani literature, 13 of which belong to the conflict period (post 1989), and seven to the pre-conflict period. The selection of the works of fiction is subjective: I scanned a rather large number of works and selected those that seemed most relevant. However, the selection is far from exhaustive. I do not intend to make sweeping generalizations, yet the analysis revealed some patterns that seem to be important for understanding the perception of the conflict in Azerbaijan.

For the purposes of this study, I define Azerbaijani literature based on the national origin of the author rather than the language in which it was written. This is because the phenomenon that I am interested in – representations of the conflict – belongs to the sphere of the social and political history more than to the sphere of language, and therefore the common socio-political experiences of the authors are more significant than the language in which they write. I assume therefore that the representations of the authors who identify themselves as Azerbaijanis, have been socialized in Azerbaijan and have lived through some of the processes that they describe are more relevant for the social imagination and collective memory. Thus, the study includes several works that were originally written in Russian. Despite formally belonging to Russian literature they in fact represent a certain section of Azerbaijani society that used to be rather influential in the Soviet and early post-Soviet period: the Russian-speaking Baku intelligentsia. It is also worth noting that literature is never neutral in terms of class and gender and I am well aware that the representations

presented here belong to a rather narrow milieu: educated, largely urban, and predominantly male. Thus, only one of the examined works, the short story *The Tree*, is written by a woman. Nevertheless, analysis of these differences in not part of the present study and it is to be dealt with in the future research.

Given the extraordinary role of the Karabakh conflict in shaping the present Armenian-Azerbaijani relations, my first point of focus will be on the literary representation of the conflict itself, of its origins, reasons and potential for resolution. Then I will look at the larger theme of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations and the factors that facilitate or hinder interaction between the two groups. In this section of the article I will be concerned with the problem of drawing and maintaining the intergroup boundary, as a process that has key significance for identity-building and maintenance (Barth, 1969). Here I will compare the representation of this boundary in contemporary, post-1989 literature with the representations of boundary maintenance in the pre-conflict period.

Karabakh conflict: Whose fault is it?

I will base my analysis of literary representations of the conflict on three works of fiction: the short story *The Life of a Human* by Samit Aliev (2003), the play *Besame mucho or Karabakh prisoners* by Hasan Guliev, first published in a journal in 1997 and later re-published as a short story in 2007, and the short story *The Tree* by Gunel Anargizi (2004). But before turning to the analysis it may be useful to briefly recount the major turning points of the conflict – this may ease understanding of the plot lines and interpretations.[1]

The Karabakh conflict officially began on February 20, 1988, when the Regional Council of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) voted to request the transfer of the region from Azerbaijan to Armenia. This triggered an escalation of violence both in Karabakh and in other parts of Armenia and Azerbaijan. That same month, in February 1988 violence leading to human losses broke out first in Askeran (Karabakh), and then, on a larger scale, in Sumgait, near Baku. Mass demonstrations were taking place in Baku, Yerevan and the capital of Karabakh, Stepanakert (Azerbaijani: Xankandi). A state of emergency

---

[1] For a detailed account of Karabakh conflict see, for example, De Waal T., Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through War and Peace. New York University Press, 2003.

was declared in Azerbaijan, including Karabakh, and Armenia. Yet this could not stop the mass protests and deportations. Meanwhile, the Supreme Soviets of the Azerbaijan and Armenian SSRs engaged in a war of legislation, with each of them voting for Karabakh to be part of Armenia and of Azerbaijan, respectively. In late 1988 the Azerbaijani minority was expelled from Armenia. In January 1990 pogroms against Armenians took place in Baku, after which Soviet troops entered the city, killing civilian protesters. The fighting in Karabakh had turned into an outright war by early 1991. In 1992, after the collapse of the USSR, it turned into a war between two independent states. Between 1992 and May 1994, when cease-fire agreement was signed in Bishkek, Azerbaijan had lost, in addition to Karabakh, six other regions around it. The cease fire has brought termination of military actions, yet no peace agreement has been reached yet.

The Life of a Human depicts the conflict at its peak, in 1992-1993, the period of heavy violence in and around Karabakh. The story presents three interconnected narratives. Two of them are classical novellas, in both of which the Karabakh conflict is a key event that radically transforms the lives of the characters; and the third is the narrator's own account of the conflict in which he offers a historical and political interpretation of the events. The first of the novellas begins in Aghdam, a town that is traditionally considered part of greater Karabakh, although administratively it was not part of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast during the Soviet period. Like other towns in and around Karabakh, Aghdam too had a mixed Azerbaijani and Armenian population. This is where the characters, two childhood friends, an Armenian (Valery) and an Azerbaijani (Allahyar), grow up together, on the same street. Aliev's description of life before the conflict is rather nostalgic (p. 7):

> *Once upon a time, maybe in another life, or in another dimension, when this land blossomed and the eyes ached from the view of gardens and vineyards stretching to the horizon, and the snowy mountain caps nodded to every visitor, invited or not, and the river murmured "be my guest" and the smell of kebab tickled the nose, the two boys, Allahyar and Valery, lived on that land, on the same street. One block down from the taxi stop by the bus station – here is Allahyar's house, with a metal sheet roof, and a fancy water pipe, looking just like a pomegranate tip. A little down the street, 40 meters down, is Valery's house: a porch, curtains on the windows, and again, flowers on the windowsills…*

The boys not only grow up near one another, but they are also similar to each other, both in appearance and character (p. 8):

> Both were dark, big-boned, with swift eyes and heads; and as they grew up no one on their street could match them in drinking tutovka.[2] They looked similar in some way – maybe the tan, or air, or something else – you know what may strike a mind after tutovka…

This peaceful life is disrupted by the Karabakh conflict. It first begins with small fights among local youth but with time becomes more serious and involves weapons and militias. The arms come from "no longer Soviet but not yet Russian" army troops deployed in the region. As the unrest intensifies, Valery's family decides to leave their hometown. The last meeting of the two friends is sad, as they do not expect to see each other again. Valery, by way of farewell, says something that Allahyar will remember for a long time: "[They] played 'fool' with us… And gave 'preference' to the Baltics. But 'preference' is an intellectual game… here we have to either work with our hands or run" (p. 16). The placement of responsibility in this comment is very telling: there is a clear division between "us" and "them", "them" who are responsible and "us", whether it means the two friends, or Armenians and Azerbaijanis, or both, who are the sufferers. But who is "them"? "Them", as the next sentence juxtaposing the local situation with the one in the Baltic suggests, is the central government which manipulated the peripheries. This, as we shall see further on, is the central issue of the story to which we will come back more than once.

Allahyar and Valery next meet a year later, in early summer 1993, when both are lieutenant colonels in the opposing armies. They first make contact by radio, and agree to meet in a "neutral zone", meaning 2 kilometers away from each other's positions. Both come to the meeting unarmed, but with vodka, which, after initial verbal testing of each other, they drink together. "Like in the old times", Allahyar says. "It will never be like the old times", Valery replies. They exchange questions about each other's families, and prospects for the future. Valery offers to smuggle Allahyar to Russia or Poland, "if you decide to come with me". Allahyar refuses and makes counter-proposal which is also refused. They agree on "trying to survive. Both of us" (pp. 24-25).

---

[2] Mulberry vodka, a famous local drink in Karabakh.

But this does not happen. Aghdam is surrendered to the Armenian forces on July 23, 1993. The narrator emphasizes that it was surrendered rather than captured, thus implying betrayal in the Azerbaijani military command. Two months after the surrender, on September 23, Allahyar, who was known for his moral integrity and rejection of compromises, dies in a mine explosion. The next day after his friend's death Valery comes to the Azerbaijani post, unarmed, and asks for a permission to visit Allahyar's grave. Despite initial doubts he is granted this permission, and walks over to the Azerbaijani side to spend an hour at the grave of his friend. When he leaves, he is ready to surrender to the Azerbaijani army, but Azerbaijani soldiers let him go, following not the formal rules, but the code of male honor: "You are a man and we are men" (p. 28).

Two months later the whole of Aghdam District is taken by Armenian forces; and after a few more months the cease fire agreement is signed. After the cease fire Valery returns to "the land that is occupied, yet his own" and settles in a small village outside of old Aghdam, which is now in ruins. This village is near the place where his friend Allahyar is buried, and Valery takes care of his grave. Rumor has it that it is always adorned with fresh flowers.

The other novella unfolds in another small town, this time in Armenia – in Razdan. This is the story of Anush, a middle aged widow struggling to sustain herself and her only son on a librarian's salary. She gets both herself and her son in trouble with one of the local "notables", Vartan, a rich and influential man, and a member of the Party of National Self-Determination. Vartan gives a speech during a meeting of the housing committee where he calls on residents to resist and sacrifice of everything that is dear to them on the altar of the nation. "Everything" includes even the lives of their children. And Anush makes a mistake asking Vartan where exactly this altar of the nation was, in Razdan or in Marseilles, where his own son was studying. Vartan is enraged, and as he is a vindictive man, Anush is afraid that he will take revenge on her young son who will reach military draft age in a few months. Through the help of his vast connections Vartan is able to arrange for Anush's son to be sent to the war. To prevent this Anush asks her cousin who lives in Istanbul to help her find the money to pay to the draft officials. The cousin's husband finds money through a friend in Kars, an owner of small hotel who agrees to lend the money in return for Anush's service as a manager in his hotel. Thus Anush is able to send her son away to relatives in Russia, to the utter displeasure of Vartan. Several days

later she herself leaves for her new job in Kars, where she eventually marries the hotel owner.

In the second novella the author brings the issue of responsibility for the conflict closer to the ground and shows the role of local elites – of Vartan – in the actual practice of conflict. Vartan's involvement can be felt at two levels: at the ideological level he uses nationalist propaganda to encourage people to actively participate and contribute to the conflict; but at the same time Vartan is powerful enough to influence decision-making on who can be sent to the front line, and thus on who is to live and die. It is not by accident that Vartan is shown as corrupt, both morally and financially. Similar corruption among the elites takes place on the Azerbaijani side – remember the surrender of Aghdam and the strange death of Allahyar. Thus the policy-making of central government and the participation of the corrupt local elites combine in the escalation and development of the conflict.

The complementary themes of policies that are formed far from the Caucasus and of local elites that implement them on the ground are further developed in the third narrative, the narrator's own account of the conflict. The following two passages offer a good illustration of seemingly alternative, but in reality complementary forces that shaped the conflict:

> It all started with ordinary fights [... ... ...] Here and there, sly little people with leather briefcases, whispered God knows what, stirred people up… In the evenings they gathered young people for lectures on some intelligent subject, on traditions and history. But that history was just deceitfully one-sided, in the spirit of "and in our neighborhood, along with such industrious ploughmen-builders-draftsmen-darlings of the Creator, barbarian neighbors settled" (p.12).

> It all started not with fighting or some old ugly men, but with newspaper articles in Baku Workers or Yerevan Party Members [newspapers]. A thread tied to soft paws with spewing saliva, but not with sparkling wit of puppets, spread far away – far to the top, from the sunny south to the overcast north. To the Kremlin – Moscow, or to the White House in Washington, until it is needed... Even a cat would understand that if stupid people start screaming about heartfelt and sincere things, somewhere nearby there is always a prompter's box, where someone very, very clever is sitting. For the sake of fairness it should be noted

that the box may be located at a considerable distance from the scene, but what really is "far away" in our times – when people can move about, information can be transmitted and punishment meted out so quickly?... (p. 13).

So the conflict is initiated from outside, by policy-makers and intellectuals, and then the local elites implement those policies on the ground. This brings us back to the division between "us" and "them" from the first novella. It is now clear who is included in "them" and who bears primary responsibility for the conflict and its consequences. But what about "us"? First of all, who exactly are "us"? The answer to this question can be found in the author's own introduction to the story (p. 3):

A human life is like a sheep's hide, all in whorls and curls… the more interesting a time is for the historian, the more profitable it is for a politician or a speculator, the curlier it is for a simple person not spoiled by boutiques, fed at receptions, drunk on Veuve Clicquot or sucked off by Cindy Crawford. Life curls up, even if one does not want it to… Sometimes, you start howling like a dog at the moon. And so we live quietly, we love, laugh and cry… our brothers are called to the army… they are later dismissed without receiving severance… we are guinea pigs for this or that experience, forcibly driven to get vaccinated or to elections, organized in good conscience, with promises and carnival farce.

Thus, "us" is a non-ethnic category and includes, put simply, "ordinary" people. From the introductory passage cited above it may seem that "us" are in general victims. But the story itself disproves this. The three "ordinary" protagonists of the story can hardly be considered powerless victims. Both Valery and Allahyar are quite active participants of the conflict, with a considerable degree of power and control which allows them even to somewhat bend the rules and norms when needed. Anush, who formally fits the definition of a victim much better – she is poor, her job is unimportant, she is a widow, and she is a woman – also actively employs her agency in resolving her problem and succeeds in saving her son. But besides these three, there are also local youth who go to fight each other "with buckled belts wrapped around their fists":

...They knocked out each other's teeth with screams and curses, gouged each other's eyes, carved crosses in their neighbors' backs, hanged prisoners,

> destroyed temples, burned villages, had fun… in short, they entertained them-
> selves and the devil as best they could (p. 5).

It is these people who actually waged the conflict, and as such they can hardly be said to be wholly devoid of responsibility. Yet two questions remain here: first is the extent to which these fighters can be identified with the ordinary people, and the second is the extent of their responsibility. Although these fighters definitely are not part of the elite, the author does not directly identify them with the "ordinary people". Ordinary people, in the story, appear to be first, rational agents, and second, honest and hard-working people. The fighters, rather, are the mob who is manipulated by the elites and therefore shares the responsibility with them.

There is one more interesting aspect of the conflict that is represented in this short story: its transnationality. We already mentioned the orchestration of the conflict from Moscow and Washington, but there is more. Thus, Vartan is the head of a local branch of the Party of National Self-Determination who "had connections from Los Angeles to Yerevan". This transnational network is behind Vartan's power in his home town. But the ordinary people, the "us", also employ transnational social capital. Thus, Anush solves her problem through a transnational family network: her cousin in Istanbul provides money, and her son is sent to relatives in Russia. Allahyar and Valery, in their last meeting at the neutral zone both indicate their ability to smuggle each other into Russia. Thus, the Karabakh conflict even at the level of personal relations and involvement is seen not just as a problem of a certain locality but as embedded in global processes.

So overall, in *The Life of a Human* the Karabakh conflict is presented not as a spontaneous outbreak of violence based on irrational impulses but rather as a deliberately constructed conflict. The responsibility for its initial development is placed on neither the Armenian nor Azerbaijani side, but on the policy-makers outside of the region and on local elites; the latter are often seen as corrupt. The elites manipulate the mob, with whose hands the actual atrocities are committed. Yet the consequences of the conflict, the sufferings of military service, forced migrations, human losses are born by ordinary people, both Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

In *Besame mucho or Karabakh prisoners*, the events also take place in Karabakh, in a small village near the frontline. Serj and his wife Galia have recently

moved here from Baku, because their son Armen is doing his military service in Karabakh. Serj is a medical doctor, and here in Karabakh this is a much needed profession at the time of military actions. Serj and Galia temporarily live in the house of Galia's relative Ashot, a local Karabakh Armenian. They are waiting to exchange their son, Armen, who has been taken prisoner by the Azerbaijani side. Serj is an old-time Baku resident, proud of Baku's internationalist past, and is very critical of Armenian nationalist discourse. He hates war, does not like Karabakh, and misses his home and his life in Baku. For him, all those who shoot are "bastards". Galia, on the other hand, is a more sincere nationalist. She often recites quotes about Armenia's great past and the oppression of Armenians in Karabakh, and "blames everything on the Azerbaijani side". Serj thinks that she acquired her nationalist sentiments from her father, who was a member of *Krunk*[3] in Soviet times and paid regular membership fees. Galia is the one who wanted them to come to Karabakh in the first place. Galia's relative Ashot, in whose house they live, is a good man. Not only does he offer his home to them, but he also brings them Azer, a wounded Azerbaijani prisoner for potential exchange for their son. Ashot seems to be confused about the conflict: on the one hand, he does not see Azerbaijanis as his enemies, recalls his many Azerbaijani friends and seems to believe that Karabakh is in fact part of Azerbaijan.

Not so Khachik, head of local Armenian militia and by inference also the top local authority at the time of war. Khachik is a diaspora Armenian from Beirut who had repatriated to Armenia a few years earlier. He is a proud member of the All Armenian Movement, and unlike Ashot he hates Azerbaijanis and has no doubts that Karabakh is Armenian land: "Armenia is where Armenians are". His vision for the future is the cleansing of Karabakh of all Azerbaijanis, whom he calls Turks. He is generally a morally corrupt man: while speaking of Great Armenia and the war he is involved in trade of positions, equipment and ammunitions with the Azerbaijani military management; he tries to seduce Galia; he makes several attempts to kill Azer, the wounded prisoner; and eventually he kills Serj.

Serj, in the midst of an Azerbaijani offensive, makes the difficult decision to stay and surrender. At this time, he recognizes Khachik, whom he had met

---

[3] An Armenian political organization pursuing the goal of independence of Karabakh. Officially it was founded in February 1988.

many years ago during a trip to lake Sevan. There, Khachik was working as a waiter and earning his long-distance university degree in Moscow by entertaining his professors in his restaurant. For Khachik, with his present military and political career, this is compromising information, and so he shoots Serj and kills him. When Azer, on his wounded leg, approaches Serj to see if he can still be helped, Galia enters the room, and assumes that Azer killed her husband. She picks up the gun and kills him.

So who is responsible for the conflict in this play? Different characters have rather different perspectives here. Galia "blames everything on the Azerbaijani side"; Khachik uses war for personal career and enrichment. But Galia's position appears unsustainable and based on false Armenian propaganda rather than on serious analysis of the conflict. In the final scene, the killing of Azer, her view is shown as both false and leading to tragic results. The two "local" Armenians, Armenians from Azerbaijan, one from Baku (Serj) and another from Karabakh (Ashot), seem to have the most complex views. Ashot in many ways resembles Valery from *The Life of a Human*, although he is a much more comic character. Thus, he is local, he has many Azerbaijani friends and he cannot see Azerbaijanis as his enemies:

> *And do you know how many Azerbaijani friends I have here, as well as there? If I want, they will take me through the block posts directly to Baku, they will get anything for me... and they will safely deliver me back. And you say: enemies, enemies…*

Yet, unlike Valery, he does not come up with a clear opinion of the origins of the conflict. He seems to be rather confused about this, but Moscow and Yerevan are both present in his thinking about the conflict. For example, he suggests, half-jokingly, that the war was started by Raisa Maksimovna (Gorbacheva, the wife of the then-Soviet leader); on the other hand he also mentions the role of Armenians from Armenia in the conflict:

> *"Ara, they...", he points somewhere to the side, "...where the hell did they come from?! Now they even feel bad in Yerevan, it's bad… Bread...", he picks up a nub, "...this is how much they give us every day... And why they don't let us near them? They say to us, go and fight with Azerbaijan. With whom, ara? With myself? We are in Azerbaijan, after all, not in the US!"*

At the same time he does not blame Azerbaijani side for the conflict at all. When Galia reminds him of the oppression of Armenians by Azerbaijanis in Karabakh, he cannot remember any and just tells a story about a local police officer Mamikonian (an Armenian) who used to take money from his father.

Finally, Serj too attributes responsibility to the central government. He says to his wife: "This is the essence of the conflict: us for us. There is no 'us' and 'them' here. Everyone is us… Didn't those stupid idiots, up there at the top, didn't they understand this?!" Unlike his wife, he does not blame the Azerbaijani side for the conflict. He even checks with Azer whether he had been involved in killing Armenians in Baku pogroms. But in fact Azer had been helping Armenian refugees from Baku during the pogroms which were organized, according to Azer, by Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia. Thus, we are faced with a rather paradoxical situation, when even the pogroms of Armenians in Baku are seen as originating in Armenia, not in Azerbaijan.

If those responsible are the authorities and Armenians from Armenia, then who are the victims? Azerbaijanis, of course, are seen as victims, as is exemplified by the figure of Azer, a man who was wounded in war which he did not want and then was killed for a murder that he did not commit. But Armenians from Azerbaijan are also seen as victims, and especially Armenians from Baku. Ashot, although he is forced to fight in war "with himself" and to accommodate refugees, is at least in his own home. But Serj and Galia have lost everything: their home, their son; Serj loses his life and Galia loses a husband.

The short story *The Tree* in a way develops this theme, shifting focus from Karabakh to Baku of 1990. This is a love story of an Azerbaijani boy and an Armenian girl. The young people are neighbors; they live in the same courtyard, where the Tree, the witness and the narrator of the story, stands. The identities of the characters, including their names, are never named directly: throughout the text they are dubbed "she" and "he".

The place and the time of the events are also revealed indirectly, through other evidence. Thus, the families of the couple have not been on friendly terms since the "terrible massacre" of the 1918, when "her" grandmother seduced "his" grandfather, who eventually left his family, went broke, and ended his days in jail (p. 28). The year 1918 here indicates that the "terrible massacre" is the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict in Baku, recently recognized in Azerbaijan as geno-

cide of Azerbaijani people.[4] The Tree also says that "her" great-grandfather slaughtered "his" ancestors, which suggests that "she" is Armenian and "he" is Azerbaijani. That old love affair was the talk of the town 72 years ago – which implies that the present is 1990, the peak year of inter-ethnic strife in the current conflict in Baku. Thus, the present, including both the love affair and the conflict are seen as repetition of history:

> *Hiding, I pretended to be asleep and watched from the side what was happening, I was aware that before me an ever familiar story was evolving. Realizing its end was at hand, I tried to scream. But can trees scream? I was silent. History repeated itself. In a moment she will say that his family will never allow them to marry, because she is of a different nationality. He will try to resist. She will cover his mouth with her hand. Then she will whisper that they should run away. He will say it is impossible, he can't abandon his parents. She will reiterate that his parents would rather die than agree to his marriage with the girl whose great-grandfather killed his ancestors in 18, and whose grandmother was blamed for the tragedy of the whole family. He will say nothing. She will sigh. The same thing has happened again. Repeated exactly in the same way... (p. 29)*

And indeed, "his" father tries to convince "him" to break up with "her", and the arguments he uses refer both to the family history and the current ethnic strife:

> *If she were from another family, if this happened a few years before! But now, when everything has turned upside down and he has to defend the honor of his motherland, which has been insulted by her tribesmen?! (p. 30)*

He does not try to refute the validity of these arguments:

> *…He had nothing to protest. He loved his father, his mother, his motherland, and was willing to give his life for them. But he also knew that he could not live even a day without her…*

This means a deadlock, which neither the young man nor his father is able to resolve. The resolution, a very tragic one, comes by itself, on "a dark Janu-

---

[4] For a detailed account of the massacres of 1918, see Altstadt, 1992.

ary day" – thus pointing to the pogroms in Baku in January 1990. "his" family hides "her" and her grandmother in their house as an angry mob breaks into the courtyard. Although no physical harm is done to them, the grandmother does not survive the shock and dies. After this horrible night the girl runs out of the house into the courtyard, and, shaken with grief and anger cries, out to her beloved: "Because of you my grandmother died. You stole our land and killed my people. I hate you (your people) for that. And I hate you…" (p. 31). When "he" tries to hold her and calm her down she breaks out of his arms, and, having tripped over an empty bucket, falls down and breaks her head open. Unable to survive this the next day "he" hangs himself on the tree.

Who is responsible for this tragedy? The young man's father seems to be attributing responsibility on the Armenian side: "…honor of his motherland insulted by her tribesmen" (p. 30). She on the other hand gives a radically different assessment: "You stole our land and killed my people". But for The Tree both of these are not so much active interpretations of the conflict but rather lines of a historical drama that is being repeated: the strife, the charms of an Armenian girl, the young man's obsession with her – all of these appear completely independent from the will of the characters. The outcome of the drama is also predestined, and therefore their actions are not able to change anything.

The three representations discussed here vary slightly in their interpretation of the causes of the conflict. In the first case the causes are largely structural, and include policies of the central government in combination with the actions of local elites. Interestingly, the responsibility for the conflict here is ethnically neutral. In *Besame Mucho* part of the responsibility is also placed on the central government; but also largely on Armenians from Armenia and diaspora as opposed to local Armenians from Azerbaijan. In *The Tree* the conflict is seen as a blind impersonal force, a repetition of history independent of the will of individual actors, and this in fact lifts responsibility from the people. But the three cases also share a lot in common: all three describe interpersonal relations across a group boundary in a situation of violent conflict. In all three the people attempt to preserve these relations despite the conflict but in all cases they fail, and the relationships end tragically, with death. This – the problem of interaction across the intergroup boundary – will be the focus of the following section of this article.

The intergroup boundary: "Good" and "bad" Armenians

The boundary between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in literature is always drawn quite clearly. There are, as I will show in this section, some cases where engagement and interaction across the boundary becomes intense and even intimate. Yet the boundary itself, the basic difference between Armenians and Azerbaijanis is always there, it is essential and non-negotiable. I do not recall a single literary case where the Armenian identity of a character was kept unknown or where it was completely irrelevant to the story – and therefore to the representation of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations. Usually, Armenian identity is revealed directly – by naming a person as Armenian, for instance, as in the story *The Life of a Human* or by using specific Armenian names and surnames.

This last method is used by Afanasiy Mamedov in his novel *Back to Khazr*. One of the characters of the novel is Maia Babajanian, a neighbor and childhood friend of Afik, the novel's protagonist. Maia, as well as other neighborhood girls Jamilia and Zulya, are part of the same "neighborhood company". Interestingly, the last names of Zulya and Jamilia are never revealed throughout the novel, and it seems that the whole purpose of giving Maia's last name was to underline her Armenian identity.

Sometimes the Armenian identity is revealed indirectly, through geographical and historical context, like "Her" identity in Anargizi's story *The Tree*. It must be noted that this clear and unequivocal drawing of intergroup boundary is consistent throughout XX century literature. Thus, for example, in short story *Story about Music* by S. Rahman there is a character named Akop; in the next paragraph after introducing him the author directly identifies Akop's nationality: "the Armenian master" (p. 172). In the famous play *In 1905* by Dj. Djabbarli, the nationality of the characters is given in the very beginning, in the list of characters (p. 144).

Yet, the intergroup boundary by itself does not imply that communication is not possible or that interaction between Armenians and Azerbaijanis does not happen, and in fact such communication and interaction can be quite intense and intimate. What makes this possible? What makes the boundary a penetrable symbolic entity rather than physically restrictive protective wall?

One of the factors that ease communication across the interethnic boundary is co-residence, experience of living side by side with Azerbaijanis. Valery from *The life of a Human*, Serj and Ashot from *Besame Mucho*, Maia Babajanian from *Back to Khazr* – all these are examples of such (previously) positive experience of co-residence. All these characters are locals, they are natives of their respective homelands, they have diverse and intense relations with their Azerbaijani friends and neighbors. I have already described the friendship of Valery and Allahyar in some detail above; others too have Azerbaijani friends.

Thus, Serj's best friend in Baku was an Azerbaijani, Mehman. They had a long history together, with Serj even thinking about marrying Mehman's sister at some point back in their youth; they have traveled together, have shared romantic memories, particularly from the trip to Armenia from where Serj had remembered Khachik. Ashot says that he had more Azerbaijani friends than Armenian. Maia Babajanian is Afik's close friend, they grew up together. She is an integral part of her "courtyard" company, with Afik and Zulya. They help each other out, Maia's sells Afik's books when he needs money, and Maia and Zulya are even romantically involved.

Such "our" Armenians, particularly those from Karabakh, often speak Azerbaijani: Valery spoke Azerbaijani with Allahyar and Ashot has no difficulties communicating in this language. They also identify themselves with Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis in addition to their Armenian identity; in some cases it may be difficult to make a choice. Thus, for example, Ashot does identify with Armenia and Armenians: "I can't understand why, in the beginning of the conflict **we** gave diamonds not to Azerbaijan's leadership, but to Raisa Maksimovna. Karabakh would have been **ours** long ago…" But at the same time he also identifies with Azerbaijan: "…they say: go fight with Azerbaijan. Ara, with whom? With **ourselves**?" [emphasis added – L. S.]. Serj decides to stay and surrender to the Azerbaijani military. Maia Babajanian unequivocally identifies with her hometown: when her friend Afik asks her to be more careful in town because "you know what they do to Armenians now", she replies: "This is my city! Whom should I be afraid of here?" (p. 97).

Another interesting characteristic of such "good" Armenians is their attitudes towards other Armenians. While they identify with Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis they also dissociate themselves from other "Armenian" Armenians. For example, Maia, in the continuation of the same conversation, when Afik suggests that she "go ask her own people", replies angrily: "my own people? They are

mine no more than yours – we are no-one for them, we are Turkified" (p. 97). Interestingly, Afik, Maia's close friend, nevertheless draws and points out the boundary between himself and her, and Maia is offended by this. It is as if he does not accept her identification with him but at the same time she claims that she is not accepted by other Armenians.

A special case of intense interaction across the intergroup boundary is love affairs, like the one described in *The Tree*. This is a recurring theme in Azerbaijani literature, dating back to the epic *Asli and Kerem*, and also regularly reappearing in XX century literature, such as the novel *Bahadur and Sona* by Nariman Narimanov, *Mahmud and Mariam* by Elchin, and a number of secondary plotlines in other works, such as *The Resettlement*. In all cases, such love affairs are doomed to fail. At least one of the participants, and often both of them, die. Thus, in *The Tree* both die. In *Bahadur and Sona*, Bahadur commits suicide after Sona's parents refuse his marriage proposal while Sona goes mad and spends the rest of her life in a mental institution. In *Mahmud and Mariam* both are killed by Mariam's father. The love affairs in literature thus appear to perform an important role of structuring interaction across the intergroup boundary: while even the most intense interaction is always possible, the inevitable failure of love affairs indicates the importance and the strength of the boundary which remains insurmountable despite the interaction.

Thus, the experience of living in Azerbaijan, cooperation and friendship with Azerbaijanis, and identification with Azerbaijan, Karabakh, or Baku, and with their Azerbaijani friends all ease the communication across the boundary. All these factors indicate rather high perceived assimilation of Azerbaijani Armenians. But even with such assimilated Armenians, the boundary persists and is never completely removed. It remains in place despite the interaction, and during the actual conflict it becomes impenetrable even for the "good" Armenians who identify with Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis. The cooperation, the friendship, the harmony belong to the past. At present no matter how strong the friendship may be, any interaction is doomed to end tragically. Sometimes the Azerbaijani counterpart dies as a result of such interaction – such as Allahyar in *The Life of a Human*. But usually it is either the Armenian counterpart or both who die or are killed: the couple from *The Tree* dies, "She" from an accident caused by her own hate and "He" commits a suicide; Serj is killed by a foreign Armenian for whom Serj's refusal to identify with Armenia is a threat, and Azerbaijani prisoner Azer is killed by Serj's wife; Maia is killed by an angry Azerbaijani mob in

Baku who does not care about her identification with the city and her dislike of Armenian Armenians.

However, not all Armenians of Azerbaijan are seen as assimilated. There is also an important issue of choice that is made by individual Armenians; and while some choose to identify with Azerbaijan, others make a choice of identifying with Armenia. Thus, while Serj decides to surrender to Azerbaijani army – although he never gets a chance to carry this decision through – his wife Galia, also an Armenian from Baku, makes a very different choice and identifies with Armenians and never Azerbaijanis. Another example is presented in *The Tree* where She, despite her feelings of love for Him, finally makes a choice to identify with Armenians and shouts to her beloved in the end: "You stole our land and killed my people. I hate you (your people) for that. And I hate you" (p. 31).

The representation of "good" assimilated Armenians is rather consistent throughout XX century literature. A vivid example can be found in the play *In 1905* by Dj. Djabbarli, written in 1930s and dedicated to the history of Armenian-Azerbaijani strife in 1905. Two families, an Armenian headed by Allahverdi and an Azerbaijani (called in the play "Turk"), headed by Imamverdi, live close to each other in Karabakh. They are connected by a multitude of personal and business ties, they help each other, Imamverdi and Allahverdi are good friends, and their children are friends too. Moreover, Imamverdi's son Bahshi and Allahverdi's daughter Sona are in love with each other. When Sona's brother Eyvaz goes to Baku to work at the oil refinery he asks his close friend Bahshi to look after his sister (p. 152). Here, like in the literature of the conflict period, we can see the motive of peaceful and harmonious co-residence and friendship. Eyvaz, in particular, underlines the irrelevance of inter-ethnic boundary: "A book which is the truth for me does not contain such words as 'Armenian' and 'Turk'" (p. 180). Another example is Akop-usta, maker of musical instruments, from *Story about Music*. Akop loses his daughter in the turbulent years of 1918-1920. She is a beautiful woman, and after the death of her husband a local Azerbaijani *bek* (they live in Karabakh) kidnaps her and forces into concubinage. Eventually the *bek* leaves her and she dies of tuberculosis. This Azerbaijani bek also tries to kidnap Leyla, an Azerbaijani girl from the same area, but she manages to escape. Years later Akop-usta and Leyla meet and recognize each other. Akop is particularly happy to meet Leyla who is like a daughter to him. A similar representation can also be found in the novel *The*

Day of Execution by V. Samedoglu. There, an Azerbaijani writer who is about to be arrested – the events take place in 1930s – gives the manuscript of his controversial novel to his neighbor Akop for safekeeping. Akop possesses all the characteristics of the "good" Armenian: he is from Karabakh, he speaks Azerbaijani, he likes Azerbaijanis and is a trustworthy person.

In all of these works the "good" Armenians, like Allahverdi, Eyvaz, or the two Akops, have experience of living in Azerbaijan, first in Karabakh and later in Baku, and they have Azerbaijani friends. However, there is one important difference – in Soviet literature there is no dissociation between local Armenians residing in Azerbaijan and the Armenians who originate from territory of Armenia or present-day Turkey. Such foreign Armenians are simply not present in Soviet literature. Instead, division and unification in Soviet-era literature are based on class lines, with peasants and workers pitted against *beks* and oil barons. Thus, the families of Allahverdi and Imamverdi are both peasants, their son Eyvaz is a worker and their common enemy is oil baron Agamyan; Akop-usta is a maker of instruments, and Leyla is a daughter of peasants; their common enemy is the Azerbaijani *bek* who kidnapped Siranush and attempted to kidnap Leyla. A similar motive is reproduced in *The Life of a Human*, with ordinary people pitted against corrupt elites. But in the literature of the conflict period the common class enemy is often replaced by Armenians from outside of Azerbaijan.

If "good" Armenians are the ones who live in Azerbaijan and love it and their Azerbaijani friends, then logically the "bad" Armenians would be the opposite. And indeed, foreign Armenians, Armenians who come to Azerbaijan and the Caucasus from somewhere else are often represented as "bad". One example of such an Armenian would be Khachik: an immigrant from Beirut, he transposes his hatred of all Turks in general onto Azerbaijanis, with whom he had very limited experience and whom he does not know. Another vivid example is Ovanes Agaronyan from G. Guseynov's historical novel *Fire of the Sun* (2003). This novel has a complex structure that interconnects the present, the history of deportation of the author's family, with the fictitious historical novellas describing the role of Armenians in the region. Ovanes Agaronyan is the central character in two of these novellas – *Trickery and Love* (pp. 69-82) and *The Sun of the Dead* (pp. 132-152).

He is an orphan who had grown up in the house of his uncle in (Tiflis) Tbilisi in the 19th century; there he had acquired ideas about building a Greater Armenia which he goes to implement in Yerevan. In Yerevan he also has a lover,

a daughter of a rich merchant, Melik-Samvelyan who had come there from Maraga in Persia. Melik-Samvelyan does not like Yerevan and wants to go back to Persia; but this runs against the radicals' plans of creating Greater Armenia and to stop him they burn his house. Both Melik-Samvelyan and his children die there. Ovanes, however, overcomes his pain for his lost lover and goes to Moscow to become a diplomat. One of his defining features is his hatred for Muslims and Azerbaijanis which he does not hide even on his translation missions. His son Avetis later becomes one of the leaders of Dashnaktsutyun, a radical nationalist party that was engaged in the inter-communal strife between Azerbaijanis and Armenians at the beginning of the 20th century.

Another example is from the novel *The Key to Your House* by R. Huseynov (2008). This novel covers the period from the early 20th century to 1930s. Sadiyar Agha, an Azerbaijani landlord, loses his family in an Armenian raid on his summer camp. The raiders shoot Sadiyar Agha's 9-year-old son and his pregnant wife dies from shock. Sadiyar Agha swears to take revenge and kill all perpetrators of this terrible crime. Over the next several years he finds and kills them one by one; but the last one, the organizer Levon Sarkisian, he does not kill yielding to his wife's plea not to kill a father in front of his children. But Levon does not feel any gratitude: on the contrary, he follows Sadiyar Agha and kills him from behind. After that he turns into a fugitive and lives the rest of his life in hiding. Levon is not a local; he is an immigrant from Ottoman Turkey and he brings with him hatred towards all Turks. So are his assistants in the tragic raid.

This pattern of hate and crime continues in the next generation, with Levon's son Gurgen. After the flight of his father, Gurgen gets involved with a group criminals and once he even brings them to his house where he witnesses them raping his own mother. Yet he does not do anything to stop them. Moreover, he continues his relationship with one of those criminals, "Uncle Karen", for the rest of his life: two decades later they both work for the NKVD (Soviet Secret Police) of Azerbaijan. While in service, Gurgen commits another horrible crime. He tells Ida, who is betrothed to his colleague Farhad, that he possesses information about Farhad who is fighting in the Spanish Civil War. This is a lie aimed at forcing Ida to have sex with him. After several months of this forced relationship, the severely depressed Ida dies in a car accident.

Thus, the "bad" Armenians, unlike "good" ones, are often immigrants or come from immigrant families. Coming from outside the region they are not personally

involved with the local Azerbaijanis and bring with them perceptions that originate elsewhere. They are full of hate, and often this hate is generalized and directed towards all Turks/Muslims. Finally, such Armenians are generally bad, morally corrupt people, murderers, traitors, rapists. In many cases Armenians also work in law enforcement agencies: Gurgen and his patron Karen Baghdasaryan are one example. In *Fire of the Sun*, in the novella about the author's family's deportation to Kazakhstan, there are several Armenian officers organizing the deportation. The same motive appears in the autobiographical novel *The Resettlement* by M. Oruj and the short story *The Black Train* by N. Rahimov.

Unlike the representation of the "good" Armenian, which is a stable and consistent image throughout all of XX century literature, the "bad" Armenian is rather new. Because of the Soviet ideological pressure of "friendship of the peoples" representations of "bad" Armenians were a sort of taboo in Soviet Azerbaijani literature. Yet there is one exception that can be found in the novel *Mahmud and Mariam*, based on the epic *Asli and Kerem*. This novel was published in 1987, and written a few years before; thus, it appeared immediately before the conflict began. In the novel, Mahmud, son of the *khan* of Ganja, falls in love with Mariam, daughter of a local priest, a "Dark Priest", as he is called. There are of course numerous obstacles in front of Mahmud's love, such as the resistance of his own family, differences in class and so on. However the most important obstacle turns out to be the resistance of Mariam's father, the Dark Priest. Eventually, unable to prevent the wedding, the Dark Priest gives his daughter a magic dress as a wedding gift; this dress, when unbuttoned, bursts into flames, killing both Mahmud and Mariam. The Dark Priest in this novel resembles very much the other "bad" Armenians found in the literature of the next two decades. Like Khachik, Ovannes, or Levon, the Dark Prince feels the same strong hatred towards all Muslims. Like them, he is also a stranger to the Caucasus – he comes here from Erzurum (in eastern Turkey). The consistency of this representation with the conflict period image of foreign Armenians as enemies suggests that the idea of Armenians as outsiders, as a potential foreign threat is not new at all but in fact lay dormant during the Soviet period.

The literature of the conflict period supports the notion of the importance of group boundary maintenance for the ethnic processes put forward by Frederik Barth (Barth, *Introduction*). The boundary in literature is maintained regardless of the characteristics of individual Armenian characters and of the quality of interaction across it.

Conclusion

"It will never be like the old times" – these words of Valery, a Karabakh Armenian from *The Life of a Human*, summarize the Azerbaijani literary representation of the Karabakh conflict very well. The "old times" are the times of harmony and peace, when Armenian-Azerbaijani relations were based on cooperation and mutual support. This "golden age" is destroyed by the Karabakh conflict, which radically transforms this relationship into hostility, suspicion and war. In literature, as well as in real life, this transformation is often represented as tragic, as leading to and bringing death to the participants. Despite some variation in the interpretation of the causes of the conflict, in all works of fiction analyzed here the Karabakh conflict is seen as a major blow that radically transforms the relations between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. Meanwhile, the causes of this conflict and this radical transformation are represented as external: either the policy-makers in Moscow, or provocation from Armenia, or an impersonal historical force that plays with the actors.

Yet, despite this representation of the conflict as a radical transformation of the relations between two groups, the comparison of conflict period literature with that of the Soviet period shows that there exist significant continuities between the two. Thus, in both periods there exists a representation of "good" Armenian. Such good Armenians are always local, hardworking and well integrated into Azerbaijan, including integration into cross-ethnic social networks, knowledge of Azerbaijani culture and language. However, and this is another carryover from the Soviet period, regardless of the level of integration of even the most friendly Armenians, the inter-group boundary between the two groups is always drawn very clearly. There may be the most intensive interaction going on across it – such as friendship, mutual support, and even love affairs, but in all cases the boundary is maintained.

On the other hand, there are important differences in the pre-conflict and conflict period literatures. The most striking of them is the emergence of the image of "bad" Armenians. Such "bad" Armenians are often outsiders; they are newcomers to Azerbaijan, and often to the Caucasus, from the territories of the former Ottoman Empire. They bring with them hatred towards all "Turks", which for them includes Azerbaijanis, and all Muslims. They are always hostile, and

interaction with them leads to death. Interestingly, the "good" Armenians often also suffer from this interaction, they fall victim to the hatred that their "bad" co-ethnics feel and exercise towards Azerbaijanis. This negative representation of Armenians emerges first, at least in the literature that I have read, immediately before the conflict, in 1987. But after the escalation of the conflict this image rapidly proliferates, and in many cases can be found in historical fiction that describes Soviet and pre-Soviet history. As the "good" Armenians in the conflict period literature always die, it is possible to suggest that the representations of "good" Armenians are being gradually replaced by representations of "bad" ones.

One important issue that I did not address in this article but which deserves a special attention is the problem of the relationship between the literary representations and the empirical reality. In other words, to what extent the representations of the conflict and interaction correspond with actual relations in "real life". This is a particularly interesting question with regard to the image of past relations as a "golden age" and the image of "bad" Armenians as outsiders. Is that really true? The sternness of the Karabakh Armenian position in the ongoing conflict resolution negotiations suggests that the representation of Karabakh Armenians as well integrated into Azerbaijan is somewhat exaggerated; or perhaps literature has generalized individual, special cases. However, to answer this question in more detail, further research would be needed.

Finally, if "the old times" are over, what then is the future of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations? Is there any basis for building new relations after the old ones have been destroyed by the Karabakh conflict? Recent literature dealing with the Karabakh conflict does not offer an answer to this question. This lack of vision for the future is perhaps based in the current uncertainty surrounding the conflict, in the lack of any resolution and settlement. Thus, both the literary representations and the conflict situation await a resolution. Judging from the literature, the resolution is likely to come from outside, from the same external forces that initiated the conflict.

Bibliography:

1. Altstadt A., The Azerbaijani Turks: Power and Identity under Russian Rule, Stanford University: Hoover Institution Press, 1992.

2. Anderson B., Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, 2nd Edition. Verso, 1991.

3. Barth F., Introduction. In: F. Barth, (ed.) Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Difference, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1969.

4. De Waal T., Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through War and Peace, New York University Press, 2003.

5. Milner A., Literature, Culture, and Society, 2nd Edition, London and New York: Routledge, 2005.

References:

1. Abdullayev Ch., Resonyor (The Reasoner) Moscow: 2003.

2. Aliev S., Zhizn' chelovechkina (The Life of a Human). In: Shiza. Baku: 2004, pp. 3-30.

3. Anargyzy G., Derevo (The Tree). In: Navstrechu Proshlomu (Towards the Past), Baku: 2004, pp. 24-32.

4. Djalilov A., Vremya, kotoroye s nami (The Time We Have), Literaturniy Azerbaijan, 2001, № 3.

5. Guliev G., Besame mucho ili karabakhskie plenniki (Besame Mucho or Karabakh Prisoners). Electronic version: http://www.luch-az.com/ (last retrieved February 10, 2010).

6. Huseynov G., Solnechniy ogon' (Fire of the Sun), Baku: 2003.

7. Huseynov R., Klyuch doma tvoyego (The Key to Your House). In: Vremya poteryannikh kartin (Time of Lost Pictures), Baku: 2008, pp. 9-282.

8. Mamedzade S., Tretiy sad (Third Garden), Literaturniy Azerbaijan, 1997, №1-4.

9. Mamedov A., Zlokoznenniy gvozd' (A Tricky Nail), Literaturniy Azerbaijan, 2001, № 4.

10. Mamedov A., Na krugi Khazra (Back to Khazr). In: Khazarskij Veter (Khazar Wind), Moscow: 2000, pp. 60-158.

11. Oruj M., Pereselenie (The Resettlement), Literaturniy Azerbaijan, 1991, №7-8.

12. Rahimov N., Cherniy poyezd (The Black Train), Literaturniy Azerbaijan, 2001, № 4.

13. Sheikhov Yu., Vzletnaya polosa (The Runway), Literaturniy Azerbaijan, 2003, № 7.

14. Djabbarli Dj., V 1905 godu (In 1905). In: Pyesi (Plays), Baku: 1979, pp. 143-238.

15. Elchin. Mahmud i Maryam (Mahmud and Maryam), Moscow: 1987.

16. Narimanov N., Bahadur i Sona (Bahadur and Sona), Moscow: 1963.

17. Rahman S., Rasskaz o muzyke (Story about Music). In: Rasskazy (Short stories), Baku: 1959.

18. Samedoglu Yu., Den' kazni (The Day of Execution), Baku: 1987.

ETHNICITY AS SOCIAL STATUS AND STIGMA: ARMENIANS IN POST-SOVIET BAKU

Sevil Huseynova

> *"It took a national upheaval for them*
> *to realize, both at the same time, how much they had hated*
> *each other, and with how much tenderness, for so many years."*
> **Gabriel Garcia Marquez, "Strange Pilgrims: Twelve Stories"**

> *"The vociferous catastrophe of a general order –- fires, wars, epidemics –*
> *are one single pain, illusorily multiplied in many mirrors."*
> **Jorge Luis Borges, "A new Tefutation of Time"**

It is believed that in January 1990, called "black" and/or "bloody" in Azerbaijan from the moment it occurred, the history of the Armenian community in Baku ended. Those who were not able to leave the city by January 1990 were forced to flee following riots and intervention by Soviet troops. This is how the Armenian-Azerbaijani process of ethnic division, triggered by the conflict in Karabakh, came to an end. By that time, Azerbaijanis had already been forcibly expelled from the territory of Armenia. The same fate awaited the Armenians living in Azerbaijan, excluding Armenians who lived in the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region (NKR).[1]

Since the 1990s there have been discussions about few Armenians who did not leave the city. Such discourse took place both at the level of the leadership of the republic, as well as in the form of rumors and conversations among ordinary citizens. In the 1990s, as well as today, in 2010, these discussions

---

[1] The Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region (NKR), with a majority of the population comprised of ethnic Armenians, was part of the Azerbaijan SSR. On February 20, 1988, the Council of People's Deputies of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region of Azerbaijan adopted a resolution formulating the idea of secession from the Azerbaijan SSR with subsequent accession to the Armenian SSR. As a result of the rapidly escalating confrontation, the complete deportation of Azerbaijanis from Armenia and Armenians from Azerbaijan occurred, accompanied among others by pogroms in Sumgait (February 1988) and Baku (January 1990). After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, the conflict took on the character of a full-scale war between the newly independent Armenia and Azerbaijan. In the course of the military action already under way outside Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenian forces occupied five districts completely and two partially. Accordingly, the ranks of the refugees to Azerbaijan were joined by hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons. Only in May 1994 was a ceasefire agreement signed in Bishkek. However, even today no peace treaty has been signed to resolve the conflict.

emerged in the context of the idea of the tolerance of the Azerbaijani people towards others as one of the essential characteristics of this imaginary community. As for the discourse among experts, it included only political scientists during the entire post-Soviet period, and human rights groups to a much lesser extent. To date I have not read a single serious field study on this subject, especially one that has been conducted from the perspective of social anthropology or sociology.

Therefore, in conducting this research with a very vague idea about real lives and problems of Armenians in Baku, I tried to focus on the specifics of the construction of ethnic boundaries in conflict situations. The main results and fundamental conclusions at which I arrived while collecting and analyzing the field data are reflected in the title of this article. Here I will try to demonstrate that the "Armenian" ethnic identity in post-Soviet Baku has been stigmatized; consequently, its social status has changed as well.

This conclusion was based on the analysis of life stories related by the Armenians from Baku I interviewed. Paraphrasing Rozvita Breckner,[2] it can be said that if we want to understand why and how the value of ethnicity "is transformed into various and changing social and historical contexts, we must conceptualize it within the framework of dynamic biographical processes". In order to understand the precise importance of various phases in the change of the ethnicity's social status, we must reconstruct "the interrelated experiences experienced before, during and after" the "hot" phase of the conflict.

First of all, I would like to focus my attention on the research methodology, which is particularly important given the difficulty of access to the field. Further on, I will examine the theoretical frames of analysis and the social context in which the stigma is considered to have been formed. Finally, I will try to reconstruct the main stages of the process of changing the ethnicity's status and the formation of the stigma before, during, and "after" the conflict.

---

[2] Brechner R., Changing the Value of the Migration in the Lives of the Eastern European Migrants, Who Came to the "West" before 1989 // Collection: The Biographical method of the study of the post-socialist communities. Proceedings of the International Workshop, V. Voronkov and E. Zdravomyslova (eds.), St. Petersburg, 1997, pp. 63-70, p. 64. Brechner talks about the migration in her article. However, the proposed methodological approach can be applied in my study as well.

Research methodology: "Every single life is valuable"

The main method of data collection in the framework of this research project, implemented in 2006 was biographical interviews.[3] I was able to conduct 12 interviews (with 11 women and 1 man).[4] As a result, I discovered a phenomenon Jan Assman calls "a communicative memory": These are "memories related to the recent past... which a man shares with his contemporaries". A typical example of communicative memory is "the memory of a generation". For my interviewees, too, events of the recent past are particularly important, as well as their own personal traumatic experiences.[5] The main topics I was interested in were the everyday lives of Armenians living in post-Soviet Baku, survival strategies in a dramatically changing social context, the loss of status as a "normal" Baku resident and citizen, as well as the problem of stigmatized identity.

It should be noted that in conversations with informants I often had to use expressions such as: "clean or pure-blooded" Armenian, etc. Although I prefer the constructivist theory that defines the nation as an imaginary community, I had to use such a vocabulary as it is commonly used among the inhabitants of Baku. According to R. Brubaker, "The language of commonplace is extremely categorical. It divides the population according to the mutually exclusive ethno-national categories, not allowing correction to the mixed or heterogeneous forms".[6] To borrow a phrase from Viktor Voronkov, this language is "a construct of the first order",[7] which must be understood and explained by the researcher.

Everyday discourse about the Armenians is important to study given the fact that it represents "a constitutive element of social relations"[8] against the background of which everyday practices and the identity of the Armenians in Baku

---

[3] In the title of this subsection the words of N. I. Kozlova, the Russian historian, establishing the use of biographical methods in social and historical researches, are quoted: "Every life is unique, it makes sense. Every single life is valuable. It is unable to escape from a sense of the relevance and the value great for the one who lived this life... On the other hand, you find yourself on the edge where you can see how behind completely voluntary decisions the socially structured beginning is discovered." Kozlova N., The Soviet People, Scenes from the Stories, M., Europa, 2005, p. 29.

[4] The interviews were conducted in Russian language.

[5] Assman J., Cultural Memory: Letter about the Memory of the Past and the Political Identity in the High Cultures of Antiquity, M., Languages of Slavic Culture, 2004, p. 52.

[6] Brubaker R., Myths and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationalism, Ab Imperio, 2/2000, Kazan, p. 256.

[7] Voronkov V., Selected Part of the Discussion // Racism in the Social Sciences, V. Voronkov, O. Karpenko and A. Osipov (eds.), St. Petersburg, Aletheia, 2002, p. 185.

[8] Brubaker R., op. cit., p. 256.

are formed. In addition, during my research I used the critical discourse analysis of the print media. In my opinion, the simultaneous analysis of everyday and official discourses was very productive. I proceeded from the assumption that the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict has transformed and changed the perception of "the Armenians" held by ordinary people. In many respects the conflict had a significant impact on the formation of stereotypes about Armenians. The role of the media was twofold: they both shaped and reflected these stereotypes. In any case, both discourses formed the social context in which the change in status occurred and the stigmatized identity was formed.

The search for and selection of the informants

The specificity of the research was largely determined by the fact that people in the relevant environment inside Baku were aware of the "ethnicity", which the informants preferred "not to display" after the "events" of January 1990.[9] An environment of such stigmatized identity was described in detail by Harald Eidheim. According to him, such a social space can be defined in terms of "interaction and communication … as the territory where people know each other's place of residence, place of origin, occupation and personal interests".[10]

This "crucial" set of circumstances for the Armenians became the most effective channel for me to obtain the necessary information. Virtually all contacts with Armenians were made through informal networks of friends and acquaintances. Another channel for establishing contacts were non-governmental and human rights organizations that cooperate with Armenians and offer them assistance. Almost all contacts established through the above-mentioned channel were with the Armenians who can be assigned to the group of the most affected and vulnerable Armenians (more about this below).

It should be mentioned that according to the State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan, 120,700 ethnic Armenians were found to be living in Azerbaijan in the 1999 census. Almost all of them were registered within the boundaries of the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Of course, the census was not conducted in this

---

[9] Under the concept of "events" Baku residents (not only ethnic Armenians, but also all the others) mean the events of January 1990. When the Armenian pogroms took place and afterwards, Soviet troops intervened resulting in significant casualties among civilians.

[10] Eidheim Ch., When Ethnic Identity Becomes a Social Stigma // Coll.: Ethnic Groups and Social Boundaries, ed. Frederick Barth, M., New Publisher, 2006, pp. 49-71, p. 55.

region of conflict. Almost all Azerbaijani experts refer to this data. President Heydar Aliyev once named a figure of 30,000 Armenians. Afterwards, this number became entrenched and widely used within the experts' community. However, during the 1999 Census, only 645 people living in the territory of Azerbaijan outside the Karabakh region declared themselves to be Armenians. However, even this figure was questioned by Arif Yunusov, who claimed that by 1996 there were 1,393 Armenians[11] living in Baku. In my opinion, all of these numbers illustrate perfectly that none of the experts recognize the fact (except maybe in private conversations) that it is impossible to state even an approximate number of Armenians. However, based on my observations, I can assert that the vast majority of the Azerbaijani citizens identified as Armenians are women.

"Nationality" in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods: Context and discourses

Baku and Baku residents: The "atmosphere" of a cosmopolitan space

In the opinion of many Baku residents, Baku was a city with a cosmopolitan "atmosphere" until 1988. However, as early as 2001, Rahman Badalov, a well-known Baku-based intellectual, argued in an article that "elder residents of Baku" "constantly complained" and "moaned" about the loss of this "atmosphere".[12] As a rule, the constructed images of Baku as a cosmopolitan urban space refer back to the period of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. At that time the small town situated on the outskirts of the Russian Empire, turned into a regional industrial center thanks to the oil boom. It was during this period that the international character of the city's population (as described later) took shape.

However, the image of Baku as a cosmopolitan city has still more to do with the revival of the USSR (1960-1970s). Older residents of Baku often com-

---

[11] Yunusov A., Migration and the New Baku Socium // Coll.: Migrants in the Capital Cities, J. Zajaczkowski, M., Adamant (eds.), 2000, pp. 64-75, p. 66.

[12] Badalov R., Baku: The City and the Country // Coll.: Azerbaijan and Russia: Societies and States, D. Furman, M. (ed.), 2001, pp. 256-279, p. 260.

plain about the passing of this particular period of city life; their recollections of Baku are inseparably connected with the memory of a special "spirit" of internationalism. The discourse of international Baku contains many trivial stereotypes about large Soviet cities where people of different nationalities coexisted peacefully. According to Soviet statistics, Russians and Armenians represented the largest ethnic minority groups in Baku.[13]

The memory of a special "atmosphere" in Soviet Azerbaijan is constructed in the context of the low significance of ethnic markers and boundaries in the everyday lives of Baku residents. These are stories about the city in which nationality played no important role. The boundary between "us" and "them" meant the boundary between "us – the residents of Baku", i.e. the real residents of the city, and "they – the countrymen", i.e. newcomers from the countryside.

An adequate description of the markers for "being a Baku resident" is not an easy task. Thus, according to Rahman Badalov, "Any factor – language, ethnicity, and social status – in this case is vague and not constitutive... perhaps the most important is a distinct time-space, in which a particular 'geographic' space of the city and a specific historical time converge".[14] Although the given time-space (the social urban space of Baku in the 1960-1970s) plays an important role in determining what constitutes "Baku residents", the factor of the availability of a common language for communication – Russian – is also essential.

However, we should remember the rather typical situation in large Soviet cities: according to Vladimir Malakhov, the usage of "the Russian language" among residents was a special form of demonstrating cultural loyalty. This cultural loyalty was formed in urban centers of the Soviet empire. At the same time "there is no doubt that the culture established in the beginning of the 1990s was considered to be Russian-language, but it was not Russian in the sense of ethnicity".[15]

---

[13] Since the beginning of the rapid growth of the city's population in the last third of the 19th century, and almost up to the last years of the USSR, the city's population was described as quite heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity. For example, "at the end of the 19th [century – S. H.] Azeris made up only 36% of the total population (Russians – 35%; Armenians – 17%)", (Badalov R., op. cit., p. 267). In the second half of the 20th century the situation underwent significant changes, but the ethnic heterogeneity of the population remained. "In 1959, according to the census, Baku's population was 897,000; Azerbaijanis predominated, amounting to 38% of the population, while the Russian population was 34% and the Armenian 17%. …Twenty years later, according to the census of 1979, the population of Baku was 1.5 million, of which nearly 56% were Azeri, 22% Russian, and 14% Armenian." (Yunusov A., op. cit., p. 65.)

[14] Badalov R., Op. cit., p. 272.

[15] Malakhov V., Ethnicity in the Big City // Coll. of articles, M., 2007, p. 165.

Despite the fact that representatives of the community and residents of Baku even today underline the exceptional internationalism of Soviet Baku, we should not think that ethnicity did not play any role in the daily lives of the residents. It should be remembered that this was a period characterized by a high degree of formal institutionalization of ethnicity; the most famous reflection of this was the designation on the fifth line of the Soviet passport. According to Rogers Brubaker, "The Soviet institutions constructed the territorial status of the nation and the personal nationality through the comprehensive system of social classification, organized by the 'principle of the vision and the division' of the social world, a standardized scheme of social accounting, an explanatory network of public debate, a set of boundary markers, a legitimate form of public and private identities".[16]

Thus, at least in relations with the government and the state, ethnicity acquired a certain importance even in international and cosmopolitan Baku. It is sufficient to recall that in the 1980s many ethnic Jews living in Baku preferred to identify themselves as a different ethnic group (e.g., Mountain Jews were registered as Tats). On the level of everyday practices, the issue of ethnicity was apparently also frequently thematized. "The ethnic Azerbaijani boss can do everything if his deputy is a Jew, his secretary a Russian, and his driver an Armenian", was a well-known and widespread adage in Azerbaijan during the Soviet period. Of course, the sentence does not reflect the diversity of inter-ethnic contacts and relationships in Baku in the 1960-1970s. However, it demonstrates that in certain situations and even in Soviet, international Baku, ethnic boundaries were well maintained. According to Frederick Barth, "the lasting and vital social relations" could sometimes be based precisely "on the dichotomy of ethnic statuses".[17] It is not surprising that this maxim emerged among the inhabitants of Soviet Baku: "Residents of Baku are a special nation". This expression should be understood in the context of the fundamental conceptions of homo sovieticus[18]

---

[16] Brubaker R., Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutional Account. Theory and Society, Vol. 23, #1, (Feb. 1994), pp. 47-78, p. 48.

[17] Barth F., Introduction // Coll.: Ethnic Groups and Social Boundaries, Frederick Barth (ed.), M., New Publishers, 2006, p. 10.

[18] These stereotypes developed in the Soviet era, when the institutionalized ethnicity was the basic characteristic of any citizen of the USSR. As noted by Malakhov, "ascribed 'ethnicity' (which is prescribed by government, not self-defined by individuals) was interiorized by people and gradually turned from an external identifier to the (self) identity. As a result, a special feature of… political thinking, methodological ethnocentrism merged. It considered the society as a conglomeration of 'ethnic groups' ('Peoples'). This type of thinking is widespread among the masses and is also shared by a significant part of intellectual and political elites. It is difficult to explain to a former Soviet citizen that his or her nationality is not something innate." Malakhov B., "National Policy" as a Phenomenon of Political Speech, ibid, p. 50.

regarding the nation: "In order to be a real Baku resident one has to be born as a Baku resident". In other words, the local urban identity has been ethicized in the mentality of the actors, acquiring features of the real solidarity groups. It is interesting to note that in the post-Soviet period some researchers constructed explanatory models of "Baku residents" in the spirit of Bromley. For example, Bahodir Sidikov characterizes Baku residents as a sub-ethnic group; solidarity among members of this sub-ethnic group was based on the Russian language and the mentality of the city's people.[19]

The social context of status change and the stigmatization of Baku Armenian identity

After the Soviet collapse, ethnic Armenian residents of Baku lost their status as equal members of the local urban community. This was determined not only by the ethnic demarcation of the population as a result of the Karabakh conflict, i.e. not only due to the fact that the majority of Armenians living in Baku were forced to leave the city. The status of the full-fledged members of the community was lost during the conflict as "Armenian" ethnicity became virtually synonymous with "the enemy" or "the other". The ongoing conflict stigmatized the ethnic identity of "the Armenian". To be an Armenian and at the same time to reside in Azerbaijan was a contradiction, by no means satisfying the criteria for being a "good citizen". The self-perception of the Armenians living in Baku is formed in this context.

According to Hoffman, the concept of stigma (in our case, we can speak of "the tribal stigma", i.e. the nationality stigma and perhaps the religious stigma) always contains a double question mark. With regard to the subject of my research, this can be summarized as follows: does the social environment (neighbors, colleagues, etc.) know about the "wrong" ethnicity of "X"? Or does "X" live under the constant threat of exposure by the social environment (neighborhood, colleagues, etc.)? Whatever the answer might be, the informational space of

---

[19] Sidikov considers this "sub-ethnic group" together with, for example, Nakhichevan and other regional identities. In principle, he does not mean "Baku Internationalism", but the Russian-speaking ethnic Azerbaijanis in Baku. Sidikov B., 2007: Barth, "Yeraz" and Post-Soviet Azerbaijan: Inventing a New Sub-Ethnic Identity. In: Representations on the Margins of Europe, Tsypylma Darieva and Wolfgang Kaschuba (eds.), Frankfurt / New York, Campus Verlag, pp. 301-321, pp. 306-307.

the city and the country[20] is permeated with an ideology. This ideology declares the stigmatized residents of Baku who are ethnic Armenians to be a community posing a threat or provoking other negative emotions. The boundaries between the stigmatized and the "right people" are clearly marked. In the media, as well as in an everyday life, we hear the stigmatizing concepts: "historical enemies", "little Armenian mongrel", "Khachik", etc. To paraphrase Hoffmann, one can say that ethnicity becomes a kind of quality that distinguishes the Baku Armenians from other Baku residents and citizens of Azerbaijan.

The basic difference, of course, is related to the conflict; we should consider it in more detail, given that the conflict is a major factor defining the social context that changed the status and stigmatized the ethnicity of Armenians in Baku. The Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (1988-1994) was the bloodiest of those that erupted in the South Caucasus during the Soviet collapse.[21] This conflict characterizes the political principle of nationalism very well, "the essence of which – by definition of Ernest Gellner – requires the political and national units to coincide".[22]

In this context of the permanent and ever-actual nationalist conflict, no matter what is asserted in private conversations, the Armenian residents of Baku cannot, for example, honor their heroes of the Karabakh war, images of whom play an important role in the ideological representation of various ethnic groups as regards their loyalty to their country of residence. The cult of the hero of the Karabakh war is actively constructed in almost all ethnic communities: Russian, Ukrainian, Jewish, Cossack and others.[23] Azerbaijani, Talysh, Lezgians, Russians and Jews may choose to publicly demonstrate their patriotism, or perhaps even more importantly, their lack thereof. In the case of ethnic Armenians, similar demonstrations of loyalty, or indeed its absence, are perceived as inappropriate. The very possibility of the institutionalization of ethnic communities, in the space where it would be possible to construct cults of the heroes of the war, is impossible in the case of the Armenians.

---

[20] Here I mean not only the mass media (TV, newspapers, radio, internet), but everyday conversation, gossip, rumors, communication with colleagues, etc.

[21] Mukomel B., Demographic Consequences of Ethnic and Regional Conflicts in the CIS, Population and Society, 1997, № 27. Internet address: http://www/demoscope.ru/weekly/archives.php.

[22] Gellner E., Nations and Nationalism, M., Progress, 1991, p. 23.

[23] The hero of the Azerbaijan Mountain Jews, tank driver Albert Agarunov; the commando Yuri Kovalev (Russian); the pilot Victor Seregin (Ukrainian); the Cossack Plotnikov and others were awarded the title of National Hero of Azerbaijan posthumously. Many are buried in the Alley of Honor in Baku (Shehidler Hiyabany).

Armenians in post-Soviet Azerbaijan. The fatality of nationality

Two different categories could be used to analyze the frame of life stories of Armenians living in Baku in the post-communist period: The first category is provided by Etienne Balibar: "Something that guarantees a certain order in the hierarchy today, may not work tomorrow".[24] The collapse of the Soviet Union, which provided a definite order to the hierarchy of ethnic groups, led to significant changes in the social status and ethnic identity of "Armenians" in Baku. According to general opinion, the change in the social status of the ethnic group in the case of the Armenians in post-Soviet Baku was accompanied by the formation of a stigmatized identity.

In such a situation, setting the criteria for selecting informants becomes a difficult task for the researcher. Allegations by Rasim Musabekov, one of the most active Azerbaijan political analysts of the post-Soviet period, are not surprising. He states that today's Armenians prefer "not to manifest … their ethnicity".[25] My attempt to focus on the self-identification of my future informants was, therefore, limited by the need to obtain preliminary information. In addition to this, in the course of my work I came to the conclusion that the stigmatized identity has taken on significant meaning for my informants in their everyday lives. This identity is formed in the context of the expectations placed on informants' by their own social environment.

Having an Armenian parent, be it a mother or a father, leads to the stigmatization of the informant as Armenian by the social environment. In addition, the informant himself/herself may not share similar views about his or her identity, but it is usually impossible to change anything in the external environment. An ethnic identity that is imposed and rigidly assigned to the informant through the external environment can be defined as an "ascribed identity".[26] This is a situation in which the primordial belief in "genetics" and the "blood" inheritance of ethnicity is transferred to the social sphere, which leads to the assignment of a certain social status or stigma to an individual. Deliberately or not, the informant has to take into account this ascribed status and organize his or her daily life accordingly.

---

[24] Wallerstein I., The Design of the People // coll.: Etienne Balibar, Immanuel Wallerstein, Race, Nation, Class. Ambiguous Identity, M., Logos-Altera, Ecce Homo, 2003, pp. 85-102, p. 100.

[25] Musabekov R., Formation of the Azerbaijani State and Ethnic Minorities // coll.: Azerbaijan and Russia: Societies and States, D. Furman (ed.), M., 2001, pp. 337-362, p. 360.

[26] See Ionin L. G., Sociology of Culture, M., Logos, 1996, p. 37.

In his famous work *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson points out that "In all that is given 'by nature' to us there is always something that we cannot choose. Thus, nationality is likened to the skin color, sex, ancestry or epoch in which one is born, i.e. to everything that is not possible to change".[27] The beginning of nationalism in the everyday life of Azerbaijanis in Armenia and Armenians in Azerbaijan coincided with massacres, deportations and war, which cast a traumatic shadow, inducing a feeling of the fatality of their nationality. Their ethnicity is considered to be their fate: "talking blood". In addition, a lifestyle, behavior, perceptions and other elements are justified by ethnicity.[28] Despite the fact that nationality is not indicated in the new passports, the investigation of an individual's origins, including the ethnicity of a neighbor or a colleague, is a widespread habit for ordinary people and often becomes a reason why, even now, "everybody knows everything".

In addition, the government continues to control the definition of ethnicity, which needs to be indicated in various official documents. Registration of a citizen's residence still requires this information to be specified.[29] Entries by housing maintenance offices, archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, military offices, or by registry offices accumulated during the years of the Soviet Union remain valid. Clashes with the government, which controls the issuance of documents needed to identify each registrant as a "true" citizen, become inevitable. The possibility of escaping the daily oppression of fear and a sense of instability lies in the process of "ethnic re-socialization", such that the citizen is no longer perceived by others and the authority to be Armenian. In order to successfully complete the process, the most important conditions include good will shown by neighbors (and/or work colleagues), a micro socium in which the citizen is included through informal communications. It is also possible to attempt to radically change one's neighborhood or working environment. However, in this case remaining in the same city still implies the existence of a certain number of actors who are familiar with the citizen's "past". The second condition is the

---

[27] Anderson B., Imagined Communities, M., Canon-Press-C., 2001, p. 161.

[28] Brednikova O., Chikadze E., Armenians of St. Petersburg: Careers of Ethnicity // Coll.: Constructing the Ethnicity, ed. V. Voronkov and I. Oswald, St. Petersburg, Dmitry Bulanin, 1998, pp. 227-259, p. 256.

[29] Maintaining the old Soviet practice of "registration" demonstrates the inconsistency of the government policies with the proclaimed strategy of liberalization. A. G. Vishnevsky gave a remarkable characteristic to the old practice of "registration". Generally, registration is a good illustration of distorted (as Marx would say bastardly) forms that combine the latest achievements of urbanization (big cities – industrial centers) with a medieval archaic one (direct distribution in the natural form, the lack of freedom of movement, etc.). The Sickle and the Ruble. Conservative Modernization in the USSR, M., O. G., 1998, p. 102.

good will of the government (let us emphasize that this is limited by corruption) to include a citizen in society. To do this, the Azerbaijani nation must be "open" to some extent. To date, the resources for such openness lie in the good will of the community or the government that controls this community; we should see these resources in light of the peculiarities of the assimilation policy that continues the tradition of the Soviet national policy, reflected in particular in the statistics recording the national composition of the republics,[30] in the choice of nationality according to the father's or mother's origin,[31] at the mercy of corrupt officials.[32]

The fatality of the stigmatized identity is associated with the inevitability of a change in the "ethnic image"; alternatively, the informant must cease to be Armenian, which entails fulfilling at least one of the above conditions (preferably both), or must confine himself or herself to the family and circle of friends. The possible exceptions, in which an individual remains Armenian for his or her environment as well as for the authorities, are the proverbial proof of the rule. And yet even in the case of successful ethnic "rehabilitation", the fatality of having to live with the stigma becomes inevitable. This feeling is aggravated by the fact that the "stigmatized ethnic identity" is supposedly characterized by a "limited capacity".[33]

---

[30] According to R. Musabekov, "In the Soviet period, the thesis of 'peak and the convergence of nations under socialism' was supported by data on the alignment of their social structure, the statistics on mixed marriages and the prevalence of the Russian language. However, this facade concealed a completely different reality. The deliberate policy of Russification was enforced on the Azeri Turks. Many of the small nations became victims of the Communist bureaucracy's desire to 'streamline' and 'simplify the ethnic structures'. As a result of the manipulation of the census graphs, entire ethnic groups disappeared momentarily, and the number of ethnic groups has consistently decreased. In Azerbaijan, this happened to Ingiloys, Talysh, Kurds, Tsakhurs, and partly to the Mountain Jews" (Musabekov R., op. cit., p. 337).
I would consider this point of view to be rather biased. It should be noted that the majority of representatives of these peoples were registered as Azerbaijanis. Thus, the Azerbaijani nation, willing or not, was "open" to Talysh, Kurds and others. In this regard, I would consider the position of V. M. Alpatov to be more balanced, who notes that an assimilation policy was carried out even in the most nationalistic republics including Azerbaijan (V. M. Alpatov, 150 Languages and Politics of 1917-2000. Sociolinguistic Problems of the USSR and the Former Soviet Union, M., Kraft+IV RAN, 2000, pp. 123-126).
Being a national minority in the Soviet Union, the Azeri at the same time obtained the title of the "titular nation" in the Republic, which somehow grants a higher status than that of the representatives of other "indigenous" ethnic groups. At present, the charges of assimilation and artificially decreased numbers of ethnic groups among Lezghins or Talyshs are addressed directly to Azerbaijani authorities.

[31] Studies show that children of mixed-ethnic marriages, given the choice of declaring their nationality, most often assign themselves to the dominant national group. This also occurs in Azerbaijan. Despite strong patriarchal tendencies, pragmatism usually prevails in the choice of nationality.

[32] The possibility of obtaining an executive document is determined largely by one's ability to bribe the relevant official.

[33] Eidheim H., op. cit., p. 51.

Ethnic boundaries in everyday life

This section will be built mainly on the analysis of four biographical interviews with Armenian women (I will also refer to other interviews where relevant). All names have been changed in order to preserve my informants' anonymity. The first and second informants, Janna (57 years old, secondary vocational education) and Violetta (55 years old, college graduate), respectively, are both married to Azerbaijanis and each has two children. This fact elevates their social status. They represent a rather large group of Armenians living in Baku. The third and fourth informants: Oksana (61 years old, college graduate) is formally married to a Russian man, but the marriage is one of convenience, and Marina (36 years old, college graduate) has been married to an ethnic Russian for one year. These two interviews are good examples of a rather insecure group of ethnic Armenian women in Baku.

It seems appropriate to talk about the two most common situations in all their real diversity, which, in my opinion, rather widely reflects the post-Soviet daily life of Baku Armenians. When considering the case of a rather large group – namely, the group consisting mainly of women married to Azerbaijanis, whose husband and children (who, of course, define themselves as Azerbaijanis) guarantee the security of these women, their lives are often restricted to the family and circle of friends. These are the ethnic Armenians living in post-Soviet Azerbaijan who are least affected by the conflict. As a rule, at the time of the pogroms they were less in danger, their apartments were not seized, and many of them were even able to keep their jobs and property.

The second group, rather small in number and most vulnerable (among those remaining in Baku) during the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, is the group of women who did not enjoy the immunity of having an Azeri spouse, and thus the important external marker of a "non-Armenian" last name. Many of these are women born into the ethnically mixed families, who went through events of the late last century defined as "Armenian" in their passports or bearing the "wrong" last name. Some of them have lost their apartments and jobs.

Before the "events": "The lost paradise"

The main feature of the memories reproduced during the interviews is a clear division of life into two parts. The first half is what happened before the "events". The symbolic date rigidly fixed on the timeline is the events of January 1990: Armenian pogroms and intervention of the Soviet troops. This date represents the place of historical memory and is described in one way or another by representatives of practically all ethnic groups. Everything that was in the Soviet past is compressed in very short, usually idyllic memories of life in "those days". The manifestation of nationalism or any cases of discrimination as a result of the policy of "nativization" ("korenizatsiia") are now seen as minor nuances in the relationships of representatives between different ethnic groups.

The policy of "nativization" did not influence the less educated people who never strived for career advancement. In contrast to these people, Oksana, a college graduate, notes that "in any case, what you should do... what you deserved you were never given. For example, to become an honored teacher there were restrictions... The national cadres were supposed to be present there... but of course the others deserved it more than the national cadres... taking into account their knowledge... their level of knowledge. Well... Naturally, if there was a commission or something, then they were brought to us... and if any promotion... was awarded, then it was given to them... and so it worked...as a workhorse… he who carries a load is always used to carry a load".

Oksana's father held a high position in the education system, and was promoted after moving to Armenia. This fact allows her to characterize the Soviet model of ethnic relations as conflict-free. Together with this, her very phrase expresses the condescending attitude common among Russian-speaking citizens of Baku towards those who were called the "national cadres", who were often migrants from rural areas of the country.

Janna, a woman with secondary vocational education, describes the Soviet times somewhat differently. "During Soviet times there were no problems at all; absolutely none. Even at school we were never interested in each other's nationality". Violetta recalls the days before the "events" similarly: "of course we lived well then. I worked in the Executive Committee, earned 125 rubles. It was completely enough for living. I was given an apartment. It was not, of course,

the way it is nowadays. Later I worked as the secretary in the legal advice of-fice. There were no problems regarding nationality".

However, the contradiction consisting in the projection of the informants' ex-perience in Soviet daily life to today's circumstances results in dual memories of life "before". On the one hand, according to Marina, ethnic discrimination occurred during Soviet times as well: "well, if we take an institute as an ex-ample – between the two people who were equally well prepared on the topic, one had to be chosen; she [the informant's elder sister – S. H.] clearly knew that Mamedov and not Abramov or anyone else had passed. I am not saying that there were some measures against this nation [Armenians – S. H.] but I'm talking about the national question, which meant that measures were taken to ensure that Azerbaijanis passed. But I know that it always has been this way. In sports I experienced this as well. National cadres were needed, yes… ...there were prejudices, of course, and I felt it. But, of course, it was not as acute as it became later".

On the other hand, for Marina, too, the Soviet period was the best time of her life, a peaceful time which will never return. Therefore, not all of the events of that time are remembered in an unpleasant light. And after telling the story about all the vicissitudes of life "afterwards", she stated: "now I think that one can criticize the Soviet times, but due to the fact that I have this problem [stigma – S. H.] now I consider my childhood as very happy and joyful. And I have a particular affinity for Gorbachev (laughs), though many say that he just opened the abyss... I do not know, maybe stagnation was the happiest time for me... because it never affected me. I never felt myself slighted".

The analysis of interviews and the everyday discourse suggests that the memories of times spent at school become an important proof of the absence of inter-ethnic tensions. The phrase, "when we went to school, none of us knew about each other's nationality," is a stable stereotype, which is constantly recre-ated by different people bound together only by a common experience of Soviet socialization.[34]

School days, times of childhood and adolescence, which for many have be-come "the best years of life", are associated with the ideal notions of the rep-

---

[34] See for example: Karpenko O., To be "National": The Fear of Losing and Being Lost. By the example, "Tatar", St. Petersburg. // Coll.: Construction of Ethnicity, V. Voronkov and I. Oswald (eds.), St. Petersburg, 1998, pp. 37-95, p. 44.

resentatives of various ethnic groups living together in Baku. But even in these mostly idyllic memories, the evidence of some relevance of ethnic markers floats up even in daily life back then. Janna now recalls: "Why should anyone talk about his or her nationality? In our class, for example, there was a Jewish girl; I was hesitant even to call her so. I used to say that she was "yevreyechka" [diminutive meaning "little Jewish girl"] to somehow soften it".

The existence of ethnic boundaries in the Soviet past can be traced most clearly in the discussion of marriages between Baku residents who assigned themselves to different ethnic groups. The strengthening of the endogamy in the post-Soviet period was apparently connected to the process of nation-building. But even in Soviet times, the state statistics indicated a very low number of interethnic marriages in Azerbaijan[35] compared to the other regions of the USSR. The fact that the rule of marrying "one of us" was practiced even in the Soviet period is confirmed during the interviews.

According to Janna's memories: "My father then told us that he would not interfere if we love each other – it meant that was our fate, but he also said he felt sorry for us. He said, "you are young, you do not know, but I've seen it all, when Armenians and Azerbaijanis were killing each other". He was born in 1908 and lived there [Janna's mother was a native of Karabakh, and the father was from Kapan (Armenia) – S. H.]. He said, "I feel sorry for you, you should not date, it is a big mistake"; but he never did anything against us. He had seen it all, but what did it mean for us? We were young. And back in 1973, who would have thought that this might happen. Well, my husband's parents were also against our marriage at the beginning. When his mother learned about it, she urged him – 'maybe you could find one of our girls – an Azerbaijani girl'. But my husband went against them, and that was it".

Whether or not the memories of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict at the beginning of the twentieth century[36] were passed on from generation to generation cannot be determined. Now, after 15 years of constructing the national states, accompanied by the creation of a historical tradition designed to locate the origins of "centuries-long" struggles, the memories of those for whom this tradition was intended are mostly reactions to such an ideology. At the same

---

[35] Susokolov A. A., Interethnic Marriages in the USSR, M., Thought, 1987, p. 142.

[36] See: Swietochowski T., 1984: Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920. The Shaping of National Identity in a Muslim Community, Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Pr.

time, older people (40-50 and older) who experienced real coexistence often deny that there was any form of tension.

Marina experienced a situation similar to Janna's. The parents of a young man she dated did not permit them to marry. "While in the tenth grade, it [the fact that she was not an Azerbaijani – S. H.] started to matter, but he never said that I was Armenian. It was just that his parents wanted an Azerbaijani girl."

In general, although the ethnic boundaries during the Soviet Union remained very strong in certain contexts and there was a differentiation of status, this situation did not imply rigid forms of discrimination or exclusion from ordinary life, and did not lead to the formation of a stigmatized identity for Armenians living in Baku.

"Afterwards": Living with the stigma

It should be noted that the Baku Armenians' life experiences after the "events" vary widely; for example, Oksana, representing the most vulnerable group of Armenians, had experiences very different from Janna's. But despite these differences their daily lives have much in common. This is because although the society puts different kinds of pressure on them, the principle of how this pressure is implemented is the same in both cases. Oksana lost an apartment, not during the "events" but in 1992.

"I went out for half an hour. Came back; already, all the doors and the safe and everything was... open. They were already there... sitting. There were about ten of them... I was taken in by my neighbors, my close neighbors. Well, there is no need to describe the state I was in. It is clear how I felt. Fear for everything... I was afraid of everything, afraid of any call and all that... " Later in the future precisely this fear from the stressful experience defined all of her behavior. This sense of insecurity felt after the major "events" sometimes also projected the period of pogroms, through which she lived without any complications. "You know... I was hiding, I walked... 10 to 15 bus stops… Because in the buses... they were watching. You know, right? They looked into my eyes like this [she opens her eyes widely]. It was terrible... it was a scary time… They wanted to identify… to know who you were... by nationality". It is now hard to determine whether this state of affairs could have persisted until as late as 1992, when the

main events of the Azerbaijan-Armenian conflict in the capital were already in the past.

Janna, however, claims that she did not feel any sense of fear, but her description of everyday life is one of permanent confinement in a restricted, familiar neighborhood environment. In her story we always hear the idea that "everyone knows me and no one troubles me". However, some discomfort appears in her case, too, when the "fear" is transformed into a feeling of "shame". "I'm not [afraid for myself]. Only for the children. Rather, I'm not afraid, but am ashamed. I am rather ashamed. Why ashamed? Well, because someone can say something. To say – she's Armenian, somewhere in the street. I'm just ashamed to imagine that it could happen. I think it's shameful to get into such situation".

The very appeal to the sense of shame becomes an unavoidable conflict with the way a citizen of Azerbaijan who has nothing to be ashamed of presents herself. Of course, she is trying to find ways of coexistence consistent with the external environment, but because of the absence of hostility from others, it becomes possible only due to the peculiarities of her character.

There remains the problem of recognition, as the ordinary person believes that ethnicity is easily determined by external features. Therefore there appears to be a need to transform one's image, to distance oneself from the stigma imposed by the external environment. For a long period of time, until the inter-ethnic tensions began to subside, Janna tried not to leave the borders of the territory she considered "hers": The region where she lived for 20 years, where everyone knew her and, naturally, her husband. But whenever Armenian women in a similar situation decided to leave their regions, they often changed their names in fear that they could reveal their ethnicity, making them sound familiar for the people of post-Soviet Baku. Naturally, here we are referring to changing one's first name and patronymic. "How would I know what they would think? No, at work I did not talk about it. But my husband said that I should change my name, make it sound familiar to them". In the case of Oksana, her patronymic, Goriginovna, now used at home and at work, sounds like Georgievna. Other strategies might be used as well. For example, hair color becomes an important marker for women. Thus, Oksana dyed her hair blond to emphasize her "Russianness".

All of these practices continue to have relevance and effectiveness and are still firmly rooted in everyday life; however it must be emphasized that almost

every informant I met noted a remarkable decrease in the level of tension in society. It should be pointed out that, on everyday level, especially in the neighborhood and circle of friends, even in the midst of the conflict, the tension between Armenians and Azerbaijanis was not high. Interestingly, this occurred at the same time when anti-Armenian propaganda was coursing through the media. And yet, conducting the interviews I assumed that the constant and often emotional discussions on the relationship with the Armenian side, observed on television screens and on the pages of the newspapers, must certainly have had an impact on those living permanently in the republic.[37] Over the years the informants have had to learn some behavioral strategies so that they were able to live under the constant pressure of propaganda.

The easiest way is not to watch national television, not to read newspapers, and not pay attention to conversations in public places. Oksana, for example, tries to do this. But, of course, other strategies can be just as successful. Janna tries to distance herself from the community designated as the "enemy". "I'm telling you, I understand this in a way that it is not about me. I understand that when they talk about it they do not have me in mind, but only those Armenians who started it all: the government, politicians from Armenia. This is my attitude towards it. I think that it's not me they have in mind".

In practice, Janna does not seek protection from her husband. Only once she did mention him, when referring to the events of January 1990. This is the only time when her husband, as an Azeri who has a certain social capital (e.g. relatives who can take him in until the hard times pass) acted as the guarantor of her security. In this case, too, we notice a very important factor in the relationship. In the course of the interview Janna, constantly emphasized that "all the neighbors here have known me for more than 20 years. They have never seen anything bad from my side… All the neighbors respect me. When I come to my daughter everyone says hello, asks me how things are going". This is the social capital Janna has earned herself; these are the systems of neighborhood and personal relationships built on the emotional platform of friendship and affection which she joined during her years of living in Baku. Precisely this system of similar relations served as a salutary thread for many Armenians, who had to hide in the apartments of neighbors during the pogroms.

---

[37] Practically all news coverage in Azerbaijan includes some mention of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict.

It should be emphasized that there were in fact only two possible options for those who remained. The first option was to leave one's home and move to another place as distant as possible from one's former residence, to a place where no one would know the newcomer. This was a chance that many took. Janna, who was forced to move by her financial situation, also prefers that no one know about her nationality in her new residence.

Here we refer only to the mixed families. To sell or legally register a new apartment, having a Soviet passport (up to 2005 the Soviet passports were still used) with its infamous fifth line stating nationality, is almost impossible for Armenian women. The second option is to live in hope of the tolerance of neighbors, which is usually justified. So Diana (75-year-old widow, secondary education) explains her reluctance to leave the familiar place: "I live here. For many years I've been living here. For half a century already I have lived here. How can I go? Where can I go?" However, this phrase of hers refers not only to the city of residence that is familiar to her, but also to her reluctance to leave Azerbaijan itself.

The need to hide "the ethnicity" from everyone – this is the environment, the framework within which they are forced to live. Unlike Janna, Oksana does not try to rationalize the problem of ethnicity, categorizing Armenians as "these Armenians" and "those Armenians"; she simply does not identify herself as an Armenian and prefers her mother's ethnicity – Russian; that's why the loss of her apartment and property is the highest form of injustice for her. It is worth noting that in both cases mentioned the daily behavioral patterns do not differ much; the difference is only between the explanatory models. All informants state that they have to hide "their ethnicity"; or suggest that some specific difficulties might occur if the people around them learn their "secret".

In the framework of the research, first of all I am interested in the question of how the Armenian identity becomes a stigma in post-Soviet Baku. In the case of Janna, the strict rule that is inherited from the Soviet era works: if both parents are "X" then their children will inevitably be "X". In the case of Marina, the situation is somewhat different. The same Soviet system had allowed a person to make a choice between the two parents. During Soviet times Marina preferred the formal identity of her mother, which was recorded as "Russian". However, the choice made in the past could not protect her from stigmatization in post-Soviet Azerbaijan. The factor of documents has played a special role in Marina's life; she managed rather pain-

lessly to replace her old passport with the new one indicating her Russian mother's maiden name. However, at the beginning of the "events" she was a student and had to change, for example, a grade book: "I had a student's record book, which nobody was going to hide because nobody cared. They simply took it and crossed out my name in it. I started to erase it all, cover it up, etc. Then they said to me... come to another exam. There were not just many, but a great many lecturers who tried to single me out. One lecturer opened the record book, exclaiming 'Aha! Why is the name crossed out so many times?' He looked at me to find out what I looked like. 'And what surname have you crossed out and to which surname have you changed it? Are you married? No, you're not married.' And so it all begins. It is awful, it's better just to get away from there".

Often the main problem turns out to be the external marker – the name, which Oksana long hesitated to change. "Many people said, well, change it, change it. You know... I... and I was not changing it, I put it off for a long time. You know why I was putting it off? Because somehow I was insulted, not because my name was precious to me. No. I was insulted because... why did I have to adapt... Only in 1991 did I change it... I married a Russian and... changed my name". However, the change of external ethnic markers is not necessarily a guarantee for avoiding stigma. The stigma is constructed from the expectations of others.

In the end, the main problem in the early 1990s was the difficulty of keeping apartments from the encroachments of invaders. Very often the children of mixed marriages (one parent Armenian, another Russian) were staying in these apartments. To appeal to "Russianness" as one of the ways to retain one's housing did not always work. Ownership of real estate, which can be challenged in principle, made these people dependent on the good or bad will of their environments. In Oksana's case, as was apparently often the case, the representatives of the authorities interfered: "So, in this way she takes advantage of everyone and does whatever she wants to... and others do what she wants them to do. She has, she practically (!) sent these invaders to my apartment and kept the apartment for herself! But it turned out differently... some misunderstandings... and they kept this apartment for themselves". In this case the expression "invaders" means ethnic Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia.

Informant Katya (46-year-old female, father Russian, mother Armenian) had her apartment taken away twice. The first time it happened was in the last year

of the Soviet Union (1991), when she managed to get the apartment back. "And I thought that no one would ever again take it away. But as soon as I left, my neighbor herself brought them here. She wanted my apartment, but I refused to give it to her. She offered to let me live in her apartment and wanted to take mine. Well, right, I said, you have the catacombs and I have an apartment. Do you think I'm going to live in yours? And then it happened... she got angry and decided to take revenge on me. And then she brought them, the same people who seized my apartment the first time. Well, I still cannot do anything, it makes no sense".

The peak of the confrontation in Baku coincided with the pogroms that took place in January 1990. The Armenians still remaining in the capital then left the city in droves. Marina's mother told her stories about the pogroms: "You cannot imagine what a horror it was. It was like in Soviet times... it was like they were getting rid of some kind of imported thing (laughs), and all the people were buying it... She told me she was going with N. and saw them carrying our things (pause). She said she had no doubts, not any thoughts. She said 'I had only one thought – that I would now walk by our block and see... I already had no doubt that they had bombed us, defeated us'... And she went on, saying – 'then I saw how they carried out our rug, then our transistor, then something else (the informant laughs). I didn't even notice that they were taking other things as well. I was just looking for our things and trying to convince myself that I shouldn't go into our building, but just pass by in order to make sure that it is happening in our building. It was in our building, but it was on the fifth floor". This memorable story told to the informant by her mother symbolizes the destruction of the previous world, the world in which ethnicity did not play a big role and all the people were united in one way or another by one identity – the Soviet identity. The things to which the individual was connected on a daily basis, the inevitable and familiar companions of everyday life, were transformed into the symbols of misfortune and trouble and thus suddenly into alien things; into the common troubles of the Soviet people – Baku people, and later on into people being Armenian or not Armenian.

However, many informants remembered the traumatic moment of pogroms only as a period of struggle to preserve their own apartments. The apartment of Violetta's mother "was seized by Dahlins" [a Tat language-speaking group in

Baku – S. H.]. There were about ten men. My mother was with me in the village then. I wanted to keep her there with me so that she couldn't leave… Her apartment was emptied by the governor. I arrived together with the soldiers. They were all armed with machine guns, with all their things. In the hall I met the boy next door. I asked him how things were [at this point the informant switches from Russian to Azerbaijani – S. H.]. He said thank you, well, and told me that my apartment was now occupied. He said it with so much cautiousness. I said it is ok, we will clear things up now. When we approached the entrance door, I asked the soldiers to let me enter first. I told them there might be children and they might be scared by seeing the soldiers entering. The soldiers were normal guys, they were Russian; the sergeant, their chief was, I think, Ukrainian. They got my point and understood me. I came to the door and listened; I heard a sound like a child running around. I went in. There were ten people sitting there. The old woman immediately began yelling at me – why was I not still gone. I asked her to calm down, let's be good. But she did not calm down until the soldiers entered the house. The soldiers moved them out. Then we sold my mother's apartment and she left. The apartment was bought by a mullah. When he was buying it he kept asking if it was halal ["pure" – S. H.], and if there had been any bloodshed there".

Although the pogroms are a symbolic point of reference, it seems that the inevitable damage engraved into the memories of those who were at risk in those days is more significant, as are the everyday difficulties that followed the loss of their apartments.

Trying to lift the stigma. Constructing a civil identity

In the situation described, the main approach to constructing the identity is to distance oneself from the stigma, i.e. from one's Armenian ethnicity, and to appeal to the civic basis of the nation. The informants demonstrate a negative attitude towards the Karabakh Armenians or towards the "Armenian politicians", who are perceived as the cause of the conflict. Karabakh itself is rather abstract, a "land on the edge of the world" which was not worth fighting for. The struggle for the "historic lands" and "fair" redistribution of boundaries – these all are equally abstractions.

63

The only things that are real are those problems they face in their everyday lives. "So what if I was born in an Armenian family? Have I become better or worse because of this? Everyone is born into one family or another. All of this was started by those Armenians … and the ordinary people always suffer. I always used to say that if my death can solve anything, here I am, kill me. If you kill me, will the Karabakh conflict be resolved?!" (Janna).

The underlined desire to distance oneself from the conflict is fraught with the desire to get rid of ascriptive ethnicity. The informants think openly in terms of their citizenship; they are good citizens, all their lives they have worked honestly and deserve respect. This is even truer considering that they were not and are still not implicated in the separatism of Karabakh Armenians. "I am a citizen of Azerbaijan, my whole life I have lived here, worked here, raised my children here. Was I worse than others? We did not even speak Armenian in the family. If we heard father and mother talking Armenian to each other, we knew right away that they were talking about something secret. If I am a citizen of this country, at least, I have citizenship by my passport, why should I be treated differently? Does it matter who I am by ethnicity, I'm a citizen of Azerbaijan. I feel this myself" (Janna). This is an attempt to appeal to the civil community, which is notable in many of the informants' statements.

Although there is "the Armenian blood" in "them", which determines almost everything whether they like it or not, "they" are still not "those Armenians", "they are others", "they are our Armenians". The symbol of unconditional inclusion in Baku and in a broader sense in Azerbaijani society should become a column in a passport, which clearly denotes citizenship. The very feeling of civic belonging to the Azerbaijani community, defined as the basis of identity, itself takes on a list of issues through which the difference from the "real" citizen is presented, i.e. the stigma. "Yes, I believe that I am a citizen of Azerbaijan. It would be different if I had nothing here. But I am a citizen of Azerbaijan, I was born here, I worked in this state, studied and lived all my life... and worked for this state" (Oksana). The question of "having or not having" real civil rights is determined, on the one hand, through the memory of the past ("the perfect Soviet past"), and on the other hand, today it is mediated by the period of conflict, and by daily life. In this case, a symbolic presentation of oneself as a citizen of the country can tell us very little about real conditions in which the informants live.

However, there is an unavoidable fatality, and by colliding with it, the informant identified as an Armenian by the community fully understands the depth of alienation from the state in which she lives. This happens when there is a need to obtain certain official documents. It should be emphasized that by law citizens are not differentiated on ethnic grounds. In the case of permanent residence and registration in the territory of the Republic, every citizen has the right to receive a new passport (internal ID), for example. However, in the bureaucratic tyranny that reigns in the country, an ethnic Armenian is often in a worse position than a non-Armenian. In the most difficult situation are those who have lost their homes and accordingly have not been able to register. According to my information (unconfirmed), the number of people permanently residing in the country who lack permanent housing and residence amounts to 40,000 people. Armenians, of course, constitute only a small part of them. In fact, they all live under the same conditions. However, the situation of the Armenians is somewhat more complicated, since any official can deny them assistance thanks to the prevalent stigma. In this case the intervention of human rights groups is crucial.

During the recent period progress has been made towards solving this problem, as for example, for Oksana. "Yes, with the help of human rights groups we have done it, thanks to them. But the fact is that they have one negative impact on me as well. And not only on me, but on all the others. They have denied us the right to have an apartment… We have a residency permit. (Pause) And now we have to provide documentation... I am applying to the court, and they tell me to bring proof from the passport office... to reject the registration. And who will give me this? Nobody will. The court must request this paper from the passport office, but the court does not do so. And the courts… they can all be bought". "All the others" designates not only Armenians, but all residents who were left without shelter and residence, regardless of ethnic identity.

In addition to this, simply obtaining a passport does not solve all problems. In the case of an ethnically-marked name and patronymic (even if the name does not pose any image of the "enemy"), any action that entails the need to present the documents often causes a painful reaction, especially among the informants themselves. Even the usual practice of confirming one's identity, namely the act of showing a passport, is transformed into a demonstration of stigma. "When we... were buying an apartment, there was a case when I had to tell a broker that I was Armenian. When buying it I had to show my passport. I already had a new

one, but the name and patronymic were the same... He looked at the passport and said: Listen, why do you have a patronymic like this? I paused. He kept looking and could not understand anything. Then my husband answered: "Because she is Armenian". And he said nothing. Then, once we had built our house, it turned out that we were his neighbors. But he never said anything to me. Every time we meet in the street he always asks how things are, how my husband is. No, I cannot lie, I really have no problems" (Janna). Such a situation, even when resolved peacefully and without any conflict, still demonstrates the "otherness" of the informant in the social field, which she diligently presents as familiar and quite comfortable for her. Her statement reflects her reluctance to be perceived as an Armenian. This ethnic marker, even in the presence of Azerbaijani husband, noticeably lowers her social status. But even under the assumption that environment does not have any "knowledge" about the informant's ethnicity, the level of freedom of her social actions may still be limited. "I am already 57 years old, I'll soon need a pension; and will they give it to me? … and do you think it's fair? All my life I have worked for this country, I always was here, never left for anywhere else. And now I cannot even register for my pension... Now I cannot travel anywhere with this passport. It's the only thing I regret compared to the past times. Maybe nothing would happen, but now we just do not risk going anywhere. Who knows what could happen? My sister calls me and asks me to visit her, but I'm not going. I would go myself, but my husband cannot decide to. I would risk it. And what could happen with me? I have the passport of a citizen of Azerbaijan" (Janna).

Conclusion

Thus, for those people who are outside the informal networks of friendship and relatives, the necessity to display "their ethnicity" leads to the inevitable and undesirable reproduction of stigma. If the recognition of ethnicity in the everyday discourse has a set of stereotypes about a particular nation, then any document, even in the absence of a "fifth column", becomes inviolable evidence against the informant. The fatal inevitability of the "recognition of ethnicity" is thus a sword of Damocles, imposed by the external environment of stigmatized identity, a threat which accompanies the informant as a hated shadow to a greater or lesser degree in different situations.

An Armenian himself or herself may not even have any bad personal experience of ethnic conflict; and this is true for the great majority of those who stayed in Baku. However, the unresolved Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict can be a cause for the discomfort they experience. The situation of conflict becomes a breeding ground that produces stereotyped images of an "ethnic/historical enemy". In this situation, attempts to go beyond the boundaries of stigma always require some effort. But even in the case of successful "ethnic re-socialization", a state of internal uncertainty may persist in the everyday lives of Armenians in Baku.

References:

1. Abels H., Romantics. Phenomenological Sociology and Qualitative Social Research, http://www.soc.pu.ru/publications/jssa/1998/1a10.html.

2. Alpatov V. M., 150 Languages and Politics of 1917-2000. Sociolinguistic Problems of the USSR and the Former Soviet Union, M., Published: Kraft + Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 2000.

3. Anderson B., Imagined Communities, M., Canon-Press-C, 2001.

4. Assmann J., Cultural Memory: A Letter, the Memory of the Past and Political Identity in the High Cultures of Antiquity, M., Languages of Slavic Culture, 2004.

5. Badalov R., Baku: The City and the Country // Coll.: Azerbaijan and Russia: Society and State, ed. D. E. Furman, M., 2001, pp. 256-279.

6. Barth F., Introduction // Coll.: Ethnic Groups and Social Boundaries, ed. Frederick Barth, M., New Publisher, 2006, pp. 9-48.

7. Brednikova O., Chikadze E., Armenians of St. Petersburg: The Quarries of Ethnicity / Coll.: Constructing the Ethnicity, ed. V. Voronkov and I. Oswald, St. Petersburg, Dmitry Bulanin, 1998, pp. 227-259.

8. Breckner R., Changing Meaning of the Migration in the Life of Eastern European Migrants Who Came to the "West" Before 1989 // Coll.: Biographical Methods in Research of Post-Socialist Societies. Proceedings of International Seminar, ed. V. Voronkov and E. Zdravomyslova, St. Petersburg, 1997, pp. 63-70.

9. Brubaker R., Myths and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationalism, Ab Imperio, 2/2000, Kazan.

10. Wallerstein I., The Design of the People // Coll. Articles: Etienne Balibar, Immanuel Wallerstein. The Race, Nation, Class. Ambiguous Identities, M., Logos-Altera, Ecce Homo, 2003, pp. 85-102.

11. Vishnevsky A.G., The Sickle and the Ruble. Conservative Modernization in the USSR, M., O. G., 1998.

12. Voronkov V., Selected Part of the Discussion // Racism in the Social Sciences, ed. V. Voronkov, O. Karpenko and A. Osipov, St. Petersburg, Aletheia, 2002.

13. Gellner E., Nations and Nationalism, M., Progress, 1991.

14. Ionin L.G., Sociology of Culture, M., Logos, 1996.

15. Karpenko O., Being a "National": The Fear of Losing and Fear of Being Lost. On the example, "Tatar" of St. Petersburg. // Coll.: Constructing the Ethnicity, ed. V. Voronkov and I. Oswald, St. Petersburg, 1998.

16. Kozlova N., Soviet People. Scenes from the Stories, M., Europe, 2005.

17. Malakhov V., Ethnicity in the Big City // Coll. Articles: "Понаехали тут", M., published: NLO, 2007.

18. Mukomel V., Demographic Consequences of Ethnic and Regional Conflicts in the CIS, Population and Society, 1997, № 27. Internet address: http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/archives.php.

19. Musabekov R., Formation of the Azerbaijani State and Ethnic Minorities // Azerbaijan and Russia: Societies and States, ed. D. Furman, M., 2001, pp. 337-362.

20. Susokolov A. A., International Marriages in the USSR, M., Thought, 1987.

21. Eidheim H., When Ethnic Identity is a Social Stigma // Coll.: Ethnic Groups and Social Boundaries, ed. Frederick Barth, M., New Publisher, 2006, pp. 49-71.

22. Junusov A. S., Migration and the New Baku Socium // Coll.: Migrants in the Capital Cities, ed. Zh. Zajonchkovski, M., Adamant, 2000, pp. 64-75.

23. Brubaker R., 1994: Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutionalist Account. Theory and Society, Vol. 23, # 1, (Feb. 1994), pp. 47-78.

24. Sidikov B., 2007: Barth, "Yeraz" and Post-Soviet Azerbaijan: Inventing a New Sub-Ethnic Identity. In: Representations on the Margins of Europe (eds.), Tsypylma Darieva and Wolfgang Kaschuba, Frankfurt/New-York, Campus Verlag, pp. 301-321.

25. Swietochowski T., 1984: Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920. The Shaping of National Identity in a Muslim Community. Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press.

MEMORIALIZING THE EARTHQUAKE

Gayane Shagoyan

"When I was four, once I said that although I have not seen the earthquake I did remember it".

The author of these words was born seven months after the earthquake.[1]

The present article deals with the problem of moralization of the devastating earthquake of December 7, 1988 in Armenia that took the lives of 25,000 people and completely or partially destroyed the cities Spitak, Leninakan (now Gyumri) and Kirovakan (now Vanadzor). I will focus on the processes of remembering and forgetting the earthquake on the example of one of the cities most damaged during the disaster – Gyumri (the second largest city in Armenia).

These processes will be analyzed in the context of correlation of two types of memories following the terminology of J. Assman: Communicative and cultural memories,[2] in other words living, everyday memory (story-telling, rituals of commemoration, and subject memory[3]) and official, monumental memory which has canonized the cultural text on the event. Of these two types of memories the communicative memory is evidently more emotional and aims to communicate the experience of the trauma to future generations.

According to one school girl from Gyumri, time does not heal but rather sharpens the perception of pain: *"The pain gets worse when the wound cools off"*.[4] But this does not disclaim a certain flexibility of communicative memory.

---

[1] From the essay of the school student of tenth grade of Akhuryan school No 1. In order to investigate the perceptions of the city by generations who have not seen the Spitak earthquake in the upper grades of three schools – 4th, 10th (in Gyumri) and the 2nd (in Akhuryan), essays were written on the topic "What I know about the earthquake in 1988". The same students were assigned to write an essay on a related topic: "What happened on Dec. 7, 1988" with the help of their parents. The aim was to identify differences between the memory of the earthquake from eyewitnesses and a generation born after the tragedy. I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude to the administration and teaching staff of these schools for their assistance.

[2] Assman J., Cultural Memory: Writing, Remembrance of the Past and Political Identity in the High Cultures of Antiquity, Moscow: Yazyki slavianskoi kul'tury, 2004, pp. 50-62 (in Russian).

[3] On the subject memory, see ibid. p. 20.

[4] Field ethnographic materials (hereinafter – FEM), Gyumri, 2006.

This kind of memory is easier to influence or change; it can be called "soft" memory.[5]

The cultural memory, by contrast, tries to "cool off" the event and attain the status of "historical fact" (that is, the maximum distance from the real) which does not easily admit variations and can therefore be called "hard".[6] The process of canonization is often accompanied by a hardening of memory, literally – the installation of monuments and the establishment of official texts (e.g., textbooks). Thus, our task is to trace how the hardening process of earthquake memory develops and which elements of "soft memory" transform into "hard memory".

The memory of trauma somewhat differs from the more general problems of the anthropology of memory: here, obviously, we deal with not so much remembering but with finding ways to forget. Memory and trauma are special themes that in the scientific literature are mostly considered on the examples of genocides, wars, deportations and repression. According to Harald Welzer the notion of trauma has transformed in the same that the concepts of "identity" and "collective memory" did, in particular: *"no one knew exactly what they meant but they were used everywhere, so that one could use these concepts for anything".*[7] So ultimately we can speak only about the politics of the memory of the trauma. However, in the case of the memory of the earthquake we have a somewhat different phenomenon – different from the memory of historical events. The latter differs from the memory of a natural disaster in that it "strongly depends on how this memory is used in the present. Whether an event will be generally interpreted as traumatic often depends not so much on the event itself, but on what value it will be given later, in hindsight".[8] In the case of earthquake the memory has an importance that goes beyond the general political, namely social, consolidating and cultural importance ("a friend in need is friend indeed", etc.). Therefore, based on this example it will be particularly interesting to consider the correlations between various components of the collective memory.

As the field materials for research, in addition to the school works I have used interviews with residents of the old city as well as of new districts, expert inter-

---

[5] Etkind A., Hundred Years of Revolution: Anniversary of Beginning and the Beginning of the End // <www.strana–oz.ru/print.php> (30.10.06, in Russian).

[6] Ibid.

[7] Welzer H., History, Memory and Modernity of the Past. Memory as an Arena of Political Struggle // Neprikosnovennyi zapas (Reserved Rations), 2005, N2-3 (pp. 40-41), <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2005/2/vel3.html> (09.06.2006, in Russian).

[8] Ibid.

views with architects, builders, sculptors and artists. Most of the informants are residents of Gyumri, but some of them are former residents who have moved to Yerevan or abroad. Of special importance are the materials (interviews, publications, exhibits) related to the Gyumri Biennale – International Festival of Conceptual Art held since 1998.

The family and official discourse of the earthquake in the article is presented in six paragraphs: in the first paragraph we will mainly discuss the official discourse and those related "traumatic" themes that frequently appear in the discussion of this tragedy (for example, the memory of the Armenian "genocide"); the second paragraph discusses the "characteristics" of events selected for "the main memory bank" that variously "strengthen" or "cool off" both individual and collective memories. The third section presents a wide spectrum of perceptions of the earthquake time period and various modern forms of ritualizing it. The fourth section refers to the different sound associations which evoke memories of the earthquake. The fifth section discusses attempts to overcome the memory of the earthquake and the loss of loved ones. Finally, the sixth section describes in detail how the places of memories are marked in the damaged city – from the ruins to man-maid memorials.

Memorialization of the earthquake: Official discourse

Let us first consider discourse such as "is it worth remembering" the earthquake at all: how are the "social" and "individual" facts articulated? In order to answer this question, let us consider the context in which the collective/individual memory is trying to comprehend the disaster. In many official texts, the very first association that is brought by the earthquake of 1988 is the Armenian "genocide" of 1915. One of the authors of the large-scale memorial to the victims of the earthquake in Gyumri is the architect Sashur Kalashyan who has designed (together with Arthur Tarhanyan) the renowned Memorial Complex in Yerevan in memory of victims of the genocide. S. Kalashyan at the time of the earthquake was working as the chief architect of Leninakan and at the very moment of the disaster he was in his office in the city council building.[9]

---

[9] FEM. Yerevan, 2006.

The new memorial complex was planned to consist of two split geological plates that formed a crevice where the museum of the earthquake was supposed to be constructed;[10] the complex is similar to the design of the memorial in Yerevan in the sense that it consists of the "path for the pilgrims" and the complex itself (which from above is seen as a cross).

The author claims that he is not a supporter of the formation of a new memorial ritual similar to the popular pilgrimage of April 24 – the Day of Remembrance for the victims of genocide – when thousands of people place flowers at the eternal flame in the memorial complex. In order to avoid the establishment of a new ceremony, the authors have not included an eternal flame and have not provided places for the flowers in the complex: *"We did not want to establish a similar ritual. We decided that it [the earthquake – G. S.] was more of a personal thing, and that we ought not present it as the all people's tragedy and rather present it as an "episode".*[11]

At the same time, the authors have made a special place for candles, thus substituting one ritual (laying flowers) with another (lighting candles). So far only the foundation has been dug while there is no funding for construction of the monument itself, which was supposed to be built with public donations. The memorial in Yerevan was built on a similar scheme, when students and volunteers from across Armenia took active part in the construction efforts.[12] This was perceived as communion, "people's duty before the victims", "an act of national solidarity".

So, remembrance of the earthquake begins to focus on an already existing model of "remembering" (commemoration)[13] of the genocide.[14] However, comparing it to the genocide raises doubts about the need to remember the disaster. The memory of the genocide is often seen in the context of restoration of historical justice,[15] whereas in case of the earthquake the issue of the morality of the

---

[10] According to the architect, the concept of this museum should be: "The lessons of the earthquake". A similar museum is already functioning in Spitak, the epicenter of the earthquake.

[11] From an interview with S. Kalashyan. FEM. Yerevan, 2006.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Memorializing is just a part of a more general phenomenon of commemoration. The latter includes not only the results (e.g., the monument, text), but the very act of "remembering" and especially rituals aimed at reviving the memory of the "historical facts". See: Nora P., Era of Commemorations // France-Memory, St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg State University Press, 1999, pp. 95-148 (in Russian).

[14] See in details the chapter Earthquake: The end or the beginning? in the report of the study conducted in the framework of the Scholarship Programme of the Heinrich Boell Foundation South Caucasus Regional Office in 2006: Leninakan Has Gone Away, Gyumri Has Remained: Images of the City Before and After the Earthquake.

[15] Marutyan A., The Role of Memory in the Structure of National Identity. Problems of the Theory, Yerevan: Noravank, 2006, pp. 84-85 (in Armenian).

"event" is usually not raised.[16] That is why the memory, both individual and collective, is "rationalized" and the memory of the earthquake provides essentially "lessons" about the tragedy. In the case of individual memory, the rationalization leads not to a didactic clarity but rather to oblivion. Zaven Koshtoyan, the sculptor of the monument in Gyumri, to which official establishment lay wreaths on the anniversaries of the earthquake, opposes the project of a large monument dedicated to the earthquake because this tragedy is not comparable to the genocide: *"It was a natural disaster"*.[17] One school student tries to perceive this issue rationally, noting that *"even though the earthquake has brought tragedy, we must not forget that this was a natural phenomenon that occurs in many places, and no one ultimately is immune from it",*[18] *that is why we must perceive this fact more "normally".*

Forms of "cooling" and "heating" the memory
of the earthquake

Discussions about the possibility of artificial reasons for the earthquake were common in the first years after the tragedy,[19] and even now in almost every other interview doubts are expressed about the natural causes of the Spitak earthquake. Quite often the following "compromise" version can be heard: the earthquake itself was weak and it was the exploded (in one version by accident, on the other – on purpose) military arsenal near Spitak that resonated the tremors.[20] But it is interesting that these "suspicions" are not of a great emotional intensity. Perhaps the reason for this is not only the balanced relations with Russia (perceived as the successor of the USSR), but also the fact that this version (as far as we know) was never heard in official statements. However, the

---

[16] In medieval Armenia similar disasters were considered primarily as punishment for one's sins. A. Sahakyan presented a paper on this topic (Perception of the earthquake in Medieval Armenia) at a conference on the fifth anniversary of the 1988 earthquake (Yerevan, 1993). On the perception of the 1988 earthquake in the context of guilt and punishment, see: Abrahamian L., Armenian Identity in a Changing World, Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2006, p. 159.

[17] From an interview with Z. Koshtoyan. FEM. Gyumri, 2006.

[18] FEM. Gyumri, 2006.

[19] See: Safarian L. V., Piruzyan S. A., The Causal-Investigative Chain of Resonance of Spitak Earthquake in Armenia // Bulletin of Social Sciences (NAS), 2002, № 1 (105), pp. 72-74 (in Armenian).

[20] Ibid; FEM. Gyumri, 2006.

official discourse contains the other concerns such as statistics about the victims of the earthquake. Although there are no direct accusations that the Soviet authorities concealed the true scale of the disaster and the media coverage of the events was in fact, unprecedented in the history of Soviet public, any indication of the number of victims is still accompanied by the obligatory reference to "official data". These "data" in different sources vary between twenty-five and twenty-six thousand victims. Although the statistics on other consequences of the quake also have their inaccuracies (for example, different sources estimate the number of people left homeless between 514,000 and 530,000), but these data are never doubted or conditioned.

In general, actualization of the "statistical descriptions" of the earthquake can be considered as one of the attempts to "cool off" the memory, as the emotional details are replaced by "naked" figures unable to "heat" the memory. But not all the figures are so "impartial". Some statistics, for example regarding persons with disabilities, were often discussed during the first years after the earthquake[21] but today are totally excluded from the discourse. Indeed, the "naturalization" of such figures transfers them from the field of "historical" facts (meaning they have no continuation in the present) into the sphere of unresolved social problems that "heat" the facts. Thus, as we see, even "naked numbers" and "cold statistics" may be considered according to the scale of "heating" or "cooling".

Another form of "cooling", or the transformation of traumatic memory, is the accentuation of the positive events of those days. This theme in the cultural memory is the support from the international community to those affected by the earthquake. These developments are set out mainly in the form of the same "bare facts" that are adapted for a school history course: statistics of the support (how many countries and international organizations provided humanitarian assistance), the names of top officials who visited the disaster zone in the first days after the tragedy, etc.[22]

The "cooling off" of the individual memory develops more slowly and in each individual case contains peculiarities. People try to suppress those memories and sometimes even to influence the cultural memory. For example, accord-

---

[21] "Tens of thousands of people died under the ruins of houses. Tens of thousands more were injured. Four hundred and sixteen people lost limbs. Fifty four of them – children". Balayan Z., Afterword // Azatyan V., Leninakan, Yerevan: The Central Committee of Communist Party of Armenia Press, 1989, p. 168 (in Russian).

[22] See the 8th grade textbook on the History of Armenia / ed. by V. Barkhudaryan, Yerevan: Luys, 2000, pp. 112-115 (in Armenian).

ing to the director of programs at the Tsayg TV station in Gyumri, in 1998 the channel's board made a decision no longer to display the images of collapsing buildings and ruins because of the numerous requests from TV viewers.

Memory of the time of the earthquake

Any form of memory, either individual or collective, operates in the space-and-time continuum and in its own way selects the "crystallization points".[23]

The time is a crucial element in the memory of the earthquake not only because the disaster broke out at a certain moment, fixing this date in the mind, but also because it marked the beginning of a new phase of life, a different reality measured starting from that moment.

"11:41"

The precise time was December 7, 1988, 11:41 a.m. Each year, the moment when the earthquake began gains increasing significance. Among the symbols of this tragedy, the clock affixed to the wall of a textile mill at Lenin Central Square frozen at 11:41 is particularly special. The clock was installed in 1966 and played the city anthem "Gyumri-Leninakan", by V. Balian.[24] The city's main clock stopped immediately because of damage to its mechanism caused by the earthquake and thus became a symbol of the disaster.[25] For many who have lost relatives and homes, this moment of time meant a conditional stoppage of time of life as normal or of life in general.[26] Even today in the writings of schoolchildren born after the earthquake its description is often accompanied by the

---

[23] Assman J., Op. cit., p. 39.

[24] See: Gyumri, comp. G. Vardanyan. Yerevan: Tigran Mets, 2006, p. 251 (in Armenian), interviews with clockmaker Varpet Ladik (Nikolay Matsakyan). FEM. Gyumri, 2006.

[25] The clock in Leninakan stopped at 11:41. It stopped as a sign of a big disaster. Sarkisyan A., Khatuntsev V., From the Reports // Armenia, December'88 / Comp. L. F. Grigorova, A. A. Gasparyan, L. Kh. Manukyan, Yerevan: Hayastan, 1990, p. 73 (in Russian).

[26] "At the crossroads near the ruined house there is a large clock. It stopped at 11:41 local time. From that moment a new point of reckoning seconds, hours and days started. Before the tragedy and after." Karriyev B., Here It Came the Earthquake... www.chelpress.ru/LANG=ru/newspapers/akcion/archive/05-12-1997/3/F1.DOC.html (10.06.06, in Russian).

phrase "time has stopped for a moment".[27] There were practically no compositions where the date and time of disaster would not have been mentioned:

"Of the numbers I hate seven,

Of the months – December.

Of the days of the week I do not like Wednesday,

And the birth of mountains – in nature.

Of the weather types I hate the mist,[28]

Of times – that ominous time,

That is called the "dark hour"

Eleven forty one, believe me!"[29]

Interestingly, many of the works of the schoolchildren written in class indicate the time of the earthquake as 11:40, while in those written at home with the help of parents (witnesses of the earthquake), the time is stated more precisely as 11:41.

Memory of the duration of the earthquake

When specifying the duration of the earthquake the influence of a particular perception of numbers was noticed. The duration of the earthquake is considered to be 40 seconds, apparently influenced by the semantic weight of this number:[30] it simultaneously carries the meaning of "many", a round number, a complete cycle of time (the ritual quarantines: 40 days of remembrance after a funeral; the first 40 days of a baby's life and of a marriage). In official statements and queries, the duration of the earthquake was often rounded up to "1 minute".[31] This is of course a symbolic minute, which is dramatized in the

---

[27] FEM. Gyumri, 2006.

[28] In the morning of December 7, 1988, a heavy fog was in Leninakan. That is why many have come to perceive it as one of the signs of the earthquake. For details, see the complete research of the author: Leninakan Has Gone Away, Gyumri Has Remained: Images of the City Before and After the Earthquake.

[29] From the homework essay of the school student of ninth grade from the school No.10, Luiza Stepanyan. FEM. Gyumri, 2006 [my translation – G. S.].

[30] About the number "40" see: Abrahamian L., Ayrapetyan V., Arakelyan G., Gulyan A. A., Talk about Round and Absolute Numbers, Yerevan, 1981-1984, pp. 4-14 (manuscript in Russian).

[31] Consider, for example, the question of the correspondent of the newspaper "Literaturnaya Gazeta" during a press conference in Yerevan on December 19, 1988: "Within one minute almost 400 villages in Armenia were damaged, and 58 were destroyed completely. Will all of these villages be restored?" // Armenia, December 1988, p. 62 (in Russian). The fact that the earthquake lasted for 1 minute is often found in schoolbooks.

sense of unity of "transience" and the temporal frontier from this very moment to all eternity. In one student essay, the times 11:40 and 11:41 are contrasted as two times: a time of happiness and a time of trouble; the difference between these units is just one notch on the dial.

"1988, December 7, time 11:40, Leninakan – still a city full of life. 11:41 – the same city – now a pile of ruins. Just one minute later, one terrible minute later..."[32]

An altered refrain of this "1 minute" is the "half a minute" (30 seconds),[33] which, as a common approximate duration for earthquakes, may be more accurate in terms of describing the combined duration of the shocks themselves (there were small intervals between the shocks). There also exists a version that earthquake lasted only for 7 seconds;[34] this can be explained as the imposition of the symbolically significant number 7 on the perception that is associated with the date of the earthquake (Dec. 7).

All monuments in the city dedicated to the victims of the earthquake (including statues in private yards) indicate the time of the earthquake represented by the hands of a clock pointing to 11:41. It can be stated that the time of the earthquake (with variations in 1 minute: 11:40-11:41) has become a key component of the "hard memory".

Ritualizing the time of the earthquake

At the anniversary commemorations of the earthquake, the moment when the clock indicates that fateful time is highly ritualized for many people who lost their relatives and homes. At 11:40 – 11:41, many relatives of the victims try to be at the graves of their loved ones.[35] Children born after the earthquake also

---

[32] From the essay of the 8th grader of the School No.10 – Edward Khachatryan. FEM. Gyumri, 2006.

[33] For example: "In 1988 in Armenia the underground tremors of force of 7 on the Richter scale in 30 seconds virtually destroyed the city of Spitak, destroyed Leninakan (now Gyumri), Stepanavan, Kirovakan (now Vanadzor)" // www.mpa.ru/cis/new.php?id=30036 (14.07.06, Press Release of December 7, 2004, in Russian); "16 years ago, on Dec. 7, 1988, in Armenia, in the cities of Spitak and Leninakan a terrible earthquake happened; in just 30 seconds over 25,000 people were killed, about 100,000 were injured and maimed. Over half a million people were left homeless" // www.rossel.ru/archive/20041207/1/ (12.07.06, in Russian).

[34] "At about noon, five minutes before the end of lessons at schools, the strong shock followed that lasted for only 7 and a half seconds" // The 13th anniversary of the earthquake in Spitak and Yaroslavl Armenians / www.gtk.yaroslavl.ru/cgibin/m_news.cgi?year (14.06.06, in Russian).

[35] In the 7-8 years following the earthquake many people have celebrated the New Year's Eve at the cemetery – at the graves of their deceased relatives. This happened more often in case of lost children. The parents not only marked all the holidays there, but spent nights there as well; there was even a request to build a small house to live near the grave. Gulyan A., I Have Not Seen My Daughter // Stories on Poverty / ed. Kharatyan H., Yerevan: Lusakn, 2001, pp. 79-82 (in Armenian).

take part in this ritual, so for them the significance of this moment comes from their own ritual experiences.

The government is also involved in the ritualizing of "11:41". At this time, the president of the country, government officials and opposition politicians try to be in Gyumri to lay wreaths at the central earthquake memorial (depicting a mother with child stuck between two tiles) and be present during the memorial service. Simultaneously, there are some attempts made to avoid the dramatization of the "11:41". For this purpose, in 2006 on the 18th anniversary of the earthquake at 11:41 the opening of the Rescue Service Center for emergency situations took place. Perhaps partly to combat the notion of accuracy associated with 11:41 an attempt was made to determine the "right time" for the opening of the first international Biennale of avant–garde art in Gyumri in 1998. The organizers of the festival consulted with astrologists in Yerevan and accordingly the opening was planned at 19:20.[36] That is, any other exact time opposed to 11:41.

The paragraph on the earthquake in eighth grade textbooks on the history of Armenia[37] also begins with an indication of the exact start time of the earthquake. In such a way the "time of the earthquake" is reproduced in various discourses – from the family to the national discourses.

Memorializing the "sound" of the earthquake

In January 1992, the clock of the central square of the city was reconstructed according to the design of architect R. Yeghoyan. The dial was slightly modified, the mechanism was repaired by Ladik (Nikolai Mazakyan) and the clock started running again. This was perceived as a symbol that "life goes on".[38] Only the musical chimes were not repaired in the new clock due to the lack of needed resources. But I think that the lack of chimes ticking at the rhythm of life for a city that has survived such a tragedy is an important element. In many

---

[36] See the documentary Gyumri Biennale by Garnik Sargsyan, TV studio Chirac, 1990.

[37] The 8th grade textbook on the history of Armenia, p. 112.

[38] See the telecast of December 7, 2006 of the journalist S. Hunanyan for the news program Azdarar of the Gyumri-based TV station Tsayg.

rituals time is expressed with the help of sound.[39] In some cases a culture can develop and reinforce a certain musical code for such moments.[40] On the first anniversary of the earthquake on December 7, 1989, at 11:41 all motorists in the city honked their car horns. This sound was joined by ringing church bells which also denote the time of the beginning and end of services, including memorial services. Therefore it is not surprising that some images of stopped time were accompanied by the "petrified" sound of bells. "The main bells of Armenian history in the belfry of the temple in Echmiadzin swayed only slightly at the moment when the subsoil in the mountains near Leninakan started to shift. For a long time the bells will have to mourn the victims of one of the strongest earthquakes in the second half of the 20th century. For whom the bell tolls!"[41]

The life of Soviet Leninakan was once measured by a siren which rang out six times a day to proclaim the start of different work shifts. Therefore it was this siren that was used by A. Sargsyan in his installation "The scar from childhood" at the Gyumri Biennale in 1998. Also at the performance of "Restoration" by students of the S. Merkurov Art School in Gyumri led by G. Gasparyan a clock face and a musical pipe was drawn on a set of ornamented boxes and cubes. As the main elements associated with the earthquake during the same Biennale, the conceptual artist Arco (Arkady Bagdasaryan) provided the land movement, noises and the familiar clock dial.

Alongside the siren, which became the "pulse" of the city and the aforementioned song "Gyumri-Leninakan", the music by T. Mansuryan written for the film "A Piece of Heaven",[42] also can be called part of the musical code of the city. Filming took place in the old part of the city and in some scenes the various ethnographic realities of pre-Soviet Gyumri were reconstructed. Currently this melody is used as a background sound in "nostalgic" TV programs about Gyumri-Leninakan. In such a way this melody reproduces the "virtual sound memory" of the city.

---

[39] Consider: "The first day of each month was called calends (calendae, kalendae); it was declared by a younger pontiff according a certain magic formula, in which several times was repeated the word calo – "I am calling out" (from "calere" – to call out); and this gave the name to the first day." Zlatkovskaya T. D., The Historical Roots of the European Calendar // Calendar Customs and Ceremonies in Foreign Countries of Europe, Historical Roots and Development of the Traditions. Moscow: Nauka, 1983, p. 31 (in Russian).

[40] As stated in the book by L. Ernjakyan and H. Pikichian, in Armenian culture the "sahari" melody was performed to mark the start of something important: Ernjakyan L., Pikichian H., Hymn to the Sun: "Sahari" in Armenian Musical Culture, Yerevan: Gitutyun, 1998 (in Armenian).

[41] Armenia, December 1988, p. 71.

[42] The Russian title of the film is: A Slap, dir. H. Malyan, 1980.

Another tune became a musical code for the earthquake – a song by the famous French singer Charles Aznavour, dedicated to Armenia to commemorate the disaster. It occupied a more of specific niche, symbolizing the "voice" of the international community rushing to help the victims. It is also used as a background melody when images of the quake are shown on TV.

Unlike many similar quakes which the residents of Armenia have had to endure from time to time, the witnesses of the 1988 earthquake heard the noise before they felt it. The earth broke apart with a loud roar that made it difficult to immediately identify that it as an earthquake. This noise was further "evidence" in favor of the theory that the quake was triggered artificially by an explosion.[43] This sound of the earthquake became a part of the family stories and has consistently occupied a place in communicative memories:

> *"A terrible moment... A long whining noise... A noise followed the heavy shaking, and then everything rocked: walls, floor, and furniture. Everything hissed terribly, crackled and creaked. Everyone thought that the earth was slipping away from under our feet. Within a few seconds the second fatal blow happened. Again the terrible rumble, the crazy crash of huge buildings... the billowing clouds of dust, the ruins, ruins, and ruins".[44]*

This sound is recalled in the publications of Today's News also: "The clock showed 11:41 when the terrible roar of the ground hit Leninakan, and immediately the land shuddered. A new point for reckoning time has come – after the earthquake..."[45] Although the press fosters cultural memory, not all of its materials can become "favorites" of cultural memory. The reason is that the press often records and presents fixed individual memory which may qualify for longevity only in case of multiple repetitions and references to it. This cannot be said about the "geological roar" that was heard. Although the emotional and sensitive experience of this tragedy is an attractive topic for the media, it cannot be canonized. Therefore the memory of this sound/noise should be considered as a subject of communicative memory.

---

[43] From a personal diary, Gyumri, 1988.

[44] From the essay of the 8th grader of the school No.10 – Eduard Khachatryan. FEM. Gyumri, 2006.

[45] Arutyunyan Y., Account of Time in Gyumri // Voice of Armenia, 2006 (in Russian).

A more terrifying and more widely remembered "sound of the earthquake" is the groans and cries for help and the wails of mourners. Architect S. Kalashyan tries to reproduce this disturbing sound backdrop in his design for the memorial by constructing a metallic structure that resembles an organ and performs two simultaneous functions. The first function is more technical (a stand propping up a raised slab) and the second is symbolic – the screeching of the metal plates through the blowing wind is supposed to "sound not like music, but be the restless chord of the organ",[46] to act as an alarm recalling the tragedy.

As the sound memory of the earthquake is characterized as difficult to "soften" along with the chimes and bells, which are more universal for cities, the modern urban discourse also allocates a few specific "sounds": the siren indicating the working time, popular melodies which typically accompany television images of Gyumri, the "geological sound" of the earthquake, and finally, human voices and moans. The aim is to use all of these sounds, alongside bells, to fix in the "hard memory" (in the memorial complex) only the last sounds, which simultaneously sound as tocsin – remembrance of the tragedy.

Forms of overcoming the memory

Many interviews contain the stories how each family in its own way has "overcome" sorrow. One of the forms was the celebration of December 7 as a new birthday, because surviving this day is perceived as a miraculous second birth.[47] In cases where one's birthday actually fell on December 7, celebrations were usually postponed until the next day since the real (not the symbolic and imitative) celebration still required true joy.

For example, one six-year girl who was born on the day of the earthquake (in 1988) without irony asked her mother: "Will my birthday cake also be black?"[48]

---

[46] From an interview with S. Kalashyan. FEM. Gyumri, 2006.

[47] "My husband and daughter were in the elevator of a high building, and when the building collapsed, they did not understand that this was an earthquake, it seemed that the elevator cables had failed. My husband was able to open the control box and save our daughter. Every year on December 7 we celebrate the birthday of my husband and daughter. I consider this day to be the second birthday of my husband and my daughter. On the first anniversary of the earthquake, when we were in a suburban house near Moscow, we received a telegram from my parents: Happy Birthday" – FEM. Gyumri, 2006

[48] TV program: Project of the Rebirth, Studio Gala (07/12/2004).

On the day of the 1988 earthquake in Gyumri and in the surrounding villages, 26 babies were born. This number was also symbolized because of its similarity to the number of victims, which for this reason was "rounded up" to 26,000 people. As mentioned above, there are certain doubts about the "official information" regarding the number of victims, therefore shifting the "official numbers" by one unit did not bother anyone. Moreover, some "unofficial" sources indicate the familiar round numbers of 40,000 and even 60,000 victims. The tragic combination of 26 births and 26,000 deaths was the main topic of a discussion programme on Noyem (Gala) TV on the 17th anniversary of the earthquake, when the children were brought together. They were presented with the issued passports in a stately manner and their short bios were presented. During the show an attempt was made to present the children born after the earthquake as the symbols of life, the victory of life over death, the survival. The performance by M. Bagdasaryan showing the photos of children born after the earthquake was a similar attempt during the Biennale in Gyumri (1998). Children born after the ill-fated day to the families who had lost the children in the earthquake became the symbols of life. They were born with a special mission – to replace the loss of their departed siblings. Having inherited their names,[49] these children have to live not only their own lives, but in part the lives of those tragically killed. The fate, education and daily life of these children is different from the lives of ordinary children not burdened by legacy of being a "living memory". Even children born after the earthquake who did not receive the names of killed relatives still feel the dramatic weight of their birth. Many of them are the later children of parents who lost elder children in the earthquake. A couple of years after the earthquake, in 1990-1991, there was a population explosion – even women over forty were giving birth. Among the school students who wrote essays about the earthquake, many were aware of their "unordinary" origin:

> *"I was not yet born when the earthquake happened in 1988, and would have not been born at all if my brother and sister had not been killed in the disaster... My parents are older than the parents of my peers. I used to feel uncomfortable because of this, but now that I am grown up... My father's hair is completely gray.*

---

[49] About the first names given after the 1988 earthquake, see: Margaryan N. M., Choosing the First Names Among the Eastern Armenians (XIX–XX centuries), (An ethnological study), PhD thesis, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, Yerevan, 2000, chapter 2.2.

I often ask myself: why did this all happen to me? But I must live and take care of my parents so that they do not feel the loss of their beloved Arshak..."[50]

"Gyumri has its own specific features associated with the earthquake. I cannot say that these children [born in the families having the victims – G. S.] are spoiled, but they are pampered. At the same time, all of them can be distinguished by special sadness, if you look into their eyes you immediately understand that this child is from a family that has lost people. They are different, very different. At least because these children's parents are old, sometimes even very old. The children feel uncomfortable because of this fact. Parents of these children are people who lost loved ones during the earthquake, and I do not want to say that these children were born to replace the dead, but that is often the case".[51]

It is not always the case that the loss of a child entails naming a new baby after the lost child or the perception of new children as "substitutes" for previous ones. Sometimes the reverse is the case. Among my informants there was a mother who confessed that she could not forgive herself or child born after the earthquake for the death of elder children. That is, irrespective of what the relation to the generation born after the earthquake is, to some extent conditioned by the memory of the victims. Here the potential of operational capabilities of communicative memory becomes obvious, as it can influence the raising of the children, who are perceived as a "second chance".

Memorial sites

Memorial sites are one of the central themes of the discourse of cultural memory.[52] Identification and registration of these places are among the most discussed issues in the field of communicative memory, because usually these choices are made by people who realize that they are the "creators of history". And the most important task is to define the concept of those memories to "bequeath" to future generations.

---

[50] From the school essays. FEM. Gyumri, 2006.

[51] Teacher at school No.10, FEM. Gyumri, 2006.

[52] On the difference between "memorable places" and "places of memory", see: Nora P., Between Memory and History. The Problems of Places of Memory // France–memory, pp. 17-50.

Ruins

In the case of a natural disaster, memorial sites are frequently selected spontaneously, as opposed to the cases of historical events where the actors are people; nature itself "creates" certain areas that fall in the category of "favorites" of the city. As in the case of forming a symbolic landscape where mountains, rivers, and lakes can play the role of social objects, also the ruins or the remembrance of them may occupy a special place in the collective life of the city inhabitants and, on the force of this "remembrance", define the new face of the city.

> *"First the monument to victims of the earthquake was erected and then the school was built besides it. Actually our school building is at the site of the old one [destroyed in the quake]. There were small houses in this place then. The director made sure that these houses were removed so that the school could be built in its previous place. They wanted to build our school in the 58th district, and he [the director] was very concerned about the fact that on the spot where the people died and their blood was spilled, there might have been, say, bathrooms or any other houses. 'Our children were crying in this place', he said. And he managed to win this place going through various institutions".[53]*

It has become a common practice in Gyumri to erect khachkars ("cross-stones")[54] at places where children died to serve simultaneously as a monument and a "tombstone". Sometimes, depending on the number of children killed at a location, the parents set an appropriate number of decorated springs either near the cross-stones or combined together with them. A continuation of an old medieval tradition, the cross–stones are places of pilgrimage and are considered to be a sacred space that requires special treatment.

The first earthquake monuments spontaneously emerged at the sites of

---

[53] Teacher at school No.10, FEM. Gyumri, 2006.

[54] About the importance and functions of khachkars (cross-stones) in Armenian culture, see: Petrosyan H., Khachkar: The Origins, Functions, Iconography, Semantics, Yerevan: Printinfo, 2008 (in Armenian); Petrosyan H., The Khachkar or Cross-Stone // Armenian Folk Arts, Culture, and Identity / ed. by L. Abrahamian and N. Sweezy, Bloomington, Indianapolis: IU Press, 2001, pp. 60-69; Sahakyan A. S., Cult-Memorial Monuments in the Armenian Medieval Folk Culture // PhD thesis, Yerevan: Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, 1986 (in Russian); Sahakian A. S., Khachkars – Ethnic and Cultural Monuments of Medieval Armenia // Historical and Ethnographic Studies of the Folklore, Collection in the Memory of Sergei Tokarev. M.: Vostochnaya literatura, 1994, pp. 214-237 (in Russian).

great destruction, especially public institutions, first and foremost schools. When the memorial stone of High School 16 (where numerous children were killed) was removed for the new prosecutor's building, this fact was perceived so negatively that the night guards of the building reportedly began to "hear" the crying voices of the children. Almost all my informants told me about this story.[55] Not surprisingly, the ruins of High School 16 became one of the "natural" monuments of the earthquake included in the "reserves of hard memory". An important role in this process was likely played by the location of the school, which is in the central Independence Square (called Lenin Square at the time of the quake).

The school's ruins sometimes can be identified on the gravestones, though the gravestones, together with the clock, represent conditional ruins, sometimes accompanied by an image of a broken tree symbolizing interrupted life.

Among the "memorable ruins" without doubt the first place belongs to the ruins of the temple of the Savior (Amenaprkich). The reason is that this temple became a symbol of the city. It is depicted on the new municipal coat of arms (adopted in 2001). The temple, which was the highest building in the region, according to experts, in fact was not an architectural gem because of flaws in its construction by its self-taught builder. It was not included in the list of monuments secured by the state.[56]

But its restoration for the residents of Gyumri and especially for the city mayor[57] was not only a matter of honor, but also a symbol of the rebirth of Gyumri. According to the mayor, "only then when Amenaprkich is restored can we say that Gyumri is restored".[58] In the discussion revolving around the concept of restoring this monument, a number of possible approaches to the reconstruction of Gyumri were announced. Regarding the Amenaprkich, the following tactics were discussed: 1) breaking down completely and clearing the area; 2) freeing

---

[55] "It was a cloven stone. I perceive it as a symbol of a split life. Now it is removed and in its place the prosecutor's offices stands, that building stands in the place of the 16th school building. And, they say that in the building of the prosecutor every night the voices of children are heard. The guards constantly have to be replaced; one of them even became mentally ill. They say that since they removed the stone and built a prosecutor's office, the souls cannot be at peace". FEM. Gyumri, 2006.

[56] From an interview with the architect S. Kalashyan. FEM. Yerevan, 2006.

[57] Gyumri mayor Vardan Ghukasyan, reelected twice to this position, began his campaign under the slogan "Hope, Love and Faith". It is significant that the first word is "hope". Also he commissioned a film about Gyumri called City of Hope. Faith also played an important role in the political motto of the mayor – in the TV political advertisements during his campaign one of the scenes used was him putting up a cross on the temple of the Holy Sign restored with his personal financial support.

[58] Quotation from the film of S. Kakhzvantsyan – City of Hope (2003).

up the facade and the remaining parts and rebuilding it with stone of a different color, so that whole additional part can be seen; 3) "it was proposed to replace the destroyed part of the church, including the dome, with a glass carcass, thus keeping the dim memory of its past transparent";[59] 4) restoring the former look of the temple, with a minimum of technically necessary changes (for example, because of concrete lining, the walls of the temple were to have been condensed, slightly altering the interior of the building).

It was chosen to restore the building, allow it to function and not turn the ruins into a "natural" monument (as would have been the case with the second and third versions)[60]. "Ruins that look like they are sinking into the ground are valued everywhere for the emotional feelings one gets by viewing them... But at the core of the emotional satisfaction there is a heightened sense of the passage of time".[61]

However, the city was so familiar with death and had its "own account" over time, that it tried not to preserve the "destruction" but to revive "life". Thus, the choice to restore the destroyed temple arose from the perception that its ruined architecture was a living person:

> *"After the earthquake, during the meetings I always said that the wounded should not be executed. I often explained to then Marzpet[62] – Ararat Gomtsyan that one should not distort, humiliate, and demonstrate a disability. In the end, by doing so you're saying: "You are not a normal human being, one half of you is there and the other is not", – or you repaint this half. It is one organism, one structure, one idea, one piece of art that was born at once. Well, then once Gomtsyan told me: 'If you're so sure, go and do it'".[63]*

The anthropomorphism of the city received literal embodiment also during the Biennale in 1998. For example, one interpretation of the Gyumri restora-

---

[59] Abrahamian L. A., The Life and Death of Monuments in Post-Soviet Yerevan: Myths, Heroes, Anti-Heroes (manuscript in Russian).

[60] According to the architect Rafael Yeghoyan, these options were also rejected because they require precise and high-level technical implementation, which in the years when the projects were discussed, was unrealistic considering the level of construction in Gyumri. FEM. Gyumri, 2006.

[61] Lynch K., The Image of the City. M.: Stroiizdat, 1982, p. 152 (in Russian).

[62] Marzpet – the name of the governor of various provinces in modern Armenia.

[63] Interviews with the architect, the designer of the restoration project of the Amenaprkich temple – Rafael Yeghoyan. FEM. Gyumri, 2006.

tion concept by sculptor A. Vardanyan made an "operational intervention" by sewing up a crack on one of the houses with the iron wires. The same human attitude towards the "wounded walls" of Gyumri during the same Biennale was demonstrated by Daniel Filippov, from Moscow, who presented the installation "Acupuncture of the Walls".

As for the other approaches that have emerged during the discussion of the fate of the temple of the Savior, some of them had an unexpected sequel: the idea of a building from glass and metal was incarnated differently.[64] Beside the second Church of the Holy Virgin facing the same square (former May Uprising Square), the son of the architect restoring the temple of the Savior, architect G. Yeghoyan, designed a building of glass and metal grate to store technical equipment. The new building inside the glass simulated the block of the neighboring October Cinema that has spared destruction in the earthquake and was later restored.

As a result, the architect in this way embodied the project of the "building-display" to demonstrate the old (in this case – simulation of the old building). Transforming the idea of encasing the Church of the Savior in glass into a glass model of the past (continuation of the building of the October Cinema) is a very clever solution well-illustrating the idea of "temporary collage" in the architectural semiotics of Kevin Lynch:

> *"To enhance the current values and a sense of the flow of time, I would use the 'temporary collage' – a creative compound of a destruction and an addition; and in those cases where the personal relationships enter the game, I consider as natural the preservation of the fingerprints as selectively and unstably as it does the memory itself".[65]*

As the continuation of this kind of attitude to the past, a special construction trend in post-earthquake Gyumri took shape; the main feature of this trend was an attempt to make a new building similar to the old one (for example, a new building beside the old textile factory building; or the new shopping center being built on the same place and in the shape of the former center of the district).

---

[64] This parallel was noted by the artist V. Pahlavuni-Tadevosyan.

[65] Lynch K. Op. cit., p. 163.

Memorials to victims of the earthquake

Near the Church of the Savior is the main monument – a mother with child. The "mother with child" theme is often found in small monuments to the earthquake victims. Many such monuments are installed by the neighborhood communities, by relatives in their backyards or along the streets. Interestingly, in a newly built district of Gyumri (58th district) the first joint event neighbors held was the installation of a new monument commemorating the victims of the earthquake (the archaic tradition of blessing the place by transfer of relics or some symbols from previous places of residence).[66] As a result, some yards have taken on a fairly organized and comfortable appearance, neighbors gathering around a central monument – most often a decorated source. And despite the fact that relatively poor people settled in this neighborhood in the early years of its existence, collecting money for the establishment of the monument was never a problem and noone refused to do so.

The project of building a large monument to the victims of the earthquake by sculptors and painters in Gyumri is perceived as a threat to the existing monumental landscape of the city. They think that a big monument to the victims of the earthquake may create the image of a dark place associated only with the earthquake, which does not suit Gyumri. This is well understood by the designers of the new monument; so in the concept of the monument they tried to underscore the idea of "memory of the lessons of the earthquake" more than the grief for the victims. Although the monument – quite interesting in terms of architectural and aesthetic decisions – carries the danger of "suppressing" other sites in the city, this "suppression" can be directed also to the communicative memory of the citizens, "cooling" and transferring the individual traumas into a bank of historical memory. After all, "there are too many memories where there are few monuments".[67]

Although in our case the number of monuments is impressive enough, they do not serve as a general commonplace of the memory (as it was the case, e.g., with

---

[66] Kharatyan L., The Panda Day: One Case of Origination of a New Place of Pilgrimage // Problems of Armenian Ethnology and Archaeology II. The materials of the 10th republican conference of young scientists on the 50th birthday anniversary of Zaven Kharatyan. Yerevan: Gitutyun, 2003, pp. 71-77 (in Armenian). See also: Kharatyan L., "New" Images of "Old" Space (models of cultural opening up the "alien" space on the example of Armenian refugees living in Vardenis district of Armenia) – in the collection.

[67] Etkind A., Op. cit.

the memorial complex for the genocide victims in Tsitsernakaberd).[68] These monuments resemble tombstones that had been transferred from a cemetery having moved to the "battlefield".[69] So far, the communicative memory allotted to specific places of deaths, prevails over the cultural memory. This situation was best described by a schoolchild in his work: *"Although many monuments are established for the memory of the victims of the earthquake, we still remember this tragedy"*.

The memory of this event spontaneously became a part of school activities. Children in their own way ritualize this day, writing poetry and preparing displays.[70] It is known that poetic design is often used for mnemonic purposes.[71] That is why the poetic inscriptions on the various monuments are fairly common. The most common are the poetic epitaphs carved on the gravestones,[72] which are not made for the purpose of interpreting the monument (as, for example in the "sculptural literariness"[73]), but are rather spiritual appeals to God or to the victim.

Lines from the "Book of Lamentations" by Armenian medieval poet Grigor Narekatsi have found their place on the back side of the monument to victims of the earthquake by sculptor Z. Koshtoyan. While designing the monument, Koshtoyan expected that the Church of the Savior would be restored and its visitors would also read the back of the monument. From this perspective one can see a woman's head turned upwards, expressing the hope for salvation. The same is expressed by the poems, which in this case combine the interpretation of the monument (literary) with the epitaphic Armenian tradition epitomized by the inscriptions on khachkars. Poetic coding of the trauma combines personal experience with a certain pathos, allowing one to both express emotions and comprehend them. It is not coincidental that I have used many poetic quotations – selected from a wide variety of such poetry – in my study.

---

[68] Marutyan A. Op. cit.

[69] Memorial for the Yugoslavian pilots whose plane crashed en route to the disaster zone to rescue the injured. Their monument, assembled from the remains of the aircraft, was erected at the site of the crash near Echmiadzin and has become a place where people and officials from the nearby communities, including Echmiadzin, commemorate the earthquake.

[70] From an interview with the director of secondary school No 4. FEM. Gyumri, 2006.

[71] Assmann J. Op. cit., p. 59.

[72] On the epitaphs carved on the gravestones at the Gyumri cemetery, see: Hovannisyan R., Sahakyan K., On the Artistic Inscriptions on Tombstones // The Shirak Center for Armenian Studies, Scientific papers III, Gyumri: Gitutyun, 2000, pp. 161-164 (in Armenian).

[73] Paperny V., Moscow (Diary of a Foreigner). In: Paperny V., Mos-Angeles, Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2004, pp. 153-254 (in Russian).

Conclusion

The presented material illustrating the memory of the earthquake and attempts to forget it allows us to select two parallel discourses: family – personal ("communicative") and official ("cultural"). As we have seen, these two discourses often influence each other, interfere with each another, and often also contradict each other and raise completely different issues. Let us try to summarize the themes of these discourses and draw a basic outline of their intersections.

As a "great tragedy", the earthquake has an "official" place among the "lamentation dates"; and its "cultural" (official) commemoration tends to follow the remembrance model of the Armenian genocide (April 24). But in contrast to that date, December 7 is not an official holiday, although in the de facto "disaster zone" it is considered so. The "politics of memory" of the authorities on the subject shows an obvious inconsistency: on the one hand, the authorities contribute to the commemoration of this day (the special paragraph on this date in the textbooks, the official wreath-laying at the "central sites" in the disaster zone on the anniversaries of the tragedy), and on the other hand they are trying to encourage its "oblivion" by excluding the date December 7 from the list of "events" of the national calendar in an attempt to reduce its dramatic and funerary content.

Contrasting this tragedy with the tragedy of the genocide in the communicative memory is justified by different "rationalization" of the memory: the genocide should be remembered for the sake of restoration of historical justice and the earthquake – to derive "lessons" from the tragedy (the quality of construction, the danger of improvised alterations of flats, behavior during an earthquake, evacuation, the availability of specialized rescue services, knowledge of first aid, etc.).

According to the logic of the "cultural memory", the transformation of dramatic events into "distant historical facts" usually retained only as dates and numbers (represented in textbooks) and devoid of emotions can contribute to the process of forgetting the tragedy (by depriving them of the details of the communicative memory). But not all the figures are "impartial": while the number of victims can be perceived as a "fait accompli", the number of people with

disabilities and the homeless, by contrast, has the potential to become "activated" as something that requires urgent socio-political intervention.

Another form of "forgetting" is the activation of "positive" memories of the tragedy: on the official level it is the selection of information on international aid, and at the level of communicative memory – it is the stories of "miraculous escapes", and second births. A peculiar compound of the forms of communicative and formal memories is the monuments with epitaphs where the personal experience gains the status of "eternal, solid" evidence.

"The memorial landscape" of the city largely is determined by the disaster itself. As a result, some parts of the city have turned into the mass graves and the ruins have become "living monuments". In this sense, the communicative memory allotted to specific places of mass deaths prevails over the cultural memory. However, on the other hand, the administrative stratification of urban space has defined a hierarchy of these ruins – only the memorials adjacent to or facing the town square (especially schools) have become common public memorials. And this "official" division of the city has been reflected in some expressions of private memory (mainly the "central" ruins are depicted on the gravestones in the cemeteries of the city).

Sometimes the attitude towards the damaged buildings recalls the way people look at a wounded man.

Anthropomorphism of the city has characterized official as well as the folk discourses (recovery strategy of the Church of the Savior, works of the avant-garde artists in the Gyumri Biennale).

I would like to conclude the article with a "memorable" quote from the new monument to the victims of the earthquake instead of an explanatory note. It was written by one of the authors of the project, S. Kalashyan. He confesses that he is proud of these lines more than the memorial itself, since he managed to convey what he felt witnessing this tragedy himself. The architect in his own way solved the problems of an individual traumatic memory. It is astonishing how the intimacy of the communicative memory in such a way penetrates objects of seemingly exclusive cultural memory. For me, the description below is the sum of all the "memorable" characteristics I managed to record during the course of my study. In this explanatory note for the future monument, the reader will find reference to almost all details of communicative as well as cultural memories we have discussed in the text above.

SONG OF GRIEF AND ODE OF RESURRECTION

– Grandpa dear, over there, in sight, why is there a broken plate?
– My dear grandson, that plate is not broken at all. And it's not ruins, but an open wound and
a sharp wedge in there, as the bitter memory of the departed souls, as well as a lesson meant no doubt for all of us survivors. The chapel is a cross and altar, a symbol of our Holy Trinity, awaked by the sound of a gust of wind, the Church for the salvation of lost souls and, ultimately, of the dying city, the call to mercy.
Handsome was Gyumri, in the serene quietness, friendly and cheerful, full of art, with beautiful old houses,
with a love for traditions, for churches and belfries, for music, not ready for the coming fate.
But the day has come, foggy and dark, and the sky is hidden behind a veil.
Suddenly everything has swollen, strained, swayed slightly and trembled with great power and evil.
The roar reverberated with terrifying thunder.
Then a deafening silence came, under a cloud of dust – a lull for a moment. Then the sound of a muffled groan came, screams from all around, from different corners, from alleys, from driveways, from under the ruins and destroyed houses. Then the outstretched hands from neighbors, from countries, from the peoples of the Globe. Then makeshift huts and tents. Then the fires and candle flames in nightmarish nights. Then the gloom, a groan of despair, and then falling down,
falling further down,
Everything like in dream,
But time will pass and the years will pass. Through the generations working hard Gyumri will rise up again from its sleep, perhaps in a different environment.
But in order not to forget, and not to stumble on the stone again, beneath the huge splinter-plates
the museum is located. Through its arches hundreds and hundreds of sad eyes are looking at us.
There, with pain in our hearts, we will sometimes blame each other: how then could we not hold vigil to
the very familiar, insidious and dangerous Disaster of Earth!
So give me your hand, my dear grandson. And we'll move forward. Along the black scar,
along the edge of the wedge, descend to the plate. We'll look up in the sky, look at God
and at all the angels. Then, through the singing chorus, turn slightly to the right.
Through the sounds of the wind we'll lay a wreath at the commemorative wall, light sacred candles,
and from the depths of our souls send prayers to
Lord God
for the sake of his creatures.

References:

1. Assman J., Cultural Memory: Writing, Remembrance of the Past and Political Identity in the High Cultures of Antiquity, Moscow: Yazyki slavianskoi kul'tury, 2004, pp. 50-62 (in Russian).

2. Etkind A., Hundred Years of Revolution: Anniversary of Beginning and the Beginning of the End // <www.strana–oz.ru/print.php> (30.10.06, in Russian).

3. Welzer H., History, Memory and Modernity of the Past. Memory as an Arena of Political Struggle // Neprikosnovennyi zapas (Reserved Rations), 2005, N2-3 (pp. 40-41), <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2005/2/vel3.html> (09.06.2006, in Russian).

4. Nora P., Era of Commemorations // France-Memory, St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg State University Press, 1999, pp. 95-148 (in Russian).

5. Shagoyan G., Leninakan Has Gone Away, Gyumri Has Remained: Images of the City Before and After the Earthquake. The study conducted in the framework of the Scholarship Programme of the Heinrich Boell Foundation South Caucasus Regional Office, 2006.

6. Marutyan A., The Role of Memory in the Structure of National Identity. Problems of the Theory, Yerevan: Noravank, 2006, pp. 84-85 (in Armenian).

7. Abrahamian L., Armenian Identity in a Changing World, Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2006, p. 159.

8. Safarian L. V., Piruzyan S. A., The Causal-Investigative Chain of Resonance of Spitak Earthquake in Armenia // Bulletin of Social Sciences (NAS), 2002, № 1 (105), pp. 72-74 (in Armenian).

9. Balayan Z., Afterword // Azatyan V., Leninakan, Yerevan: The Central Committee of Communist Party of Armenia Press, 1989, p. 168 (in Russian).

10. History of Armenia (The 8th Grade Textbook) / ed. by V. Barkhudaryan, Yerevan: Luys, 2000, pp. 112-115 (in Armenian).

11. Gyumri, comp. G. Vardanyan, Yerevan: Tigran Mets, 2006, p. 251 (in Armenian).

12. Sarkisyan A., Khatuntsev V., From the Reports // Armenia, December'88 / Comp. L. F. Grigorova, A. A. Gasparyan, L. Kh. Manukyan, Yerevan: Hayastan, 1990, p. 73 (in Russian).

13. Homework essay of the school student, ninth grade, school No.10, Luiza Stepanyan. FEM. Gyumri, 2006 (translation – G. Shagoyan).

14. Gyumri Biennale (the documentary film) by Garnik Sargsyan, TV studio Chirac, 1990.

15. Karriyev B., Here It Came the Earthquake... www.chelpress.ru/LANG=ru/newspapers/akcion/archive/05-12-1997/3/F1.DOC.html (10.06.06, in Russian).

16. Abrahamian L., Ayrapetyan V., Arakelyan G., Gulyan A. A., Talk about Round and Absolute Numbers, Yerevan, 1981-1984, pp. 4-14 (manuscript in Russian).

17. Gulyan A., I Have Not Seen My Daughter // Stories on Poverty / ed. Kharatyan H., Yerevan: Lusakn, 2001, pp. 79-82 (in Armenian).

18. Zlatkovskaya T. D., The Historical Roots of the European Calendar // Calendar Customs and Ceremonies in Foreign Countries of Europe, Historical Roots and Development of the Traditions, Moscow: Nauka, 1983, p. 31 (in Russian).

19. Ernjakyan L., Pikichian H., Hymn to the Sun: "Sahari" in Armenian Musical Culture, Yerevan: Gitutyun, 1998 (in Armenian).

20. A Slap directed by H. Malyan, 1980.

21. Arutyunyan Y., Account of Time in Gyumri // Voice of Armenia, 2006 (in Russian).

22. Project of the Rebirth (TV program), Studio Gala (07/12/2004).

23. Margaryan N. M., Choosing the First Names Among the Eastern Armenians (XIX–XX centuries), (An ethnological study), PhD thesis, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, Yerevan, 2000, chapter 2.2.

24. Nora P., Between Memory and History. The Problems of Places of Memory // France–memory, pp. 17-50.

25. City of Hope directed by S. Kakhzvantsyan (2003).

26. Petrosyan H., Khachkar: The Origins, Functions, Iconography, Semantics, Yerevan: Printinfo, 2008 (in Armenian).

27. Petrosyan H., The Khachkar or Cross-Stone // Armenian Folk Arts, Culture, and Identity / ed. by L. Abrahamian and N. Sweezy, Bloomington, Indianapolis: IU Press, 2001, pp. 60-69.

28. Sahakyan A. S., Cult-Memorial Monuments in the Armenian Medieval Folk Culture // PhD thesis, Yerevan: Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, 1986 (in Russian).

29. Sahakian A. S., Khachkars – Ethnic and Cultural Monuments of Medieval Armenia // Historical and Ethnographic Studies of the Folklore, Collection in the Memory of Sergei Tokarev. M.: Vostochnaya literatura, 1994, pp. 214-237 (in Russian).

30. Abrahamian L. A., The Life and Death of Monuments in Post-Soviet Yerevan: Myths, Heroes, Anti-Heroes (manuscript in Russian).

31. Lynch K., The Image of the City. M.: Stroiizdat, 1982, p. 152 (in Russian).

32. Kharatyan L., The Panda Day: One Case of Origination of a New Place of Pilgrimage // Problems of Armenian Ethnology and Archaeology II. The materials of the 10th republican conference of young scientists on the 50th birthday anniversary of Zaven Kharatyan. Yerevan: Gitutyun, 2003, pp. 71-77 (in Armenian). Also: Kharatyan L., "New" Images of "Old" Space (models of cultural opening up the "alien" space on the example of Armenian refugees living in Vardenis district of Armenia) – in the collection.

33. Hovannisyan R., Sahakyan K., On the Artistic Inscriptions on Tombstones // The Shirak Center for Armenian Studies, Scientific papers III, Gyumri: Gitutyun, 2000, pp. 161-164 (in Armenian).

34. Paperny V., Moscow (Diary of a Foreigner). In: Paperny V., Mos-Angeles, Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2004, pp. 153-254 (in Russian).

35. Shagoyan G., Field Ethnographic Materials, Gyumri, 2006.

36. Shagoyan G., Field Ethnographic Materials, Yerevan, 2006.

ISLAM IN ADJARA – COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TWO COMMUNITIES[1]

Ruslan Baramidze

The present article describes the role and the practice of Islam in Adjara. Adjarians are the largest local group of Georgian Muslims. The specific characteristics of Islam in the region are linked to both the history and recent processes in the society. For this paper, a comparative analysis was conducted of the situation in two communities of Adjara where various factors contributed to preservation or weakening of religiosity. This analysis is especially important when viewed in the context of formation of inter-confessional relations in a country with the formally dominant Christian religion where everyday discourse regarding Muslims is largely negative, especially in case of the Georgian Muslims. On the other hand, during internal upheavals, Muslims have often been used as an electoral and political resource. This tendency has not lost its significance in contemporary Georgia.

Methodology: For the work an ethnographic approach based on three principles was used: "total descriptive, historicism and ethno-specificity".[2] This approach allows for an understanding of the culture and the life of the people by establishing relationships with informants through observations and interviews.

During the field research, the first contacts were established with the "experts on life" in the researched communities – Khelvachauri and Ghorjomi. Subsequently,

---

[1] Since writing the first version of this article in 2003-2004, important political, administrative and socio-economic processes took place both in the country and the region. These changes were studied and recorded by me during follow-up work on the topic, especially within the framework of the project: The Muslim community in Georgia in the contemporary context (historical, folkloric and ethnological, socio-psychological, cultural and statistical analysis), (grant № 07-614-1-40), funded by the Kartvel Foundation for Logic, Humanities and Social Sciences (The Rustaveli Foundation). Some conclusions are reflected in this work.

[2] Melikishvili L., Kharchilava M., Scientists in the Zone of the Latent Conflict, Tbilisi, 2003 (in Georgian), p. 4; Chitaia G., The Method and the Principles of the Ethnographic Field-Work, Works, Volume III, Tbilisi, 2001 (in Georgian), pp. 74-83; Chitaia G., The Method of the Ethnographic Field-Work, Works, Volume IV, Tbilisi, 2001 (in Georgian), pp. 78-85.

most of the information was received precisely from them. These people helped to establish contacts with other informants. Free in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives of the clergy (clergy holding managerial positions, ordinary imams, teachers at madrasas), with believers (with deeply religious persons, as well as those who observe those rites less rigidly), as well as with adherents of other religions living in the surveyed villages. As contacts with informants became stronger in the process of the research, I had no problems touching on "difficult" topics (formal and informal mechanisms of existence of the religious communities, funding, issues of social interrelation, political priorities, etc.).

In order to strengthen the argument and make general conclusions, parallel studies in other places were conducted, namely in the village of Zoti, in the Chvani Gorge, and the city of Batumi.[3] In general, for information gathering I used the method of interview (mainly semi-structured, both individual and group) and held informal talks. An interview guide was developed for the work, which afterwards made it possible to more efficiently compare the obtained materials. The questions were focused on collecting information about Islam, the mosques, and the specificities of practicing the religion. For a better understanding of the situation, participant observation was conducted. In the course of the study, diaries from the field were produced in selected villages, which along with other collected materials were used to write this paper.[4]

Objective of the research: For the research of the activities of the mosque and the clergy, two communities: Ghorjomi (high mountainous community) and Khelchvauri (community in the lowland of western Adjara) were selected. The main attention was focused on unexplored topics, such as specificity of the dissemination of Islam in Adjara, social function of the mosque, financial side of the existence of the mosque, religious education system, and the clergy. Selection of the research objectives was determined by several factors: in both communities old mosques are functioning; they play an important role in the

---

[3] In 2008-2009 the work were conducted in all settlements of western Georgia where there are Muslim spiritual or educational institutions.

[4] Baramidze R., Field Diaries № 3, Georgia (Zoti), 2003; Baramidze R., Field Diaries № 4, № 7, № 10, Batumi, 2004; Baramidze R., Field Diaries № 5, Shuakhevi District (Chvana), 2004; Baramidze R., Field Diaries № 6, Khulo District (Ghorjomi), 2004; Baramidze R., Field Diaries № 9, Khelvachauri District (Sharabidzeebi), 2004. Baramidze R., Field Diaries of the Census of the Mosques in Western Georgia, № 1-5 (Kobuleti, Khelvachauri, Keda, Shuakhevi and Khulo Districts), 2008-2009 (The field materials were collected in the Georgian language and are stored in digital format).

lives of these communities and Adjara as a whole; in both communities various categories of clergy and ordinary believers are present.

According to my hypothesis, the differences between the communities in the highland and in the lowland could be primarily explained by the degree of accessibility to the city and its distinct cultural environment. Having a remote location affects both the nature of the work of public institutions (education, information, management, etc.) and everyday life (economy, life, etc.). The connection between different parts of the territory plays an important role in the formation of civil, ethnic, religious or other identities.[5] If the link between the communities is lost or weakened, the resulting isolated development contributes to the formation of specific features. Proximity to the city, on the contrary, promotes the development of religious institutions, infrastructure, and opportunities for the religious activities. Thus, the city has a mosque, a boarding school-type madrasa and separate facilities for girls. However, Islam in the city has its own specificities, which require separate study.

History of Islam in Adjara: Islam was spread in Adjara during the Ottoman conquest (Adjara was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire from the 16th century until its incorporation into the Russian Empire in 1878).[6] The process of Islamization was difficult. In the 16th century, according to the Livi census of mountainous Adjara,[7] the majority of the population, as Christians, paid various religious taxes.[8] Initially, mostly noblemen were converted to Islam. The process of Islamization was complete only by the end of the 18th century.[9] According to N. Kakhidze, the invaders managed to gain a foothold and began construction of the main bulwark of the faith, mosques, only in the 19th century.[10] According to the field materials,[11] it is clear that the majority

---

[5] Ladyuri E., Le Roy and Braudel F. best characterized the described phenomenon: "Different social groups (urban and rural, the city and the province) and different cultural spheres and areas (religious, political, economic) are not necessarily changing at the same time", Berke P., History and Social Theory, translated from English by N. Ladaria, Tbilisi, 2002 (in Georgian), p. 187.

[6] Shashikadze Z. ,Two Important Documents from the History of XVI Century Adjara – Collection of SIC after M. Abashidze, BSU, III, Batumi, 2002 (in Georgian), pp. 151-152.

[7] The name of the administrative-territorial unit in the Ottoman Empire, the same Sandzak.

[8] Shashikadze Z., Ottoman Taxes in Adjara – Batumi State University Works, IV, Batumi, 2002 (in Georgian), pp. 215-224.

[9] Bakradze D., Archaeological Journey in Guria and Adjara, Batumi, 1987 (in Georgian), p. 72, pp. 84-85.

[10] Kakhidze N., Craft in Adjara (Historical and Ethnographic Research) – Life and Culture of South-Western Georgia, XVII Century, Tbilisi 1990 (in Georgian).

[11] Baramidze R., Diaries of Census of the Mosques of Western Georgia № 1-5 (Kobuleti, Khelvachauri, Keda, Shuakhevi and Khulo Districts), 2008-2009.

of the mosques were built from the mid-19th to the beginning of the 20th centuries, although some of them were rebuilt on the sites of older buildings. In 1878, as a result of the Russian-Turkish War, the Berlin Congress decided to incorporate south-western administrative territories of Georgia into the Russian Empire. The fact that it took so long for the Russian empire to strengthen its position in the Caucasus was in large part linked to the factor of religion. The Tsarist Government tried to define its attitude towards the Muslim communities and to establish control over them and build their loyalty towards the authorities. This was done in three areas – creation of "spiritual management",[12] training of Muslim personnel working in the field[13] and putting limitations on travels abroad for receiving religious education, or for obtaining a title.[14]

By the time of elimination of the Independence of Georgia (in 1921), 158 mosques operated in Adjara (as indicated by Soviet sources). By 1929, five high madrasas and 150 primary religious schools operated in Adjara. With the new Soviet government in power, a new policy towards religion was put in place.[15] And although within the next two years the number of the religious schools increased to 172,[16] only a few mosques were built[17] or renovated.[18] On the other hand, a 1924 decree abolished the Sharia courts in Adjara and women's committees were set up. In 1926, religious subjects were removed from the school curriculum.[19] In that same year, the Muslim Spiritual Director-

---

[12] In 1872 the king approved the statute on the management of the spiritual affairs of the Muslims of Transcaucasia and the establishment of the Transcaucasia Mohammedan Spiritual Directorate of the Sunni doctrine and the Transcaucasia Mohammedan Spiritual Directorate of the Shiite doctrine. Also, the statute "On the construction of Mohammedan mosques" was prepared, according to which mosques were built in all villages where more than 200 Muslims resided. "Regulation about the management of the Transcaucasia Mohammedan spiritual clergy of the Sunni doctrine", 5 April 1872, Saidbaev T., Islam and Society (Historical-Sociological Study), Moscow, 1984 (in Russian), p. 121.

[13] According to N. Derzhavin, in the year 1906, in Batumi and its surroundings, 119 mosques had madrasas operating at their facilities, and there have been special schools opened in Tbilisi for the Muslim clergy. Batumi and Its Surroundings, Batumi, 1906 (in Russian), p. 17; Baindurashvili H., Islam and Muslims in Tbilisi in the XIX century – Nodar Shengelia, 75, Tbilisi, 2008 (in Georgian), p. 50.

[14] Andriashvili R., Dogma and Social Teachings of Islam, Tbilisi, 1984 (in Georgian), pp. 40-41.

[15] In Adjara, in the early years of Sovietization, Mussektsiya (Muslim Section of the People's Commissariat of National Minorities) oversaw the issues of the Muslim clergy, education, female Muslim sections, political campaigning, etc. TsGAA (Central State Archive of Adjara AR), F. p-1, D.77, pp. 1-95; TsGAA, F. p-1, D. 38, pp.1-2.

[16] Andriashvili R., Dogma and Social Teachings of Islam, Tbilisi, 1984 (in Georgian), p. 54.

[17] For example, in Makhvilauri and Khutsubani, Baramidze R., Diaries of the Census of the Mosques of Western Georgia № 1-2 (Kobuleti and Khelvachauri Districts), 2008-2009.

[18] TsGAA, F. p-1, O.1, D 10, p. 4/2.

[19] According to the field materials, at times in Adjara, the teaching of religious and secular subjects took place simultaneously in schools, the clergy were invited as the teachers (the process was overseen by Muslim Section). Education was often held in the madrasa (sometimes in a mosque), but later the main madrasa was transformed into a Soviet school. After the first years of the Soviet government, secular and religious education were split, and for some time they were held in parallel lessons, first secular lessons, then the religious – Baramidze R., Diaries of the Census of the Mosques of Western Georgia, № 1-5 (Kobuleti and Khelvachauri Districts), 2008-2009.

ates of Adjara were outlawed, and starting in 1929, when the policy on general education was adopted, the abolition of religious schools began.[20] On 20 July 1929, a campaign discouraging the wearing of headscarves was launched.[21] Anti-Soviet demonstrations in the years 1925-1930 show that the process of strengthening the Soviet power in the region was going far from smoothly.[22] By 1930, the Soviet Government took the situation under control[23] and, now acting "on behalf of the people," closed down mosques.[24] The buildings of mosques were redesignated for household (warehouse storage) or for other needs (village council, hospital, museum). At the same time new "Soviet traditions", such as the red wedding,[25] the red Bayram[26] and other anti-religious innovations were introduced and spread.[27]

Despite having the support of the population and the clergy in the ensuing years of the Soviet Era, the Soviet authorities did not trust the local population, especially the Muslim community. Adjara was among the targets of mass repressions. In order to avoid exacerbating tensions, starting November 15, 1944, at the decree of the State Defense Committee of the USSR, 15,568 Muslim families (69,869 persons) were evicted from the border zone. A total of 4,055 such families were evicted from Adjara, and of this figure 1,770 were ethnic Georgian families[28] while 2,285 were of other ethnicities.[29] The change of the attitude towards religion became noticeable in the years 1940-1945, when the state to some degree permitted

---

[20] Andriashvili R., Opportunistic Tendencies of Muslim Clergy in Georgia – The Process of Overcoming Religious Relics, Collection, Tbilisi, 1973 (in Georgian), p. 87.

[21] APG (Archives of the President of Georgia) F.14, O.4, D.301, pp.160-178.

[22] See Andriashvili R., Opportunistic Tendencies of Muslim Clergy in Georgia – The Process of Overcoming Religious Relics, Collection, Tbilisi, 1973 (in Georgian). Andriashvili R., Dogma and Social Teachings of Islam, Tbilisi, 1984 (in Georgian).

[23] Prefeasibility study within the NKVD – The Report on the Status and Activities of the Muslim Clergy in Adjara, TsGAA, F.p-1, O.3, p. 54.

[24] Note that in the neighboring region of Guria, in the villages Zoti and Chkhakaura (populated by immigrants from Ghorjomi) the mosque did not close down and periodically the parish held religious ceremonies – Baramidze R., Diaries of the Census of the Mosques of Western Georgia, № 6 (Guria), 2009.

[25] TsGAA, F.p-1, O.1, D.353, p. 45.

[26] TsGAA, F.p-1, O.1, D.145, p. 35.

[27] Gugutishvili M., New Soviet Tradition in Georgia, The PhD paper, The State Museum of the Academy of Sciences GSPC.,Tbilisi, 1972 (in Georgian).

[28] Dumbadze S., Indignities of the Soviet Power – Historical Journal, XI Collection, Batumi (in Georgian), pp. 26-27.

[29] Natmeladze M., Demographic Processes in Georgia in 40's of the 20th century (The Deportation of the Turks and Other Groups from Georgia in 1941-1945), Tbilisi, 1993 (in Georgian), pp. 33-34.

the practice of the freedom of conscience.[30] In 1946, the Batumi mosque was reopened but no significant changes followed afterwards. New processes started at the end of the 1980's, when, with the reform policies of glasnost, religious communities started to revive and mosques were rehabilitated (first they we rehabilitated as buildings of cultural heritage and afterwards as places of worship). Since the 1990s, an active process of religious revival has been under way, followed by the process of re-Islamization characterized by an active rehabilitation or construction of worship facilities and religious educational institutions[31] and by an increase in the number of believers and persons with religious education. It should be noted that the first years of independent Georgia were characterized by an active process of Christianization nationwide, including in Adjara. Much of the history of independent Georgia since 1991 has been characterized by the ambiguity of religious policy, as well as by a "special" attitude towards religious minorities.[32]

Because the local religious body, the Adjaran Muftiate, does not have official status and is not registered as a legal entity, it is difficult to determine the exact number of registered mosques. The majority of the mosques are operating semi-legally. In some cases, other factors are hindering the determination of the exact number of mosques. For example, in the Chvani Gorge, a decree of the Mejlis[33] declared the mosques of the adjacent villages as parishes of the Chvani mosque, despite the fact that in Chvani relevant facilities exist for running an independent mosque (small and large two-story buildings). Usage of these buildings was permitted only during Ramadan.[34] During the rest of the time (mainly on Fridays) the believers of this village have to pray in the Chvani mosque, as it is perceived as an older and more respectable mosque. At the same time, very often, the local

---

[30] See, for example: Emelyanova N., Kabardia Muslims, Moscow (in Russian), 1999.

[31] Some religious and educational facilities were rebuilt, others were constructed again, some mosques have been housed in already existing buildings suitable for religious service (e.g., in former commercial buildings).

[32] See Khaindrava I., Religion in Georgia: XXI century – Religion and Politics in the Caucasus. Materials of the international conference, ed. A. Iskandaryan, Yerevan, 2004, pp. 53, 74; Papuashvili N., Via Dolorosa of Religious Education in Georgia, Tavisupleba (Freedom), № 9 (33), 2004 (in Georgian), pp.11-19; Papuashvili N., Zakareishvili P., Do Not Do What You Do Not Want to Be Done to Us, Zgvari (The Edge), № 2 (4), 2004 (in Georgian), pp. 22-26.

[33] Mejlis – the council at the mosque comprised of the representatives from the local parish: families, neighborhoods and settlements.

[34] Ramadan – the Muslim month of fasting.

population, mainly in the mountainous part, calls the Muslim educational institutions mosques (the local population in Adjara calls them madrasas). But only those institutions in areas with no mosques which are used as praying places by the parish are referred to thusly.

This situation is not unique to Adjara, the problem of the lack of exact figures exists in Russia too. "For example, in 1980, according to Mikhailov, the Head of the Department for the Relations with Religious Organizations at the Council of the Ministers of the Soviet Russian Federation, only 335 imams and mullahs were officially eligible to conduct religious services, whereas 1,245 were in fact conducting religious rituals".[35]

The same gap exists between the number of registered and unregistered mosques. According to Mufti S. M. Abubakarov, the number of unregistered mosques in Russia stood at 3,500 in 1997, but Caucasologist V. Bobrovnikov says there were more than 5,000 such mosques in 1994.[36] On the other hand, Islam does not require a special building for prayer. It is possible to pray anywhere as long as certain conditions are observed. This is why there is a set number of small prayer houses. Recently, the number of Muslim worship facilities in Adjara was placed at 180.[37]

The level and the factors of religiosity in two communities

Today, the importance of Islam is not the same in all communities. In order to understand these differences, it is necessary to consider a comparative history of the mosques, and also to analyze the socio-economic angles of reintroducing religiosity and specificities of religious education in the researched communities.

---

[35] Mikhailov G., Islam in Russia – Ermakov I., Mikulski Dm., Islam in Russia and Central Asia, 1993 (in Russian), pp.18-19 (cited by – Notes of the Fatherland, № 5 (14) 2003, pp. 82-83).

[36] Malashenko A., The Islamic Revival in Contemporary Russia (in Russian), p. 77 (Cited by – Notes of the Fatherland, № 5 (14) 2003, p. 83).

[37] There are following types of facilities – a mosque, a mosque and madrasa together, a madrasa, a chapel, a prayer room, a seasonal chapel or a mosque.

History of the Ghorjomi and Khelvachauri mosques

The history of the Ghorjomi mosque I recorded in the community itself, as well as in the village of Zoti, in Georgia's Chokhatauri District.[38] In the mountains, people remember these histories to this day.

As a result of the speedy growth of the community, at the end of the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th century, the Ghorjomi mosque was too small to house all the worshippers. The elders of the community gathered several times in order to solve the problem. One such meeting happened to be attended by a man who earlier had moved to Zoti. This man passed by the respected elders, but did not greet them. The elders requested an explanation for this disrespectful act. The man replied that such noble and prominent men deserved a new big mosque, not only the enlargement of the old mosque. The elders explained to the man that the construction of a new mosque would require construction materials (the community did not have enough resources) and large financial expenditures. The guest promised to help (his community possessed the necessary construction materials). And so, with joint efforts the mosque was built in 1900-1902.

As we see, the increase in the population stimulated the construction of the mosque in this mountainous community. In a similar situation several years ago, the mosque in the village of Didadjara was demolished and materials were transferred to the neighboring community, which built a new mosque.[39] These facts point to the important religious and social function the mosques play in mountainous areas.

Fewer details are known about the history of the Khelvachauri mosque. As the mosque was not used as a religious facility for a long time, interest in it diminished and a lot of evidence was lost. The history of the construction of the mosque is as

---

[38] This area is part of another historical region of Georgia – Guria, which borders Adjara to the north. Guria is populated overwhelmingly by Orthodox Christian Georgians but in this village and several nearby ones residents are migrants from mountainous Adjara (mostly Ghorjomi).

[39] There was an old building in Didadjara, which had wood carvings in its interior. This building could not hold all believers as it was too small in size. Incidentally, the building had earlier been moved to Didadjara from another settlement, where the parish had divided into two parts, and one half moved to Didadjara. In Didadjara, with the help of two brothers from Turkey (whose mother came from Georgia), construction started on a large, stone mosque. The villagers actively searched for a place for the new mosque. The old mosque was moved aside without being demolished and was used as a prayer house during the construction period. The residents of other settlements, where there were no mosques, as well as the people in Didadjara, presented their proposals regarding the location of the new mosque. After lengthy deliberations, it was decided to move the mosque to one of the settlements of the valley, Satsikhuri, as it was located on the road between Didadjara and its summer pastures, so the villagers would have the opportunity to use the mosque while pasturing. Baramidze R., Field Diaries of the Census of Mosques in Western Georgia № 5 (Khulo District), 2009.

follows: The mosque was built at the end of the 19th century or in the beginning of 20th century. It is believed that the mosque was built shortly after the construction of the mosque in Batumi by the same people. The construction of the mosque was led by several prominent families who had donated the land for the mosque from their own estates. The construction process progressed in an organized manner. A part of the land donated for the mosque was used as a cemetery. It should be noted that the local population uses the term "vakf" to denote an unprofitable land used mainly as a cemetery (it is also called "khairat", which means goodness). Thus, in the beginning of the 20th century, religion was as important in the lowland villages as it was in the highland villages and the construction of a mosque was considered a "matter of honor". The end of the century, however, saw a sharp decline in the religiosity of the population. When comparing the two histories described above, it is noticeable that the influence of state atheism was proportional to access to the city and was reflected in various transformations of religious practices.

The history of the Soviet period was preserved in both communities in greater detail. The Ghorjomi mosque was closed down in 1938 "at the request of the population"; the minaret was demolished and the building was used as a club, and later as a warehouse. After some time, when the building was significantly damaged, it was repaired again "at the request of the population" and was used as a museum. In 1980s, (again "at the request of the population!"), religious significance was returned to the building and it was restored as a mosque.

In the lowland community the history is similar, but with the difference that in the lowland villages, mosques were exploited so savagely that they quickly turned into ruins. Most mosques are destroyed, and details of their stories are lost. The building of the Khelvachauri mosque was used as a military headquarters during the Second World War, and later as the premises for the village administration and as a club (partly even as a shop). This is why today the building looks like an administrative institution. I noticed that the young people called this building an "office" (the question "where are you going?" was answered with "to the office"). Although after the restoration of the mosque, with the lapse of time, less actively but still, the word "mosque" is again entering into usage in everyday speech.[40]

This situation – not observed in the mountainous settlement – indicates that the mosque had lost its religious and worshiping functions and was transformed

---

[40] In recent years the building has been completely reshaped, in particular, a minaret and auxiliary buildings were added and the villagers began to call it a "mosque".

into an ordinary secular building. For some time now, since the mosque was restored, this designation again entered into use.

Incidentally, the influence of Islam (or rather of the mosque) on toponymy is significant in Adjara. Thus, during Batumi's annexation by the Russian Empire, the city was divided into four parts, three of which were named after local mosques.[41] In the mountainous part, the toponym "Jamikari" (meaning door of the mosque) is found, and in some areas, villages were named according to the same principle.[42]

Socio-economic factors behind the revival of religiosity

First of all, let us discuss the factors which hinder the interrelation and interaction of the researched communities. The mountainous settlement (more precisely a group of large settlements with a majority Muslim population) is located 9 kilometers away from the central highway, 14 kilometers away from the district center and 101 kilometers away from Batumi.[43] As a result of the distance from the city and due to the mountainous location, the road to the village is in a bad shape. Public transport does not function properly – an old bus serves the village (although there are also minibuses), which the local population mainly uses for transporting goods (agricultural or other related products). The minibus makes several trips per day, but it is very hard to leave the village after 10:00 in the morning. Inside the village it is best to travel in a vehicle with high maneuverability.

The lowland community (several large and independent settlements with mixed population in terms of religion) is located 0.5 kilometers away from the central highway, 14 kilometers away from the center and 15 kilometers away from Batumi.[44] As the road is of high importance, its quality is quite good. Most parts of the road in the village have been asphalted, though some damage is already apparent. Public minibuses reach Batumi in 30-40 minutes. In comparison with the highland community, there is no feeling of isolation and restriction here.

---

[41] Sichinadze B., History of Batumi, Batumi, 1958 (in Georgian), p. 106.

[42] Mgeladze V., From the Structure of Settlements in the Village Darchidzeebi, Works of the Batumi Research Institute, V. II, 1962 (in Georgian), pp. 117-119. Baramidze R., Diaries of the Census of the Mosques of Western Georgia № 1-5 (Kobuleti, Khelvachauri, Keda, Shuakhevi and Khulo Districts), 2008-2009.

[43] Adjara in Figures 2002: Statistical Yearbook, Batumi, 2003 (in Georgian), p. 13.

[44] Adjara in Figures 2002: Statistical Yearbook, Batumi, 2003 (in Georgian), p. 12.

Employment is of paramount significance in the mountainous village, as the opportunity to earn income is very limited. In addition, the climate in the village is very harsh. Nomadic cattle herding is the most developed sector. Agriculture plays a secondary, but important role.[45] Having limited financial resources, the population is forced to sell some of its agricultural goods produced locally (mainly potatoes). They try to gather all necessary products and firewood in a minimum period of time. The inhabitants of the village are constantly leaving for seasonal work. From childhood they are used to hard physical labor. Since the break-up of the Soviet Union, the significance of links among relatives and neighbors has grown. There are mainly families, relatives and neighbors taking part in solving each other's problems.

In the lowland village, agriculture plays only a secondary supportive role. The main agricultural crops here are subtropical plants (citrus). Citrus is also sold and the money is used to support the family. Part of the population produces foodstuffs which they then sell at the market. Some in the community have pensions and salaries as income. The division of labor is weak in the agricultural field (the situation is different in the mountainous village). There is a possibility to choose a profession and to have plans for the future. The influence of family and neighborly connections is far less significant. Unemployment among the local youth is high. The influence of the city infrastructure is huge. The people are concerned largely with the interests of their own families and neighbors hardly interact with each other. Consequently, the inhabitants have little motivation to help their co-villagers. In all, the relations in the village are regulated through the formal institutions, although there are some cases of using informal rules to resolve certain issues (mediators, respected persons). Remnants of traditional law are still alive. But the influence of religion and tradition are weak here and are regulated less rigidly.

In the mountainous community, the local population is uniform in its ethnic and religious composition – they are ethnic Georgian Muslims.[46] In the lowland community, there are representatives of various ethnic and religious groups living together. This factor influences the cultural conception. The mountainous community's minimal connection with the outside world is why old traditions live

---

[45] See – Shamiladze W., Highland Cattle-Breeding in Georgia (Ethnographic Study of Cattle-Breeding in Adjara), Tbilisi, 1969 (in Georgian).

[46] More precisely, an ethnographic group of Georgians – Adjars.

on and are slow to change, such as the institution of bridal endogamy.[47] The large Muslim population in the highland community helps to preserve traditions, and in the lowland community, where the Muslim community is small, traditions are lost easily.

In the highland Ghorjomi, terrestrial TV reception is poor, so satellite receivers are necessary to receive broadcast media. Its remoteness also inhibits the distribution of printed media. These facts seriously hinder the inhabitants' ability to be aware of various developments and problems of the country, including political ones. Consequently, the influence of official propaganda here is huge and it limits the free choice of the local inhabitants. In the lowland Khelvachauri, it is possible to receive all Georgian channels in addition to the regional channels and cable TV. Printed media is not sold in the village itself, but is easily accessible. Access to various information sources enables the local population to independently shape their attitudes on various issues.

In the mountainous village, the main cultural events are celebrations. Their importance could be categorized thusly: religious, traditional, local and state celebrations. This attitude contributes to the preservation of the traditional conceptions. The lowland community is on the contrary under the strong influence of Batumi's cultural life. Both secular and religious celebrations are observed. Religious celebrations are also marked by those who are less interested in religion.

Religious education

To better understand the specific features of Islam in Adjara, I will discuss one more institution which directly influences the revival of religion: education in general and in particular religious education. In the high mountainous zones of the region, the level of education is very low. There is a shortage of qualified personnel. The persons graduating from these particular schools work mainly in schools in mountainous communities. These people received vocational training at Batumi State University. Progressive reforms implemented in the field of education made it possible to slightly improve

---

[47] As noted by Yuri Bromley, endogamy plays a major role in preserving traditional values – Bromley Y., Essays on the Theory of Ethnos, Moscow, 1983 (in Russian), pp. 53-54.

the quality of education at community schools. Before the reforms, the local population was not interested in receiving an education as chances for getting a job according to one's profession were low. And if some school students had an interest in education, it was very quickly lost because of the limited access to higher education institutions and the inability to use the education and diploma received. The introduction of the standardized national university entrance exams has significantly simplified and opened up access to higher education, although the problem of finding employment still influences the choice of future strategies.

After the 1990s, the only field of education which had a "practical" usage and was highly demanded, was religious education. People start to learn the bases of religion and rituals from childhood. The families observe most of the religious rituals (mandatory practices, prayers), and during celebrations and fasting, children are unwittingly involved in the process.

Having regular contact with and observing religious life, children quickly learn religious perceptions. As mountainous communities are inhabited only by Muslims (not counting a certain number of non-believers), there is no issue of communicating with representatives of "other cultures", which usually creates difficulties in the formation of common rules in everyday life.

In the mountainous communities, an extensive network of unofficial religious schools operated, where young people received knowledge. Some young people further pursue careers and enter religious institutes, as this has a practical value. Along with family education, this leads to an increase in the number of believers. The general trends in religious education observed in the process of my fieldwork should be pointed out.

In 1990-2000, the demand for religious education was observed among all age groups. People wanted to obtain sufficient knowledge for performing prayers and observing religious requirements. By the end of this period and in the next few years a trend of preparing a more or less qualified clergy was apparent and was evidenced by an increase in the youth enrollment at religious educational institutions in general and their enrollment in various religious schools abroad.

In recent years, two new trends emerged. First, the Muftiate in a more-or-less formal manner operates an extensive network of elementary schools (called madrasas) which teach religious and practical knowledge. Second, specialized

boarding school-type madrasas were created (which include courses in the Koran), acting both in the Muftiate and independently. Here, along with religious and ritual knowledge, young people receive some social skills (skills of behavior, language, culture, etc.).

In Adjara, education in madrasas, despite its name, is primary. They operate informally. Several of them offer very high quality training. The madrasas are funded by sponsors, the community and the central mosque (the latter two do not always appear in the list of the donors). However, there are alternative sources (including foreign) of funding. Education is free. Children are taught the theoretical and practical bases of religion. Classes consist mainly of a few desks, chairs and boards. Sometimes lessons take place in rooms with no furniture. Here are the words of one of the madrasa teachers:

> *"Here in the madrasas we teach, as well as pray. In the summer the education process is inactive, as people go to the mountains [to pasture cattle – R. B.] <...> here we learn how to read the Koran, how we should pray, as well as how we should behave. We teach the rituals of purification, older children learn the rituals associated to handling deceased persons. Although the contingent consists of mainly young children, and such things are also taught in the main madrasa[48] <...> we do not interfere with schools, we have weekend classes, so children learn here and there, in order not to hinder them <...> here we teach the Arabic language, the language of the Koran. In addition, we teach the Koran, all the books and such. The lessons we have here go like this: we ask a child, for example, to learn a prayer. When he is given the lesson, we will help him to read as it should be read. He goes home, then reads it by himself when he comes back. Another student may be given a different lesson. Some, for example, learn the alphabet, others learn reading. All sit together, but all learn different lessons. The lesson begins, for example, at 10:00 o'clock. I go to the madrasa and light a fire if it is cold. I wait for the kids to come. As soon as two or three children come, we start, and then others come. First I check, and then explain the new lesson. I start in the morning and finish in the evening. If there are 30 pupils in the class, lessons continue for 6-7 hours, and more <...> if students do not prepare their lessons properly, they have to do them again. We repeat again, and teach. We have*

---

[48] The madrasa operating in the central mosque of the community.

no penalties, no grading, though there is some assessment. If they didn't learn it, we tell them again to learn it. We encourage the student by giving grades, they think 'he has a five, and I can get one too'. If one has not learnt something, we do not say anything bad so as not to hurt him and so that he can continue learning <...> young people now want to learn a little, when I studied, married people were also attending schools and now, in the last three years, such people have not been coming".[49]

As it is evident from the words of the teacher, religious education plays an important role in the mountainous community. The reason that "married" people do not learn any more is related to the young age at which people tend to marry and the decrease of interest in the religious education. The latter may be caused by the spread of elementary knowledge among the population, but also, perhaps, by reduction of interest in religion. Education in the boarding school-type madrasas is guided by a formal program, covering both secular and religious subjects. There is a list of subjects and distribution of the lessons. Some secular subjects – Georgian language, history, mathematics, computers, etc. – are taught alongside with religious ones. Afterwards, the children go to regular schools. After they get home from regular secular school they pray, dine and prepare school lessons. In their free time, they mainly study religious subjects.

In the lowland villages the quality of the school education is higher. Students have significant prospects, which means it is not difficult for them to obtain higher education and to find some use for it. This determines the direction of secular education. Although the population was willing to enroll children in religious schools, there were none in operation in the 1990s. Children had very weak or no religious knowledge. The same can be said about the population as a whole.

As pointed out by a local madrasa teacher, earlier, in 2002-2004, when training was conducted, the Adjarian Ministry of Education issued an order to halt the training and demanded a list of all madrasa students and their dismissal from the school: "I had some problems. Then N. was the minister, he ordered us not teach religion to children".[50] Recently, religious schools, including board-

---

[49] Baramidze R., Diaries № 6. Khulo District (Ghorjomi), 2004, p. 121, pp. 125-127.

[50] Baramidze R., Diaries № 9, Khelvachauri District (Sharabidzeebi), 2004, p. 24. Similar observations were expressed by the imams of the mosques of other lowland communities (see Baramidze R., Diaries № 4, Batumi, 2004, pp. 1-5).

ing schools, started to operate in the lower-zone too. However, most of the pupils there have recently moved from the mountainous villages. This somewhat increases the overall interest in religion. The words of the imam in one of the lowland mosques express this trend precisely: "If it weren't for those of us who have moved from the mountainous communities, the namaz [prayer] would not be read here!" [51]

Today, the population views the issue of religious education with understanding, but the focus is on secular education. Poor knowledge of religion affects the performance of religious ceremonies. Some religious rituals are observed, though with major errors. So, in order to observe a ritual, people are forced to invite the clergy and pay them for their services. In the mountainous villages, charging fees for the performance of rituals is considered unacceptable. As most of the people know how to observe religious rituals, there is no need to summon other people to do so. In addition, the residents believe that it is the duty of every believer to help their neighbors in these matters. In the lowland communities, the amount and the form of payment for the religious rituals lead to an increasing distrust in the clergy.

Funding of religious institutions

Although the basic requirements associated with the mosque and the clergy that are placed on worshippers are not binding, there is a clear link between religiosity of a community and financing of its mosque. On the one hand, there is a difference in payment for religious services. The existence of the mosque depends on the commitments the community undertakes. For example, in one of the villages, where a madrasa operates, according to the local residents, previously there have been talks about the construction of a mosque: *"We have so many houses, and how we will not be able to afford to build a mosque?"* But later they decided that the construction of the mosque would require major financial resources so they decided to build a madrasa.[52] As one religiously-educated young man from Ghorjomi told us in an interview:

---

[51] Baramidze R., Diaries of the Census of the Mosques of Western Georgia № 1 (Kobuleti District), 2008.

[52] Baramidze R., Diaries № 5, Shuakhevi District (Chvana), 2004, p. 69.

> *"Who will bear the cost? This is the question, because here (...) Islam is not strong among the people: people do not know what Islam is. [It is necessary] to strengthen Islam among the people, so they can better know Islam (...), and so that the person knows it is necessary to pay religious tax on every revenue they have – saadaka,[53] or zakat,[54] or something else; how much to pay, whom to pay".[55]*

The role of the mosques in everyday life

As we know, the mosque is a Muslim religious building, but in Adjara instead of the term "mosque" the term "Jame" is used, which denotes a large, cathedral-type mosque.[56]

The mosques in Adjara can be classified as follows: the central mosque (Batumi Mosque-Center and the residence of the Mufti of the Muslim Spiritual Administration of Adjara), the central district mosque (the center of the district spiritual administration), the central community mosque and the rest of the mosques. Also, there are seasonal mosques associated with the semi-nomadic way of life in highlands. It should be noted that in some cases due to the remoteness of the mosque from the neighboring settlements, relevant temporary chapels are set up and prayers are read during Ramadan (in the homes of the believers).

Let us consider the role of the mosques in the daily lives of the two researched communities, and the social characteristics of their parishioners.

The social functions of the mosque

In Adjara, the mosque is used not only for religious purposes, but also for everyday affairs (for discussion of local issues, politics, economics, etc.). This feature characterizes the mosques in the Central Asia and Kazakhstan.[57] One example was when, in the complex political environment of February 1917, a

---

[53] Saadaka, voluntary charity – Islam, Collegiate Dictionary, Tbilisi, 1999 (in Georgian), p.165.

[54] Zakat is compulsory charity, a religious tax – Islam, Collegiate Dictionary, Tbilisi, 1999 (in Georgian), p. 64.

[55] Baramidze R., Diaries № 6, Khulo District (Ghorjomi), 2004, p. 3.

[56] Georgian Muslims in the Context of Modernity, Batumi, 2010 (in Georgian), pp. 391-395.

[57] Saidbaev T., Islam and Society (The Historical-Sociological Study), Moscow, 1984 (in Russian), p. 115.

patriotically-motivated part of the population convened a representative assembly in Batumi mosque and established the "Committee of Georgian Muslims" and held several meetings.[58]

During the recent election campaign I saw a political candidate meet residents, local clergy and specially invited imams in the courtyard of a mosque in a mountainous village.

It should be noted that in mountainous Adjara, more precisely in Jamikari,[59] the mosque is used as a place of gathering by the male population. They discuss community issues (repair of roads, various buildings, etc.) and engage in various kinds of general conversation. The local population participates in the discussion and the solution of various problems. According to the imam of the mosque:

"We are not talking about matters that are not useful for the village. Incidentally... the youth that does not attend services at the mosque often remind us – those who do go to mosque – that we are solving all issues. We tell them that we discuss issues such as cleaning canals and fixing roads. And they say – is this the business of the mosque? And we answer that soon the autumn will come, take the initiative in your hands, clean the cemetery yourself, independently. They do not like our proposal, but they themselves do not want to act, because the issue is solved by the mosques <...> However, people gathered in the mosque mostly talk about politics".[60]

In the mountains, the local population also uses the common community areas[61] for such gatherings, especially "shadrevani" (fountains) are used – a bathing place, also denoting a hexagonal building sometimes with a water supply. At shadrevanis, according to my findings, announcements are posted about the schedules for agricultural activities, grazing, livestock tracking, etc. This demonstrates an important social and symbolic role of certain buildings and places. Thus, by virtue of a specific culture, religion, and life, the mosque or a particular area becomes a special place that plays the role of social center.

---

[58] Meskhia E., From the History of the South-Western Georgia (Committee for the Liberation of Muslim Georgia), Batumi, 1997 (in Georgian), pp. 8-9.

[59] Land and buildings adjacent and related to the mosque, to its physical space.

[60] Baramidze R., Diaries of the Census of the Mosques of Western Georgia № 3 (Keda District), 2009.

[61] Mgeladze N., Tunadze T., From the History of the Construction of Mohammedan Places of Worship in Adjara (Khulo Jammeh) – The Caucasian Ethnological Collection, V. VII, Tbilisi, 2003 (in Georgian), p. 64.

As a demonstration of its special social role, mosques in Adjara are mainly located in the heart of the settlements. Very often, there is a local family or other kind of cemetery next to the mosque.[62] There are old cemeteries with Arabic inscriptions, which locals call a 'Hoja Cemetery'.[63] Graves of non-natives, who left a will to be buried here, can be found near some of the mosques (especially in the mountainous villages). These cemeteries were considered prestigious. In the lowland community I noticed such a grave near the local mosque belonging to a head priest of the mosque. Due to the complex history of the cemetery (in the Soviet period, it was demolished and rebuilt several times), I was unable to obtain accurate information. The graves in the mountains have "a Muslim appearance" and are not decorated.

Only the location of the head and the feet of the deceased (the head is directed to the west) are indicated. On the inscriptions only the names and the years of life and death are indicated. In the lowland, such graves are very rare. Most headstones there are richly decorated with marble, and with inscriptions and images of the deceased. Thus, this is an example of the influence of religious asceticism in the mountains and a tendency for extravagance[64] in the lowland.

The spatial organization of mosques and parishioners

Mosques in Adjara have a square layout. A mosque rather resembles a house, which is defined by the local construction tradition.[65] Mosques that are located in the mountainous part, are mostly wooden (old buildings stand on a foundation of carved stone and have stairs in front). As we know, mosques are built facing south (toward Mecca). This is also evident in the planning of ordinary residential houses in the mountainous part of Adjara.[66]

---

[62] For example, next to the mosque of Khulo there is a cemetery of an influential family, which is called the "graveyard of lords" – Mgeladze N., Tunadze T., From the History of the Construction of Mohammedan Places of Worship in Adjara (Khulo Jammeh) – The Caucasian Ethnological Collection, V. VII, Tbilisi, 2003 (in Georgian).

[63] Hoja – an educated spiritual figure.

[64] As noted by T. Veblen, F. Boas and especially by Bourdieu, with its special "practical" importance for "social capital" – Berk P., History and Social Theory, ed. with Eng. by N. Ladaria, Tbilisi, 2002 (in Georgian), pp. 77-80.

[65] Kakhidze N., Craft in Adjara (Historical and Ethnographic Research) – Life and Culture of South-Western Georgia, XVII Century, Georgia, 1990 (in Georgian), p. 74.

[66] The layout of buildings in upper Adjara is traditional and includes a rigid allocation of rooms and business units (See Mikeladze J., Housekeeping and Residential Buildings in Adjara, Batumi, 1982 (in Georgian). See also: Mgeladze N., Tunadze T., From the History of the Construction Moslem Places of Worship in Adjara (Khulo Jammeh) – The Caucasian Ethnological Collection, VII Century, Tbilisi, 2003 (in Georgian), p. 68.

It should be noted that in most cases the old mosques represent interesting, original and valuable objects of cultural and historical character. The southern parts of the prayer hall, the balcony and the pillars between floors, ceiling and doors are designed especially elaborately. Different variations of wood carving, drawing ornaments, plants and geometric patterns, painting, and mixed designs are used for this purpose. Often, together with the decoration, carvings of religious and moral or historical character (indicating the names of builders, the date of construction, imams, etc.) are featured.

Most of the mosques have two floors. If a building has a stone foundation, it is transformed into a floor, or mezzanine floor for economic purposes. It is provided with a place of ablution, a waiting room or an auxiliary space. The first floor consists mainly of a longitudinal corridor and most of the prayer hall. The second floor (more precisely the mezzanine) has a triangular shaped balcony, whose facade faces toward Mecca. It is designed for a large number of worshipers. As the inhabitants of the mountainous villages point out, on holidays and during daily prayers the number of worshipers here is very large (in Ghorjomi, on Fridays and on holidays prayers are attended by hundreds of believers). In the lowland, the number of the worshipers is fewer, but their number increases during the holidays (in Khelvachauri, Friday prayers are attended by an average of 10 to 50 believers, and on holiday prayers by hundreds or more).[67]

According to other informants, the second floor is designed for women. According to the mountain community, "women go to the mosque during Ramadan and the night prayer and assemble on the second floor, which is protected by a curtain".[68] Generally it is considered impermissible for a woman to pray in front of or next to a man, and if a man sees a woman during the prayer, the prayer is considered void. In Adjara, as in other parts of the region where Islam is spread, it is not acceptable for a woman to pray in a mosque. This is mainly explained by the fact that a woman is not considered to be "clean" (although each region has its own peculiarities). Therefore, some researchers consider the mosque to be "a male house"[69] and this opinion is confirmed by my findings on Adjara.[70] However, for certain rituals (mainly

[67] Baramidze R., Diaries of the Census of the Mosques of Western Georgia № 1-5 (Kobuleti, Khelvachauri, Keda, Shuakhevi and Khulo Districts), 2008-2009.

[68] Baramidze R., Diaries № 5, Shuakhevi District (Chvani), 2004, p. 11.

[69] Saidbaev T., Islam and Society (The Historical-Sociological Study), Moscow, 1984 (in Russian), p. 114.

[70] Baramidze R., Islam and Muslims in Adjara (Historical and Ethnological and Socio-Cultural Aspects), the PhD research paper in History (specialty Ethnology) – Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, Batumi, 2008, p. 192.

during funerals) women who can do everything "by the rules" are needed and the community takes this into account. For example, during an interview with a group of informants from the mountainous settlements, I raised this subject and received the following answer:

> "Women do not go to the mosque. In general, they have a right to pray at the mosque, but they pray at home. Nowadays, there are hoja women <...> a hoja woman cannot lead the prayer as an imam, this does not happen. If there is a man, he leads the prayer. Hoja women are mainly undertaking services for deceased persons. Women pray at home. At the start of prayer time, they stand up and pray".[71]

At the same time women are actively involved in the religious life at homes – prayers at home, Mavluda,[72] preparations for holidays, etc.

In the lowland communities, women do not attend prayers at the mosque, they rarely participate in public rituals, and their role is limited mostly to conducting rituals at home. This could be defined as a rigid distribution of gender roles in the ritual sphere.

In general, the division of the female and male roles is noticeable at first sight in mountainous Adjara.[73] Specific economic conditions determine a rigidly fixed distribution of female and male spheres, particularly when it comes to pasturing and cattle ranching.[74] In support of this assertion, I would like to give one of my observations characterizing the interaction of traditions, customs and religion. From my diary: "At home I spoke with the owner. During the conversation there was a knock on the door several times. I thought the owner was pretending not to notice because of me, so I said: *I think there is a knock on the door?'* To which he replied, *'If someone knocks, it's a woman, so my wife will open the door.' 'How do you know?'* I asked. *'If it was a man, he would have called me by name'.*[75]

Similar cases occur quite often. Comparison of these two features has once

---

[71] Baramidze R., Diaries № 6, Khulo District (Ghorjomi), 2004, p. 7.

[72] Mawlid, from Arabic "Mawlid" – "time of birth", "birth place". "Birthday of Muhammad celebrated in Georgia, in areas populated by Muslims, including in Adjara (so-called 'Reading of Mevlud')" – Islam, Collegiate Dictionary, Tbilisi, 1999 (in Georgian), p. 122.

[73] This is noted by a researcher T. Achugba, when referring to the organization of work and rules of relationships – Achugba T., The Family and Family Life in Adjara (The Historical and Ethnographic Research), Tbilisi, 1990 (in Georgian), pp. 73-98.

[74] See – Shamiladze W., Alpine Cattle-Breeding in Georgia (The Ethnographic Study of the Cattle-Breeding in Adjara), Tbilisi, 1969 (in Georgian).

[75] Baramidze R., Diaries № 6., Khulo District (Ghorjomi), 2004, p. 133.

again confirmed that the residents of mountainous villages are serious about "gender traditions". Similar facts are not observed in the lowland population.

Middle-age and elderly people predominate among the parishioners who quite earnestly adhere to all the rules. The high mosque attendance by elderly people I would attribute to the fact that they have a lot of free time. Often there are people among the parishioners, who, after reaching a certain age, for various reasons, "suddenly" begin to live according to religious laws. Many of them do not hide their "sins of the past", and this fact causes (especially in the lowland) distrust and, therefore, a lack of confidence in the religiosity of these people, and religion in general.

It should be noted that compared to the mountainous area, in the lowland the youth is less interested in religious topics. As one of the informants told me:

"...Our local youth no longer goes [to mosque]. Earlier, younger people were attending sermons at the mosque, though there were only a few of them. But little by little, in the areas where newcomers [people relocated from the mountain villages – R. B.] live, people are more interested and the youth is more involved. Locals are now too cool <...>,[76] no one goes to mosque".[77]

This statement allows us to evaluate the age structure of the believers, although recently the number of formally religious persons was found to have risen among all generations and age groups.[78]

Minaret: Relation to reading the azan

The minaret is among the most important parts of a mosque. A muezzin calls the believers to prayer from the minaret. In Adjara, minarets are not seen often; they are mainly found in mountainous villages. It is more common to see a modern-type tower with a sharp upper part of the mosque roof. Very often, minaret is equipped with an audio transmission device. In some cases, mainly in the lowland (for example, in the researched village), this device is installed directly on the roof. During my work in the mountainous community I observed a simultaneous call to prayer from different mosques, which created

---

[76] Obscene language used.

[77] Baramidze R., Diaries № 9, Khelvachauri District (Sharabidzeebi), 2004, p. 11.

[78] In recent years young people (among others those studying in the institutions at the madrasas) were added to the number of the middle-age and the elderly believers and as noted earlier the number of the parish at Friday prayers comprises approximately 50 worshipers – Baramidze R., Diaries of the Census of the Mosques of Western Georgia, № 1-5 (Kobuleti, Khelvachauri, Keda, Shuakhevi and Khulo Districts), 2008-2009.

powerful effect. Most local residents understand well the peculiarities of reading the azan, and its "performance".[79] They assess the voice, knowledge and experience of the muezzin. This is a distinguishing feature of the mountainous community. To date, in the mountainous communities, apart from the call to prayer other important announcements are transmitted from the minaret – information about the death of a resident of the community, the time of prayer for the dead and for the funeral.

The situation is different in the lowland community. Most of the population has grown unaccustomed to the ritual of azan. Only a part of the population reacts positively to the reading of the azan, while others view it with suspicion, skepticism, and some even with hostility. In this regard, there have been many conflicts between believers and other residents of the village. For example, residents raised with me the issue of the minaret and the attitude to the reading of the azan several times. In many lowland communities people protested the "noise" associated with the call to prayer. There were cases when an imperative call to end the "disturbance of the peace" was met with extreme responses. In a conversation with a person party to one such incident, I learned that he repeatedly demanded an end to "this", and since nothing was done, he "took steps", and in anger, took a gun and shot the audio device during the reading of the azan".[80]

A similar fact occurred with the Khelvachauri mosque. This is why the mosque did not have a minaret for a long time. The azan was read mostly during Friday prayers. The Imam of the mosque told me:

"Once there were such problems with reading the azan. There was one man who tried to hinder the reading of the azan, claiming that children were afraid <...> We have problems at night and in the morning, during the night and early morning readings, because we do not want anybody to get angry and say something. But we do read them. There are people who like it. Some people tell us we should only read during Ramadan <...> so that we know when to stop eating <...> and when to start eating. Many people want us to do so, but there are some people who complicate matters. More precisely, they say the azan frightens children, and they

---

[79] Azan – the call to prayer is delivered by a muezzin from the minaret and if there is no minaret, from the mosque. – Islam, Collegiate Dictionary, Tbilisi, 1999 (in Georgian), p. 15.

[80] It was not possible to record this story in detail, as the conversation had an informal nature. For obvious reasons, the names and the place of the incident are not given.

are also Muslims, just they cherish their sleep, they do not want us to disturb them while they sleep, and they themselves are Muslims and believers, but still it is difficult for them, and they ask us not to read in the morning and in the evening. We don't have other problems, but small difficulties have occurred. There was firing of a machine gun" [here he changes the subject of the conversation and moves to another topic – R. B.].[81]

Some believe that the problem is related to the lack of professionalism of the local muezzin:

"...The current one has no voice. The reading of the azan should make you to fall in love with it. In short, people have become divided against each other <...> we have to record the voice on a tape and that voice has to be pleasant <...> He does not have a voice, and look how he looks when he reads <...> get a normal one, and then we will see who comes here".[82]

Still, most locals do not accept the loud reading of the azan, believing that "a real believer should have a watch and use that to get orientated". All these indicate not only a loss of tradition, but also the unacceptability of "strange" rituals disrupting a daily life. From the examples it follows that the interactions of modern daily life with religion have different social consequences in the mountains (where they are interconnected), and in the lowland (where their interaction often leads to conflicts).

The Muslim clergy and ritual practices

Today there are two groups of clerics in Adjara. First are "traditionalists" (mostly older people). They were educated in the Soviet period, and therefore they correlate elements of religious restrictions typical of that period, with some modern ideas added in. They received additional education, mainly through literature and to a lesser extent at special training courses. This was manifested in the rituals they conducted. One young imam told me*:*

---

[81] Baramidze R., Diaries № 9, Khelvachauri District (Sharabidzeebi), 2004, pp. 17-18.

[82] Ibid, pp. 10-11.

"When I went to Turkey, I visited 10-15 places each day, as everyone wanted to see and to listen to a certain young imam. In fact, the old people talked about what they heard from him. It was clear that the old people were self-educated. They were not able to agitate, did not know what to say".[83]

Another group is the newer generation, who received their education in the late 1980s and during the 1990s. Along with practical skills these people possess theoretical knowledge, which gives more weight to their judgments. There are enthusiasts among them who oppose "traditional Islam" and are considered to be fighters for innovation and change, both in practice and in theory. An interesting fact is that those who wish to receive religious education come mainly from mountainous villages, so the original "innovations" took place either in the mountainous parts or through its people. Later, they focused more on the city and the lowland mosques.

Despite the significant spread of religious education, the majority of the Muslim clergy in Adjara have a low level of education, so, basically, they serve as imams, leading prayers. Only a small part of the clergy – mostly the management staff – is competent to lead the community. Several imams work simultaneously in larger mosques while in smaller mosques, several functions are performed by a single person (for example, the muezzin, the cashier, the guard, etc.). Apart from purely religious functions, the clergy also performs functions that are to one extent or another connected to Islam. According to A. Malashenko[84] this demonstrates the degree of "normalization of Islam" in a society. In the mountainous community imams are invited to attend various events, mostly because the inhabitants know and respect them; in the lowland this is done mainly out of necessity (as a rule to perform the ritual Mavluda). In general, we can say that the main activity of the clergy is the performance of rituals related to funerals, weddings and – to a lesser extent – birth and circumcision. Especially important is the fact that, in my observation, the clergy is also invited to address issues related to land, property, supernatural issues, and, occasionally, to address family problems.

In mountainous Adjara, due to the increased attention to religious and morality issues, additional functions are being added to the usual functions of the clergy (family, property and land issues), whereas in the lowland emphasis is placed on ritual practices. According to informant X:

---

[83] Baramidze R., Diaries № 9, Khelvachauri District (Sharabidzeebi), 2004, p. 27.

[84] Malashenko A., Two Dissimilarities of Islam – Notes of the Fatherland, № 5 (14), 2003 (in Russian), p. 59.

"There [in the mountainous villages – R. B.], there are far more elderly people and family ties are more influential. Therefore, there is more trust in the mosque. Here [in the lowland villages – R. B.] people are different, relatives live far away, so – what should I do? On the other hand, there all have the same religion, but here a person can be an Orthodox Christian, a Catholic, or even an atheist".[85]

It should be noted that religious life in the lowland is less diverse, and therefore the main ritual which is performed is the Mavluda, celebrating the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad. As indicated by the imam of the local mosque, in Adjara, this ritual is also performed on other days:

"There are days when they [clerics] are invited for readings or other events <...> so often that sometimes four hojas cannot cope. There are four hojas here. in addition, there are several self-taught ones, some families have educated people who read, but despite this, during the month of Mavluda we still cannot meet the demand. This is the main ritual which people observe".[86] Incidentally, in the mountainous part the ritual is mainly a religious burden, whereas in the lowland it is often perceived as a "household tradition".

Very often in the lowland people give only an emotional definition to rituals, and consider them "pious" and "blessed", things people are "recommended" to do. Mavluda or reading the Koran is usually carried out for the sick, dead, etc. Below I quote one record, which illustrates a fairly widespread attitude towards the rituals and the clergy in the lowland:

"A middle-age man entered the courtyard of the mosque smoking a cigarette. He greeted me and asked 'Do you work here?' 'No, but what's the matter?' 'Where are the hojas?' 'They're praying now <pause> and what's the matter?' 'No, I just wanted to take him for a reading of Mavluda.'

After a short pause I asked, 'What's going on, is everything all right, or you just want to read Mavluda?' 'Nothing special, just my sister died and today is her birthday. Neighbors, people have recommended that it is good to read it. So I came.'

'Are you waiting for someone in particular?'

'No, it does not matter, they are all the same to me.'

---

[85] Baramidze R., Diaries № 9, Khelvachauri District (Sharabidzeebi), 2004, p. 31.

[86] Ibid, p. 27, p. 35.

'It is clear, N. is not here now but the others will be.'

'Good.' – <After some time we returned to the conversation> 'In general, I do not trust hojas who start to pray and read after age 40. Earlier, he might have been a hooligan or a thief and then, after 40, he became a hoja. God will forgive me, he says. What will God forgive? Neither God nor others will forgive him! I had one case where I was in hospital and one of them [hoja] said he would buy medicine for me. He said it cost 25 lari[87] but I refused and said 'what, do I look like a beggar to you?' Then I thought: he didn't take it, didn't ask again, didn't insist. I then said 'buy it'. Then I asked him when he became a hoja. He said after he was 40. Then I said 'get out of here'.<…>.[88]

Sorry, I should not be talking like this here, but he got offended and left. So why did they come [to the faith] after 40 years. First they were robbing and causing trouble, then they became clerics, saying 'God will forgive us'. But even there [in the clergy] they want to make money and cause trouble".[89]

Obviously, the level of religiosity is directly symbolized by status of the clergy, the attitude towards the clergy and the ritualization of everyday life. It can be said that this moment is the most expressive and demonstrative feature characterizing the religious community.

---

[87] One lari is worth about 60 US cents.

[88] Obscene language used.

[89] This conversation was recorded later, but I tried to fully demonstrate its substance and style, as it represents a widespread view. Baramidze R., Diaries, Number 9A, Khelvachauri District (Sharabidzeebi), 2004, pp. 1-3.

Conclusion

Mosques play a special role in the daily lives of the local people. As we move from remote villages towards the city, the significance of a community's local mosque varies – in some places it is of vital importance and in others it is completely neglected. A determining factor in the propagation of religiosity is the number of people in certain settlements, or groups of villages. Under the influence of neighboring settlements, traditions disappear quickly in small settlements as bonds with a population of similar behaviors and lifestyles are broken. Some religious traditions are so closely linked with the everyday life of the mountainous village that they are considered an integral part of their own identity, and a departure from these rules creates some distance. In the lowland, the people relate to the mosque and religion because of their "practical usefulness", and if the mosque violates the usual rhythm of their life, the residents complain.

The clergy is divided into three groups – traditional (older and conservative), the younger generation (educated and innovative clergy) and a transitional group with features of both. In the mountainous community the clergy is very influential. In the lowland the relationship is confined to observing mandatory rituals. Due to the minimal religious education locally, the lowland population has to pay for religious services and rituals. Rituals are often performed haphazardly, or for demonstrative purposes. Performance of rituals is considered personal and as a pious deed in the mountainous villages.

The study demonstrated that, historically, Islam is largely influenced by local perceptions, culture and life. Distance from the city and weak communications contribute to the preservation of certain religious and community characteristics. On the other hand, when a community has frequent interaction with other cultures, especially with a city, there is a rapid transformation of traditional concepts and practices.

References:

1. APG (Archives of the President of Georgia), F.14, o.4, D.301.
2. TsGAA (Central State Archive of Adjara AR) F. p-1, D.77.
3. TsGAA, F.p-1, 38.
4. TsGAA, F.p-1, O.1, 10.
5. TsGAA, F.p-1, O.1, D.145.
6. TsGAA, F.p-1, O.1, D.353.
7. TsGAA, F.p-1, O.3, 54.
8. Adjara in Figures 2002: Statistical Yearbook, Batumi, 2003 (in Georgian).
9. Adjara in Figures 2003: Statistical Yearbook, Batumi, 2004 (in Georgian).
10. Achugba T., The Family and Family Life in Adjara (Historical and Ethnographic Research), Tbilisi, 1990 (in Georgian).
11. Andriashvili R., Dogma and Social Teachings of Islam, Tbilisi, 1984 (in Georgian).
12. Andriashvili R., Features of Modern Religious Thought of the Believer, Tbilisi, 1972 (in Georgian).
13. Andriashvili R., Opportunistic Tendencies of Muslim Clergy in Georgia – The process of Over-coming Religious Relics, Collection, Tbilisi, 1973 (in Georgian).
14. Andriashvili R., Remnants of Islam in Georgia, Tbilisi, 1983 (in Georgian).
15. Andriashvili R., The Muslim Household Tradition in Georgia and Ways to Overcome Them, Tbilisi, 1988 (in Georgian).
16. Baindurashvili H., Islam and Muslims in Tbilisi, XIX century – Nodar Shengelia, 75, Tbilisi, 2008 (in Georgian).
17. Bakradze D., Archaeological Journey in Guria and Adjara, Batumi, 1987 (in Georgian).
18. Baramidze R., Diaries № 3, Guria (Zoti), 2003.
19. Baramidze R., Diaries № 4, № 7, № 10, Batumi, 2004.
20. Baramidze R., Diaries № 5, Shuakhevi District (Chvani), 2004.
21. Baramidze R., Diaries № 6, Khulo District (Ghorjomi), 2004.
22. Baramidze R., Diaries № № 9B-9AB, № 9B, Khelvachauri District (Sharabidzeebi), 2004.
23. Baramidze R., Field Diary of the Census of the Mosques of Western Georgia № 1-5 (Kobuleti, Khelvachauri, Keda, Shuakhevi and Khulo Districts), 2008-2009.
24. Baramidze R., Islam and Muslims in Adjara (Historical and Ethnological and Socio-Cultural Aspects). The PhD Research Paper in History (Specialty Ethnology) – Shota Rustaveli State University, Batumi, 2008.
25. Batumi and Its Surroundings, Batumi, 1906.
26. Bourdieu P., Sociology of the Policies: Translation from French, compilation, editing and fore-word N. A. Shmatko, Moscow, 1993 (in Russian).
27. Bromley J., Essays on the Theory of Ethnos, Moscow, 1983 (in Russian).
28. Burke P., History and Social Theory ed. in Eng. by N. Ladaria, Tbilisi, 2002 (in Georgian).
29. Chitaia G., Method and Principles of Ethnographic Fieldwork – Works, Volume III, Tbilisi, 2001 (in Georgian).
30. Chitaia G., Method of Ethnographic Fieldwork – Works, Volume IV, Tbilisi, 2001 (in Georgian).
31. Dumbadze S., Indignities of the Soviet Power – Historical Journal, XI Collection, Batumi (in Georgian).
32. Emelyanova A. N., Muslims of Kabardia, Moscow, 1999 (in Russian).

33. Gugutishvili M., New Soviet Tradition in Georgia, PhD Thesis in History – State Museum of the Academy of Sciences GSPC, Tbilisi, 1972 (in Georgian).
34. Islam, The Collegiate Dictionary, Tbilisi, 1999 (in Georgian).
35. Kakhidze N., Craft in Adjara (Historical and Ethnographic Research) – Life and Culture of South-Western Georgia, XVII Century, Georgia, 1990 (in Georgian).
36. Kazbek, the Military-Statistical and Strategic Essays of Laz Sagdzhak, Tiflis, 1876.
37. Khaindrava I., Religion in Georgia: XXI century – Religion and Politics in the Caucasus. Materials of the international conference, ed. A. Iskandaryan – Yerevan, 2004.
38. Malashenko A., Islamic Revival in Contemporary Russia – Notes of the Fatherland, № 5 (14), 2003.
39. Malashenko A., Two Dissimilarities of Islam – Notes of the Fatherland, № 5 (14), 2003.
40. Melikishvili L., Harchilava M., Scientists in the Area of the Latent Conflict, Tbilisi, 2003 (in Georgian).
41. Meskhia E., From the History of South-Western Georgia (Committee for the Liberation of Muslim Georgia), Batumi, 1997 (in Georgian).
42. Mgeladze N., The Cult of the Deceased and the Funeral Ritual in Adjara – Proceedings BSU, IV (A Series of Humanities), Batumi, 2002 (in Georgian).
43. Mgeladze N., Tunadze T., From the History of the Construction of the Muslem Places of Worship in Adjara (Khulo Jammeh) – The Caucasian Ethnological Collection, V. VII, Tbilisi, 2003 (in Georgian).
44. Mgeladze V., From the Structure of Settlements in the Village Darchidzeebi – Works of the Batumi Research Institute, V. II, 1962 (in Georgian).
45. Mikeladze J., Housekeeping and Residential Buildings in Adjara, Batumi, 1982 (in Georgian)
46. Mikhailov G., Islam in Russia, – Notes of the Fatherland, № 5 (14), 2003.
47. Natmeladze M., Demographic Processes in Georgia in 40's of the 20th century (The Deportation of the Turks and Other Groups from Georgia in 1941-1945), Tbilisi, 1993 (in Georgian).
48. Papuashvili N., Via Dolorosa Religious Education in Georgia, Tavisupleba (Freedom), № 9 (33), 2004 (in Georgian).
49. Papuashvili N., Zakareishvili P., Not Do What You Do Not Want to Be Done to Us, Zghvari (Edge), № 2 (4), 2004 (in Georgian).
50. Saidbaev T., Islam and Society (The Historical – Sociological Study), Moscow, 1984.
51. Sanikidze G., Islam and Muslims in Modern Georgia, Tbilisi, 1999 (in Georgian).
52. Sanikidze G., Walker E., Islam and Islamic Practices in Georgia, University of California, Berkeley, 2004.
53. Shamiladze W., Alpine Cattle-Breeding in Georgia (An Ethnographic Study of Cattle-Breeding in Adjara), Tbilisi, 1969 (in Georgian).
54. Shashikadze Z., Ottoman Taxes in Adjara – Batumi State University Works, IV, Batumi, 2002 (in Georgian).
55. Shashikadze Z., Two Important Documents from the History of XVI century Adjara – Collection of SIC after M. Abashidze, BSU, III, Batumi, 2002 (in Georgian).
56. Sichinadze B., History of Batumi, Batumi, 1958.
57. Situation about the Administration of the Transcaucasian Muslim Clergy of Sunnite Doctrine, 5 April 1872.
58. The Georgian Muslims in the Context of Modernity, Batumi, 2010 (in Georgian).

TO BE KIST: BETWEEN GEORGIAN AND CHECHEN

Ia Tsulaia

Some 15 years ago the majority of Georgians knew Kists only from the poetry of Vazha-Pshavela (1861-1915, Georgian poet and writer). Nowadays few Georgians have any idea who the courageous foes of the Georgian highlanders were. But the 2002 Pankisi crisis made Kists – a people lost in the distant valley of Kakheti, "half-Georgians – half-Chechens" living in the Akhmeta area over the past two centuries – famous. The Kists number about 5,000. Living conditions in the valley are rather difficult: the soil is infertile, and the population is engaged mainly in cattle-breeding and sheep-herding. At the time of my study the population of the valley was receiving humanitarian aid. The community lives in poverty, but their solidarity and willingness to help each other is quite strong.

The aim of my research is to determine what happened to Kist identity under the influence of the radical social changes in Georgia over the past two decades. My observations were conducted in the Pankisi Gorge by speaking with local residents and recording biographical interviews. The issue of ethnicity spontaneously popped up in almost every conversation. There was no doubt that the issue of ethnicity was urgent.

Representatives of various ethnic groups – Kists, Ossetians, Georgian regional groups (Pshavi, Tsova-Tush and Kakhetians) – live together in the Pankisi Gorge. The main differences between Kists and the other ethnic groups are language and religious affiliation. In the Soviet era the Kists, a part of the Vaynakh ethnic group, were well integrated into Georgian society and were able to speak the Georgian language; mixed marriages were also frequent.

Significant changes have occurred since the beginning of the second war in Chechnya in 1999, when Chechen refugees flooded into Pankisi. Their number reached 7,000 people – and they accounted for 85% of the gorge's population. (In 2009 there were only 992 refugees left in the Pankisi Gorge). Increased focus of the local population on the Chechens gradually distanced the Kist population from Georgians and activated historically conditioned stereotypical

attitudes towards Kists from the side of the Georgian population. These mutual identification processes have contributed to the desires of certain states which were aiming to increase their influence in the region.

Ethnicity is constructed on the elements that strengthen the community: culture, historical experience, concept of a common origin. All these concepts are ambiguous from a scientific point of view, but in the minds of people they are objective concepts and therefore have real consequences. Drawing on the work of Max Weber,[1] representatives of the constructivist approach stress the importance of shared faith of the society in a common origin.

Researchers, starting with Frederick Barth, highlight the importance of the function and meaning, rather than the existence of cultural traits.

Consequently, what's decisive here is the interaction that defines the rules for attributing a certain ethnicity to oneself or someone else. It is not important whether certain attributes exist "in reality" but rather whether the actors consider them to be important and meaningful.

Collective identity, developed in the institutional cores, is based on the so-called "ethnic code". "This refers to the cognitive and normative frameworks, [...] which should serve as a general guide. Ethnic coding – the process of combining defined as 'ethnic' group features, [...] that, increasing the value of each other, represent a total ethnic integrity".[2] These provisions are the central theoretical assumptions used to explain the results of my research.

During the interviews the supporting concepts that shape identity were observed. I tried to point out the main themes that emerged in conversations with informants, and which were associated with the transformation of Kist identity. I also considered the dynamics of identity and the factors affecting the integration of the Kists into Georgian society.

For the analysis 10 interviews – five with females and five with males – were conducted.The selection process of the informants was conducted through contact persons trusted by the informants; this was important both in terms of the current political situation and cultural specificity. The age of the informants ranged between 25 and 58 years; social status and educational level also varied among the interviewees. In addition to interviews and observations, I

---

[1] Quote from: Voronkov V., Oswald I., The Post-Soviet Ethnicity // Constructing Ethnicity / ed. V. Voronkov and I. Oswald, St. Petersburg, 1998, p. 11.

[2] Voronkov V., Oswald I., mentioned, p. 18.

examined the materials of various researches conducted in this area[3] at differ-ent periods of time.

The Kist identity crisis: Forward to the past
Factors of migration

The study showed that preservation of the Kist identity today is consid-ered to be in doubt. For two centuries the Kists lived in the small territory of the Pankisi Gorge. Being a fairly closed community, they maintained their tra-ditions and followed their old customs. Soviet passports indicated their eth-nicity as "Kist" though their family names typically had Georgian endings. In 1970, when the economic situation in the region worsened, the population of the Pankisi Gorge (including Georgians) began to look for the job opportunities elsewhere and migrated for work to Chechnya and Ingushetia – the regions that at that time had a lot of well-paid job opportunities. Still, until the 1990's labour migration was rather low.

Migrant Kists have easily integrated into kinship Vaynakh society, and in the Pankisi Gorge information about their common roots and language has begun to spread, albeit only in the form of rumours. In the 1990's labour migration to Chechnya intensified. Despite the surnames with Georgian endings, the simi-larities to the Vaynakh community became more and more important.

Most of my informants also migrated for work to Chechnya and Ingushetia. They brought new information into the gorge: *"I learned from my father [about Kists' Chechen roots]. My father worked in a store and often travelled to Chech-nya. After these visits, he told me about them, about the Chechens – who they are and how they live. We had more in common with Georgians than with Chechens, and I was not too interested. I've heard all about it but have never seen it with my own eyes"* (Tariel, 25 years old).

During this period information about the "common origin" had no effect on the Kist identity. Similarly, another informant said: *"We considered ourselves Kists, we knew that we were Muslims, knew that Chechens lived somewhere, the*

---

[3] Pankisi Crisis, ed. A. Melikishvili, Tbilisi, 2002. Margoshvili L., Traditions of the Pankisi Kists and the Modernity, Metsniereba, Tbilisi, 1985.

elders knew it but nobody knew where this place was. There were people who went over there and came back. Almost 200 people have been there; these were like rumours" (Nana, 37 years old).

However, with the increasing tendency of migration from the gorge the situation has radically changed. As Nana explains: *"Today everyone knows that they are Chechens, that their homeland is Chechnya. It was not like that before. After migration [to Chechnya], having lived there, people were convinced that they were really Chechens. People have been aware of it for almost 15-20 years; for example I did not know that [before]"*.

In addition to migration, which caused significant changes in the self-perception of Kists, an important impact was the settlement of Chechen refugees in the gorge. The appearance of Chechens in the Pankisi Gorge has caused a crisis for the Kist identity. Here are some representative statements:

"[I don't know what would have happened] if the Chechens had not come – Kists were already losing their religion; they had already become 90% Georgian" (Nodar, 30 years old).

"When they came, the Chechens, [everyone] looked at them and [as a result] some things started to change" (Jamlet, 54 years old).

"We – Kists and Chechens – are one nation, my roots come from there, but I grew up in Georgia. I know that I am Chechen, [but] I'm not distinguishing – sometimes I consider myself Georgian" (Nana, 37 years old).

"I knew that I was Kist; like the Mingrelians and Svans that are in Georgia, I thought of myself as being like them. When I grew older I learned that we originate from the Chechens. I was a little disappointed because I thought that I was Georgian, and when I learned that I am the son of another nation, it was strange... Then I gradually became convinced" (Tariel, 25 years old).

However, Tariel soon came to view his Chechen identity in a positive way: *"Now [that I know I'm Chechen] it is first and foremost the pride. Despite the difficulties, they still continue to struggle for the independence of their homeland"*. The term "Kist" for Tariel is redefined: in the past he believed that Kists were Georgians, now: *"I am Kist, but I feel like I am Chechen; the Kists are part of Chechens, as Mingrelians are for Georgia"*. The apparent contradiction of

a dual identity finds its resolution: the recognition of Chechen origin does not prevent the preservation of the Kist identity as a unique and autonomous one.

It should be underlined that the Kist identity, which over the past two centuries was never questioned by the local population, in fact is recognized neither by Chechens nor by Georgians.

> *"We are in such a trouble! When we are there (in Chechnya) we are called Georgians, but here in Georgia they call us Chechens. We are accepted neither there nor here. And we are Kists" (Jamlet, 54 years old).*
>
> *"You are Georgians; then, if we are Georgians then you are – Russians, I tell them" (Giorgi, 58 years old).*
>
> *"So what if I am a Kist: I am a citizen of Georgia and I'm Kist, I'm part of them" (Nodar, 30 years old).*

Georgian society consider the Kists to be Chechens: *"In Tbilisi, everyone knows that Kists are Chechens. When I am introduced to a friend or a companion, they always say that I am Chechen"* (Tariel, 25 years old).

It can be said that Kists face a dilemma: on the one hand Georgians are pushing them towards Chechen identity and their own idealization of Chechens, and on the other hand – non-recognition of Kists as "their own" by the Chechens. In addition, there are contradictions of ethnic self-identification among different generations of Kists. The older generation tries to preserve the Kist autonomy, turning a blind eye to new circumstances; the new generation that has grown up in a "Chechen atmosphere" in Pankisi and consider themselves to be Chechens. Amid these contradictory circumstances the Kist community establishes its own image of "pure, original Chechens" that will be discussed in the next chapters.

Inventing historical memory

The question of the origin of the Kists is discussed variously in different families. For example, Tariel's family has never discussed this issue. 37-year-old Nana also says: *"There were not many discussions about Chechnya in my family. Maybe it's our parents' fault, perhaps in other families there were conversations on this; for example, there are families where they have a detailed*

knowledge about their roots; I know that too now, but only after I myself got interested in it; everyone is interested in their ancestors".

A different situation was reported in another family: *"I always knew that I was a Chechen woman; everyone knew it in my family"* (Leila, 40 years old). In contrast to Leila's family, which is not different from others in terms of social contacts with Chechnya, the majority of residents of Pankisi had a vague idea about their origin. According to Nana, *"in the past most Kists did not know that they were Chechens; they did not know where Chechnya was. The faith then was not as strong as now. Now they are more entrenched; it happened after people began to travel there (to Chechnya); everyone saw that they speak the same language"*. After she learned that the Kists are of Chechen origin, Nana began to gather information about her ancestors and found that *"three brothers, our ancestors, moved here because of a vendetta. It happened long ago. From these three brothers one was Hirga and in Kist we are called Hirgashvili. We ourselves are from X. and we are therefore named after that place. This area is in Chechnya, in the mountains"* (Nana, 37 years old).

Another informant, Nazi, talks about the history of her family: *"My father is of Chechen origin. My grandfather came here once to visit his wife's relatives; when they started to kick out Chechens, he escaped by chance – his wife's relatives here gave him a Kist surname"* (Nazi, 28 years old).

The informant was familiar with Chechens and, unlike other Pankisi inhabitants, she has not considered Chechens as something exotic; but, despite this (or perhaps because of this), she clearly defines Chechens and the Kists separately. In other words, in her family Kists and Chechens were identified as two different groups.

Jamlet, who firmly defends unique Kist identity, describes the origin of Kists as follows: *"It turns out that long before everyone was called Kists – the Chechens and the Ingush. And even before that we were called 'dzurdzuki'. After that the Chechens and the Ingush separated; and over 200 years ago we also left. Some of them moved to Chechnya; I also moved there in 1980s; many Chechens didn't even know about the existence of Kists"* (Jamlet, 54 years old).

This version coincides with the opinion of the most historians. At the time when Kists settled in the Pankisi Gorge, there was no strict separation (especially administrative) of them among the Vaynakh tribes. And Georgians called all of them "Kists". In presenting this version, the informant stresses his Vay-

nakh origin, but does not focus on Kists' Chechen origin and so emphasizes his Kist identity.

Interestingly, in most families of my informants there was a lack of information regarding their origins, although nowadays all are more or less informed about the Chechen roots of Kists.They often say "now I'm confident that I'm Chechen" but no one can substantiate their own Chechen origin in detail. It is even more interesting that the population of the Pankisi Gorge leaves to earn money and work to Ingushetia, people they share lots of similarities with as well. However the Kists have firmly "chosen" Chechens as their ancestors.

"This is my homeland"

For the Pankisi Kists the sense of homeland is very important. They believe that by origin they are Chechens but their homeland is Georgia. Even though many Kists moved from the Pankisi Gorge to Chechnya, most of them have kept their homes in Georgia. Their migration to Chechnya Kists attribute solely to the economic motives. *"I was born here in Dzhokolo, and grew up here, this is my homeland. I graduated from a Georgian school. A lot connects me to Georgia. I moved to Chechnya later, in 1997, before the war began. After the war, I returned.... If there had been normal living conditions, who would have left? Everyone wants to be close to home with his family"* (Tariel, 25 years old).

Tariel considers Georgia to be the most comfortable place for him to live as he received a Georgian education and the Pankisi environment is most natural for him. Therefore, in future he would like to live in Georgia: *"I would like to live here. Even if it is very difficult, I want to live here."*

All of my informants, without exception, have their justifications when talking about their migration from the Pankisi Gorge. Like Tariel, another informant states: *"Wherever I go, even I have money or housing, I still prefer (to live) here, where I was born and raised. Only for the sake of children did I leave for Grozny"* (Giorgi, 58 years old).

Another old gentleman says: *"I would not go away from here. I was born here, grew up here, got used to everything, it is my homeland. Maybe I would go over there, but would not stay there to live if the conditions were good here.*

You can stay there for years, buy 10 houses but I would not wish anyone to leave their place of origin; the place where our fathers and grandfathers were born and raised and where we had a wonderful childhood" (Ilia, 58 years old).

The notion of "homeland" is very important for the Kists. This distinguishes them from Chechens, for whom the prospect of returning to their homes is ruled out in the near future. My interviewees underline that the homeland – Georgia – is not just a place to live. The relationships with the Georgian population, self-assertion in Georgian society are very important issues for them. *"From school, from college I have many Georgian friends here. In fact, I do not know Chechens well [their nature, spirit]; I was brought up as a Georgian and I love Georgia... By the way, I am proud that I was born in Georgia. I graduated from the Georgian school; it influences me a lot, I love Georgia",* says the 37-year-old Nana, whose first husband was Georgian.

During the interviews many tried to express their patriotism. According to Nana: *"If certain tensions occur and someone says 'to pick one [side]', I will not be able to choose any side, to sacrifice someone. Of my two children, one has a Georgian father and the other – a Chechen father".* Nana's family clearly reflects the duality of the Kist community and their devotion to both historical and the real homelands. *"The Kist will never be against Georgia. The Kist authority is unfortunately undermined and it is a shame; Kists will never betray Georgia. It was not so 10 years ago"* (Nodar, 30 years old).

The topic of "betrayal" occurs repeatedly. The Kists are in a way apologizing for the fact that they "are not quite Georgians" and might be suspected of disloyalty. They look for evidence of their devotion to Georgia in history. They mention comparatively recent period associated with the rise of the national movement in Georgia; during the struggle for the independence from the Soviet Union, Georgia and Chechnya were allies. It was a period when the Pankisi population of Chechen origin felt themselves included in the political process (the arrival of the leader of Ingushetia to Georgia, Chechen representatives, declaration of the independence of Chechnya at the parliament session in Grozny). The Kists also remember that much earlier, in 1924, they supported a Georgian anti-Bolshevik rebellion under the leadership of the heroic Georgian figure Kakutsa Cholokashvili (there existed a plan to include people from mountainous regions, in particular the Chechens, in the uprising).

Episodes of joint action of Georgians and Chechens had a great influence on

the attitudes of some of my informants. One of them, Nodar, says: *"My dream today is to do something good. The brother of my grandfather was Kakutsa Cholokashvili's comrade-in-arms. I wanted to visit Kakutsa's grave in France; I often thought about it. After all, during Zviad [Gamsakhurdia, Georgia's first president], Kakutsa was declared a national hero. Before that [during the Soviet period] of course the brother of my grandfather was considered as a robber; and then he was declared as the national fighter. I felt very proud that my ancestor was declared a national fighter"* (Nodar, 30 years old).

Nodar has always actively participated in public rallies, starting from the events in Tbilisi on April 9th (a protest rally demanding the restoration of Georgia's independence that was brutally broken up by Soviet troops) and ending with the "Rose Revolution" in 2003. Today, like Tariel he also connects his future with Georgia: *"If Georgia is happy, then the Pankisi Gorge will be happy too, because it is Georgia. I do not like when someone says – 'you are Kisti and he's Georgian'; I am a citizen of Georgia".*

Transformation of Kist identity: Old and new "The most Vaynakh of the Vaynakhs?"

As already mentioned, the evolution of the notion of identity in the Kist community is quite complicated. Elder Kists defend the old identity of Kists. The young have been more influenced by the on-going changes in society. The generations have been divided. This has led to discussions on the ethnic differences between Kists and Chechens in private conversations of Kists as well as among Georgians. However, Kists were more readily affiliated with Chechens in the centre of the Kist community than was the case elsewhere in Kakheti, the Georgian province where the Kist community is located. During the conversation those who consider themselves Kists try to emphasize properties that are considered as "Kistian"; they describe their community in comparison to the Chechen community.

"There are similarities and differences in many respects. Kists here grew up in a different atmosphere, and Chechens grew up in a completely different situation. Among us there are not so many cases of betrayal and denuncia-

tion as among Chechens; they are 100 times more than us, we are a small nation… There are also lots of good people among the Chechens. We are a small nation, we are close to each other, we support and help each other. Aren't there bad people among us? Of course there are. The similarity is that we have one language, one religion, old rules and traditions that are almost the same, that do not differ really. But Chechens do not have as many distinctions according to our father's (traditions and rules) as here" (Jamlet, 54 years old). These kinds of impressions and views are quite typical for the inhabitants of the Pankisi Gorge.

Kists underline that their community is more united than the Chechens, a sentiment Chechen refugees tend to agree with. The strong cohesion of the Kist community on the one hand is due to the rules of traditions, and on the other – to their number and apparent differences from the other inhabitants of the Pankisi Gorge. Because Kists especially support each other, their labour migration was very effective since those who left for work and settled soon took their brothers, sisters and other relatives with them. But this is also exactly the reason why Kists are not able to form a community; for example, they cannot convict a member of the community for any misconduct as it might be someone's family member, might affect someone's interests and might provoke a fatal reaction.

Kists are constantly trying to emphasize that they are not second class Chechens, quite the contrary: it is exactly their community that maintains in its purest form the core values and character traits of the Vaynakh. Kists refute Chechen claims that Kists supposedly have assimilated into Georgian society, and emphasize that they have preserved the main Vaynakh values much better than the other peoples of the same roots (Chechens and Ingush); and the influence of Georgians is mainly expressed in their *"hospitality, food and freedom"* (Giorgi, 58 years old).

One of the strongest arguments for their superiority over the Chechens, Kists say, is the way they have preserved their language in the gorge. Despite the fact that Kists received schooling in the Georgian language and had no opportunity anywhere to learn Kist, they preserved their language, in contrast to Chechens and Ingush, who spoke mostly Russian. This applies particularly to urban residents. *"In the cities they mainly speak the Russian language. We can speak Georgian [as well as the native language]. They*

cannot – half of them speak Russian. I think they do not know their language well" (Ilia, 40 years old).

"We speak the Kist language rarely mixing it with Georgian. They (Chechens) speak mostly Russian language" (Giorgi, 58 years old). Informants emphasize that Chechens not only cannot speak their native language, but even if they know it, the language has long lost its purity: *"As we speak, this Kist language is an ancient language. Sometimes we add Georgian words, but we can fully speak pure Kist as well. Sometimes because of this there were some problems; for example, when we started to speak our language – they [Chechens] could not understand us, they looked at us surprised; they do not know their language, they let their native language drift away. I'm sorry but they do not care"* (Ilia, 40 years old).

At present there is an evidence of some tensions between Chechen and Kists, as the emergence of the refugees in a small area of the Pankisi Gorge has caused many inconveniences in everyday life, and worsened the crime situation. It appears that coexistence with Chechens has significantly altered the idealized image of Chechens that many Kists had prior to the refugees' arrival: *"After the war, many things changed. Many people showed their real face. If suddenly some misfortune happens to you, then you know what the reaction will be around you, where the people will run. After the arrival of Chechens lots of things changed; many young people changed in their own way, many changed for good, many learned something. This is life. The good must be learned; we don't need the bad"* (Jamlet, 54 years old).

At the same time, it is obvious that Chechens are being blamed for the generational conflict and reduced influence of elder Kists. Chechens are being blamed for the changes and strife that are influencing the order of Kist community.

Adat: "Custom above religion"

The institution of "adat" (rule, tradition) plays a huge role in the Kist society as it still governs the lives of members of this community. Observance of these customs is considered to be a core value for Kists; it preserves the collective

identity of Kists.[4] The aim of recent years' events in the Pankisi Gorge is to bring changes exactly in this direction; and they have been painful for the majority of the Kist community. Typically, adat took precedence over religion. The growth of religious sentiment and the interference of religion into everyday life jeopardized the dominant role of adat. That is why advocates of adat perceive the spread of Wahhabism as a danger affecting the younger generation, which is becoming more and more religious.

Kists are very committed to their traditions. Informants emphasize that this is one of the indicators of Kists' superiority over Chechens: *"The traditions and customs we both have are Islamic, but the education and adat are more entrenched among us. Our people have not forgotten the rules"* (Giorgi, 58 years old). *"Adat is the rules we have in the foreground"* (Ilia, 58 years old). However, it must be said that the degree of practicing Adat varies from family to family. The families that were more open to the Georgian community were relatively less observant of customs: *"[In our family] there were some customs, but there was also a big influence from Georgians. The tradition of seniority was more or less respected in the family; our people always had this tradition"* (Tariel, 25 years old).

After the arrival of Chechens, the adat traditions that were more close to Georgian customs have gradually lost their strength. According to one informant, earlier they worshiped at shrines ("khatoba"), like Georgians: *"People came, brought gifts, had fun. After the emergence of Chechens this tradition has disappeared. Only few are left that go there"* (Tariel, 25 years old). According to another informant, the main traditions are still well preserved: *"These are still Kist adats: if an elder enters a room, everyone must rise to their feet. If someone has troubles or is sick, all the relatives should help; all collect money to help"* (Nodar, 30 years old).

It must be emphasized that when judging crimes Adat completely contravenes the administrative and legal principles of the state. *"The police will never come if they know that we are judging the case. If we are not able to settle it only then do the police interfere"* (Jamlet, 54 years old).

"Analysis of good and bad mainly occurs in accordance with adat; if there is a complicated situation or there has been a theft or a murder, they try not ap-

---

[4] Shubitidze V., Security and Ability of Adjustment of Ethnical Culture to the New Social-Economic Environment Pankisi Crisis, Tbilisi, 2002, pp. 87-88.

peal to court because no one wants to go to jail. Even if you leave the gorge, still years later they will judge the case according to adat" (Ilia, 58 years old).

Adat particularly strictly controls the private sphere, which causes frustration among young people: *"To practice the Adat of the community is good against thieves and criminals, but what about others? If, say, the family is to split up, it is the business of the husband and wife. Why should this problem be solved by the community? Here it is considered shameful if one appeals to the court. I, for example, am against it. If I divorce my wife the court must decide what share of the property belongs to her and not someone in this valley, who does not know what two plus two equals"* (Nodar, 30 years old).

Adat creates a vicious cycle in society; adat is responsible for strengthening the criminal elements in the Pankisi Gorge and represents an obstacle to the development of civil society, explains Nodar, who is considered as Wahhabi in the gorge: *"Yes, adat, adat! Adat is good but which century is now? We ought to do more; adat is good and we should respect it, but adat is not always enough. Let's say someone broke something and said it to the village gamgebeli [head of administration]. The elders again start to consider the case. If I am a citizen of Georgia I must in fact be judged according to Georgian legislation. Citizens should not be afraid to tell the truth in order to identify a criminal"* (Nodar, 30 years old).

The informant considers the religious youth to be the progressive part of the society and recounts the following episode: *"We, the young people, always wanted that, but they always have disrupted us in restoring order. For example, in 2002 more than one kilogram of drugs was found at the place of X. When young people wanted to destroy the drugs, the police and elders did not allow it. They wanted to do it themselves. Fortunately, the young have not obeyed and have thrown 1 kg and 650 g of drugs into Alazani (river) in front of the people"*. According Nodar, the institution of elders/seniors contributes to the patronage of crime and corruption.

Religion: The phenomenon of Wahhabism

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in the post-Soviet states there has been a tendency for the role of religion to increase in society. Kists are Muslims. The Sufism that existed in the North Caucasus was well coordinated with the local customs, traditions, and therefore in the regulation of the social life the Adat had

a greater impact than formal religious institutions. This is particularly apparent in the Kist community, which for a long time was separated from the Muslim world and Islam was represented here rather nominally.[5] A similar situation was in Chechnya, although it has changed radically since the first Chechen war. The war had a strong influence on the mass proselytizing of more conservative brands of Islam. These included the Kists who have left the gorge and returned home with the new religious ideas. The increased religiousness of the Kists was also due to the emergence of Chechen refugees in the gorge and the activities of many religious preachers, who came to Pankisi from Arab countries. Many young people from Pankisi later went to Muslim countries to get a religious education.[6]

The degree of religiosity of the community has increased dramatically in recent years. *"It is approximately 3-4 years since the influence of religion has massively increased. A person has to be religious"* (Tariel, 25 years old). *"Now it has been several years since I have had a drink. I have been praying and not drinking for 23 years"* states another informant (Giorgi, 58 years old).

Nodar also speaks about the influence of Chechens on the rapid dissemination of religion: *"60-70% of the population, including women and children, are religious. When the war began Chechens came here and also the Kists living in Chechnya returned. After this people started to become religious, people began to pray; both factors played a role – Islam and the Chechens. Until 2000 I did not know what it meant to be religious; I knew that I was Muslim but so what. . . Since 2000 I pray. Nobody prayed in my family, now we all pray. There are no such families anymore that don't have at least 2-3 family members praying"* (Nodar, 30 years old).

Nodar considers his turn towards religion as the most significant event of his life: *"So far I have not done anything, so it can be seen; absolutely nothing has changed in my life. But one important thing has happened – religion entered my life. When I was young I did not know what the religion was; I just thought about democracy".*

He considers the dissemination of religion to be the solution to the problems of crime and drug addiction. According to him, drugs began to spread in the valley before the arrival of Chechens; they found the dead young people (including girls) on a daily basis. But the spread of religion in the gorge greatly improved

---

[5] Chikovani G., Structural Changes of the Settlements, Conflict Situations and Traditional Mechanisms of their Regulation // Pankisi Crisis. Tbilisi, 2002, p. 131.

[6] Akayev V., Religious-Political the Conflict in Chechen Republic of Ichkeria // Central Asia and Caucasus, 1999, No.4 (5), p. 107.

the situation: *"It is so good that the religion has entered our community; the faith helped many addicts to get better, they were forced to quit drugs. They shut themselves in the mosque and recited prayers. Many in the valley had behaved badly, but those who became religious have got better".*

Wahhabism, which plays a certain role in the Pankisi Gorge, must be discussed. Wahhabism is a puritanical and fundamentalist movement within Sunni Islam. Wahhabism penetrated into the gorge from Chechnya, and its popularization was promoted by Arab religious leaders, who supplemented their sermons with the distribution of humanitarian aid. Over time, various criminal groups have joined the Wahhabis. Wahhabism is now generally considered by the community to be discredited. Although some people trust Wahhabis and believe in their honesty, still the most of the population see a great danger in Wahhabism. The main resistance to Wahhabism has come from the older generation, because they expressly oppose the religious practices, relying more on adat than on strict religious regulations. Wahhabism has divided the faithful.[7] One Wahhabi characterizes this trend: *"They were believers, young people, now known as the Wahhabis. Decent guys, who believe, and do not smoke, and live decently in the gorge. Fifty of us young people gathered and decided to clear the gorge of drugs... In the Pankisi Gorge there are people like me, people who are praying a lot; 20-30% are on the side of preachers who do not pray at all, but go against the decent young people"* (Nodar, 30 years old).

Nodar clearly indicates that the mullahs and their supporters look at religion formally and feel uncomfortable when young people strive to change the society. *"There are young people who have faith, do not smoke, do not drink, do not take drugs and do not distribute them and are Sunnis, but they call them Wahhabis. They prohibit the sale of drugs; but there are also Sunnis who support the drug trade and criminals. And there is a strong confrontation among them".* Unlike most Kists considering Wahhabism as dangerous force, Nodar, by contrast, considers older traditionalists in the community as defending negative customs. He sums up the religious differences between the generations: *"Now the whole young generation prays, and elders are non-believers".* The confrontation of generations can be described in terms of the confrontation of the Kist and Chechen identities, as well as in terms of confrontation of adat and religion.

---

[7] Shubitidze V., pp. 94-95. Recently, in the village Duisi without consulting the local inhabitants and authorities the Wahhabis built a new Mosque, leading to certain disturbances.

At a crossroads: Integration problems facing Kists in Georgian society
Economic factor

My informants have been facing the existential question – how to live? Go to Chechnya or remain a Georgian citizen? And while many would prefer to stay in Georgia, the difficult economic situation – along with the boundaries between ethnic Georgians and Kists arrayed "inside" and "outside", which will be discussed below – has forced many to think of leaving. *"Now my future is unclear. Here I do not have a home"* (Jamlet, 54 years old).

"We have our hands out and this is very bad. When nothing good happens, one thinks either of leaving or fleeing, although I would prefer to stay here and have a peaceful life. I would wish for my children peace and good relations both with Georgians and with outside neighbours, a better life." Another informant, who sees her future in Georgia if her children have good career opportunities, also hopes for a better life: *"My son will probably get a good post at work, it's my dream, and we will live more normally. There will be an opportunity for a better life"* (Nana, 37 years old).

Unemployment and the lack of sufficient income are the top problems named by many informants. *"I think about leaving, because the children have to study; we have to create normal conditions for them. I wish there was something for us here, but there isn't… no one has time for us. Once you leave [to Chechnya] you have something, the children can study normally, and they might get a job. If there was a job here, then I would work, but where? Nothing is here. The citizens of Georgia are unemployed, how will I be able to find a job? They provide us with some aid but it is not enough. I cannot imagine my future in Georgia. If I were alone, perhaps I would think about it, but not now,"* said my companion Maqvala.

About her children's future Leila says: *"I want them [the children] to be nice and well brought up. If the situation improves there [in Chechnya] then we go there. Economically we had a better situation there. Here we get aid every two months but it's barely enough for us. I do not care where we are – there or here. The main thing is to do everything that's needed for my children for their normal development"* (Leila, 40 years old).

Economic considerations are often supplemented by the choice of lifestyle based on civil or religious principles. Leila's husband, unlike Leila herself, makes the choice to adhere to strict religious rules: *"Father thinks they should adhere to the Quran, when my daughter turns seven, he says, she must begin to pray, wear a long dress and headscarf and I really do not want this. Why does he want a student in a headscarf and long skirt? My little girl is now nine but I cannot put the headscarf on her and I cannot stand long skirts"* (Leila, 40 years old).

Her husband adds: *"If my son ever even takes a sip of wine, I'll give him a bullet in the forehead, he will not be my son"*. In contrast to this, the other informant who connects his future only to Georgia sees a way out by establishing the democratic norms and values throughout the country: *"I cannot live without the Pankisi Gorge; if they offer me to live somewhere else I will never be able to leave. If Georgia develops into a democratic country, it will be worth it to live here. There will be a rule of law. First and foremost there should be no fear that today or tomorrow someone will cause you harm"* (Nodar, 30 years old).

External boundaries: Ethnic discrimination

A very painful issue for the Kists is the participation of Chechen "militants" in the war against Georgia on the side of Abkhaz in 1992-93. Those Georgians who consider Kists to be Chechens often remind Kists of this fact. The suspicion of "betrayal" is perceived by Kists quite painful: *"There were moments of feud between us and I'm not blaming Georgians for that. This was a moment when Chechens went to Abkhazia and fought on the side of Abkhaz. At this time Georgians had a reason for this [for discontent]. I experienced it myself when I came to Tbilisi. I was then told that we were the enemies of Georgians. They were right, I was not offended, I felt responsible for the fact that my people fought on the side of Abkhaz"* (Jamlet, 54 years old).

Another informant also talks about the negative attitude of Georgians: *"We were reminded that we fought there; I felt this in Tbilisi too. Upset that Chechens were there. There was a case when even a lecturer said this. The first reaction when they learn that I'm Kist is to express their anger about Chechens"* (Tariel, 25 years old). However, Tariel seeks to demonstrate that

he is a patriot of Georgia: *"Abkhaz are different from Chechens because Chechens were defeated by Russia and Chechens continue the resistance and fighting, but Abkhazia is Georgian land and Abkhaz are an alien people. You cannot compare Chechnya and Abkhazia"*.

The difficult crime situation in the Pankisi Gorge and the creation of negative stereotypes in the media played an important role in the formation of a negative attitude towards Kists. These stereotypes have become a basis for discriminatory practices. *"As soon as they learn that you are Kist, not only in Georgia but everywhere, they look at you as if you were a terrorist, a criminal or a kidnapper. Kists' rights are infringed more in Akhmeta than anywhere else. You are Kist – thus you are a criminal"* (Nodar, 30 years old).

The majority of the population of Pankisi also underlines the negative attitude on the part of law enforcement agencies towards them. Moreover, discrimination is seen as provoked by senior officials. For example, Nodar quotes one senior government official as saying: *"The terrorists with their own religious beliefs are living in Pankisi and they must be cured"*.

Another informant also talks about the image of Kists as of potential criminals: *"One thing that I do not like about Georgians is that if any Kist does something bad, they say it's because he's Kist. It means we are all bad, but all my life I have never done anything bad. They perceive all of us as the same. Yes, maybe one Kist has done something bad, but is it also my fault?"* (Giorgi, 58 years old).

Informants do not deny that the situation in the valley is truly worrisome: *"There is sometimes stealing and fighting, little skirmishes too. There is no sense in paying attention to it, there are complaints that we, Kists, bather them; this was during the riots. Now all has calmed a little, and probably the Abkhaz syndrome will become a secondary concern"* (Jamlet, 54 years old).

However, the stereotypes are not formed momentarily. And the Abkhaz war and the consequences of the "Pankisi crisis" have been superimposed on the previous ideas of Georgians about Muslim Kists as "historic enemies". My informant, who married into a Georgian family, remembers the attitude of her mother-in-law toward her: *"By the way, my family received our son-in-law better than I was received by my husband's family, I [was called] 'bloodsucker' by my mother-in-law and she has not spoken to me for two months. I went through a very [difficult] way, I was very hurt. I would prefer to be stabbed with a knife"* (Nana, 37 years old).

Inner boundaries: Closed society

As noted above, the most important practice that distinguishes Kists from the other ethnic groups is the observance of the adat. The strict control and high degree of social cohesion allow community members a minimum space for individual freedom. The degree of openness and contacts with representatives of other ethnic groups is strictly controlled by relatives and Kist society as a whole. Particularly severe behavioural rules are prescribed by the adat for women. Significant gender differences are seen in marriages: *"Man is free to choose, he can marry whoever he wants, he might get only wishes and advice from his parents but he is the one who makes the choice... In principle the woman has no freedom of choice: there are sometimes cases when women return home [after being bride-napped] but some are afraid of complications and stay in the [husband's] family. They rarely try to go back home; girls mostly stay with the men who abducted them"* (Tariel, 25 years old).

In the interviews with women the sacrifices that Kist women make for the sake of adat is underlined. To marry a Georgian man is to challenge the society. *"In my house the grandfather and the elders wanted to separate us. At the same time they were very fond of my husband. My mother and sisters especially loved him, they all had a good relationship,"* says one informant (Nana, 37 years old) who was married to a Georgian man. But she notes her other relatives were strongly against having a Georgian son-in-law: *"My parents were not against him, rather – relatives were. They said that we should divorce, that we have to be separated. Sometimes they spoke so rudely to my husband – you're our son-in-law and a good guy, but you must leave".*

In the case of Maqvala, her family knew that she was going to marry a Georgian, and to prevent this, colluded with relatives of a Kist man to have her abducted. *"My family knew, but the problem was that I was Kist, and he was Georgian".* Forced to part with her beloved, Maqvala says: *"I didn't start screaming and wailing, still it made no sense. I realized that I could have been freely taken away from the house as well, because my father and my mother were at home. To make a long story short, the deal was done and they knew that I would agree, but even if I had refused they still would have married me. A month after the marriage I still tried to return home, but my mother said to me: 'Look, daughter, don't ruin me, don't do that to me!'"*

It should be noted that people of this ethnicity are strictly limited in their choice of marriage partner, but this does not apply to other forms of relationships such as friendship. In addition, the Kist society condemns mixed marriages only when it comes to marriage of women: *"I am positive on a Georgian girl marrying a Kist man, but negative on a Kist girl marrying a Georgian man. Such a different attitude is due to religion"* (Tariel, 25 years old).

Today, contacts between Kists and representatives of other ethnic groups are becoming increasingly rare, and the emergence of Chechens in the gorge has contributed to this. Considering the changing attitudes towards traditions and the identity crisis of the Kists, there remain fewer and fewer links between the Georgian and Kist populations.

Findings

The study shows that the construct of ethnicity is strongly dependent on the changing life conditions. Kists who settled in the Pankisi gorge two centuries ago and were formerly engaged in cattle breeding, hunting and stealing other people's cattle have begun to develop agriculture despite the absence of an agricultural tradition and even an existing stigma about men's involvement in this activity. Initially, agriculture was largely the responsibility of women, but over the time this model of division of labour started to collapse. The structure of activities of Kists and Georgians living close to each other became similar. Further rapprochement of Kists with Georgians continued in the Soviet period. Surnames with Georgian endings were recorded in their passports. Kist women actively pursued Georgian-language education. In addition, the number of mixed marriages was gradually increasing. Kists began to perceive themselves as one of Georgia's ethnic groups.

The crisis of ethnic identity started in the 1990's. On the one hand the ethnicity was mainstreamed. Many ethnic minorities felt discriminated against. At the same time the participation of Chechens in the Abkhazia war on the side of the separatists significantly changed the attitude of Georgians towards Kists. On the other hand, earlier isolated Kists, searching for job opportunities started to move to the Northern Caucasus; and through these migrant workers information about their "Vaynakh roots" began to spread. Later, this trend was reinforced by the fact that Chechnya began to emerge as ideological ally with Georgia in struggle for inde-

pendence and also by the arrival of Chechen refugees and fighters in the Pankisi Gorge. The Chechen war has decisively influenced the inhabitants of the Pankisi Gorge in making the choice in favour of Chechen identity.

Thus, two external factors – the fragmentation process of Georgian society along ethnic lines and increased prestige of Chechens in the North Caucasus – gave impetus to the re-evaluation of ethnic identity of Pankisi inhabitants. The arrival of Chechens complicated the life established according the adat. Religion has begun to spread rapidly, including the Wahhabism. The older generation has begun to lose its influence. One reason for additional irritation was the fact that the Chechens, kindly hosted by the Kists, have not perceived the Kists as Chechens.

The differences between these two groups have become more distinct. Accordingly, Kist society has to reconsider its identity and formulate a new ethnic code. This code contains the traditional values that have been preserved due to historical circumstances and are transformed within the other Vaynakh peoples living in different circumstances. The new image of them is that of "pure (true) Chechen". It is embodied by such arguments as the preservation of adat, social cohesion, general knowledge of native language and its preservation in its "pure" form. Yet another distinctive feature is the fact that Kists consider Georgia to be their homeland. Thus, Kists consider themselves to be the Vaynakh group[8] preserved in its "purest" form.

Kist society is characterized by generational conflict, and there are several reasons for this. First of all, there are significant differences between Soviet and post-Soviet socialization in general. Secondly, the new generation shares Chechen identity and is devoted to religion, and the older generation tries to preserve the Kist identity, adhering to adat, which is endangered by young people seeking to reduce the influence of the older generation. Nowadays Kist and Georgian societies have different orientations; this widens the distance between them. The new reality, with the dramatically reduced role of Chechens, and united Caucasus ideas belonging rather to the past than to the future, once again presents the Kists with the challenge of determining their identity and finding their place.

---

[8] The perception of themselves as owners of "pure" and "authentic" ethnic culture is not unique to the Kists. Studies show that the preservation of traditions is perceived and presented as an advantage, for example, by Russians, Germans, Turk-Meskhetians, and some other groups (Brednikova O. "Actually, I'm Russian... But when in St. Petersburg they throw garbage not into the garbage can, then I feel that I'm still a German..." // Constructing the Ethnicity / ed. V. Voronkov, I. Oswald. St., Petersburg, 1998, pp. 97-135).

References:

1.   Barth F., Introduction // Barth F., Ethnic Groups and Boundaries, The Social Organization of Cultural Differences, Bergen, London, 1969.

2.   Akayev V., Religious-Political Conflict in the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria // Central Asia and Caucasus, 1999. № 4 (5).

3.   Brednikova O., "Actually, I'm Russian... But when in St. Petersburg they throw garbage not into the garbage can, then I feel that I'm still a German..." // Constructing Ethnicity / ed. V. Voronkov, I. Oswald, St. Petersburg, 1998, pp. 97-135.

4.   Voronkov V., Oswald I., The Post-Soviet Ethnicity // Constructing Ethnicity / Ed. V. Voronkov and I. Oswald, St. Petersburg, 1998.

5.   Margoshvili L., Traditions of Pankisi Kists and Modernity, Metsniereba, Tbilisi, 1985.

6.   Pankisi Crisis, ed. A. Melikishvili, Tbilisi, 2002.

7.   Chikovani G., Structural Changes of the Settlement, Conflict Situations and Traditional Methods of Conflict Resolution // Pankisi Crisis, Tbilisi, 2002.

8.   Shubitidze V., Security and Adjustment Ability of the Ethnic Culture to the New Social-Economic Environment // Pankisi Crisis, Tbilisi, 2002.

FREEDOM AND BONDAGE:
THE DISCUSSION OF HIJAB IN AZERBAIJAN

Aysel Vazirova

n 1998-2005 the conflict over allowing the presence of the Muslim heads-carves (*hijab, bash ortuyu*[1]) in passport and ID pictures remained near the centre of public attention in Azerbaijan. Administrative bans and informal pressure on veiled students and professors entering classes in institutions of higher education also became the subject of intense debate.

Legal and cultural battles over the acceptability of Islamic covering for women in public space burgeoned in Turkey, France, Great Britain and other European countries in the last 20 years. The controversy over veiled bodies of women en-tering the public realm in Azerbaijan unfolded during the same period, though it stemmed from the country's own unique historical roots. The nation's colonial past, the Soviet project of modernization of Muslim women and the develop-ment of nationalist discourse in Soviet and post-Soviet Azerbaijan produced several powerful narratives that connected personal and national progress to-wards freedom with the act of unveiling the nation's women. Images of the veil and unveiling generated by these socio-cultural factors and stored within important cultural texts (family memoirs, writings of the early 1920s century reformers, a 1960s' statue of a woman discarding the veil in downtown Baku) continued to live in collective memory and influenced present day discussions. These texts, along with personal stories, conference speeches, open debates,

---

[1] The term "hijab" (in Arabic literally "curtain") has several meanings in in present day Azerbaijani language. It designates the Muslim headscarf that covers woman's hair, ears and neck. It is also used to describe the full dress code for Muslim women, including headscarf and the rest of the attire that covers whole body except for the hands and face. Sometimes the term "hijab" and its opposite, "hijabsizlig" (the lack of "hijab") is used to depict a certain code of behaviour considered appropriate (or inappropriate) for Muslim women. The term "hijab" was not commonly used during the Soviet era. The Azerbaijani language contains a number of other words used for des-ignating woman's headscarf ("lechek", "orpek", "bash ortuyu"). "Bash ortuyu" is frequently employed in everyday speech for describing the Muslim headscarf. However neither of these words carries explicit connections with Islamic practice. The word "chadra" (a piece of dark fabric used to cover a head and most of woman's body with the face partly exposed) was used in the beginning of 20 century and all throughout the Soviet period and carries rich historical and cultural connotations. "Kelaghai", another term for women's headscarf, is used to designate specific type of white or bright colored silk scarf with particular decorative pattern. Currently "kelaghai" is a part of the "formal" national costume.

newspaper articles, TV and radio shows, web-sites and internet forums discussing the meaning and impact of veiling have formed a complex intertextuality of what from 1998 to the present day came to be known as the "headscarf issue" ("hijab meselesi") in Azerbaijan.

In the course of the current hijab controversy the explanations of meaning and function of Muslim headscarf in the life of Azerbaijani women and its impact on society were formulated within a variety of discourses. Diverse discursive appropriations of the veil (and veiled bodies) clashed, merged or ran parallel, reflecting the power struggle that currently surrounds the redefinition of such important elements of Azerbaijani social constructs as nation, tradition, religion and femininity.

The use of the discourse that draws upon concepts of human rights introduced a new dimension to the contemporary public discussion of veiling practices among Azerbaijani women. Historical association of unveiling with personal and national "liberation" firmly placed the covered bodies of Muslim women within the discourse of nationalism and modernization. Meanwhile, the articulation of hijab through the language of human rights in the course of current discussion challenged this association by recasting veiling as an exercise of freedom of belief and an act of personal choice and self-actualization.

In the current article I argue that both discourses profoundly impacted the formation of the new Muslim female identity in Azerbaijan. I also propose that the tensions and impasses created by the clashing of two discourses within the same discussion illuminated a range of struggles over the definition of national community, Islam and acceptable forms of femininity.

.

Veil battles: Historical overview

Islamic religiosity made one of its most striking appearances in Azerbaijan's present day public sphere as a gendered issue: covered Azerbaijani women were singled out, essentialized, scrutinized and discussed as carriers of a certain identity that created public controversy. This was not surprising given that, in Azerbaijan, as in many post-colonial nations, women's bodies held utmost significance for the definition of "nation" and "religion"

within the language of modernity.[2] The current discussion of hijab in Azerbaijan continues a long history of public controversy over the appearance and position of Muslim women in the Caucasus. Starting in the colonial context of the late 19th and early 20th centuries in debates over Muslim women's access to public space, which took place among male Muslim intellectuals, it continued through the first decades of Soviet rule, finding its culmination in the *hujum* (state-sanctioned massive campaign to discard the Muslim veil in 1927) and then re-emerged at the end of the 20th century in the conflict over passport pictures and the presence of covered women in educational institutions.

In late 19th and early 20th century the discussion of Muslim women's appearance in the public space articulated the importance assigned to the covered bodies of local women by the system of colonial differentiation in the Russian Empire. Produced and maintained through the efforts of colonial administration, education and academia, the hierarchical system of colonial differentiation aimed to establish homogenous categories of colonized subjects through emphasizing their essential difference from the colonizer and each other.[3]

Muslim women's covered bodies within this system signified the qualities ("barbarity", "submissiveness", "backwardness" and "ignorance") that inevitably differentiated Muslims from the "civilized" colonizers. However, for the period's male Muslim intellectuals, covered bodies carried an even more complex set of meanings and presented one of the most important cultural and political battle grounds. Starting in the 1830s the policy of incorporating and "educating" local male elites pursued by the Russian imperial administration in the Caucasus ran parallel to the discourse of "colonial differentiation"[4] and domination that featured Muslim women as the epitome of otherness and backwardness.[5] Thus for local male elites the struggle to define the emerging national identity involved recasting the normative image and lifestyle of Muslim women.

---

[2] On the connection between the construction of femininity, Islam and nation building in Azerbaijan please see Heyat, Farideh Azeri Women in Transition: Women in Soviet and Post-Soviet Azerbaijan (Central Asia Research Forum), Routledge, 2002 and Tohidi, Nayereh "Guardians of the Nation": Women, Islam, and the Soviet Legacy of Modernization in Azerbaijan – in Women in Muslim Societies, ed. Herbert L. Bodman and Nayereh Tohidi, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998, pp. 137-161.

[3] Partha Chatterjee, The Nation and Its Fragments. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1993, pp. 10.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Russia's Orient. Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917, Indiana University Press, 1997.

In the spring of 1907, the popular satirical magazine *Molla Nasreddin*[6] in a series of articles[7] suggested to Muslim men that it was not against the Quran to allow Muslim women appear in public spaces with their faces uncovered (and the rest of their bodies covered according to Islamic dress code). The articles generated fierce opposition, and discussion continued for several months involving some of the popular media outlets in the Caucasus (such as the newspapers *Taza Hayat* and *Bakinskiy Den*). These public debates turned Muslim women into an "issue" (*mesele*) and placed them in the middle of an ongoing cultural battle over the definition of national identity.

Molla Nasreddin and some of its supporters insisted that going out with an uncovered face[8] would enable Muslim girls to receive education, and become educated wives and mothers, thus serving the cause of national progress. His opponents (Hashim bey Vezirov, Abdurrahman Hadizade, Aburtab Efendizade) believed that the change would result in the violation of divine commands, moral corruption (caused by the unrestricted impact of female sexuality on men) and cultural assimilation by Russians and Europeans.

The discussions produced an essentialized image of Muslim women – secluded, submissive, uneducated and covered. Present-day research testifies to a more complex picture with regard to gender relations and women's dress among Caucasian Muslims: the veiling had various forms and was specific for some social classes and regions while not common for others.[9]

Despite the variety of opinions, participants in the debate defined the "issue" of the veiled Muslim women within two discourses: theological interpretation of the Quran and rumination over cultural authenticity. Incorporated into the religious discourse of the veil was the discussion of dangerous female sexuality. The veil served to isolate women's sexuality from *namehrem*[10] men and acted as protection for the community against *fitne* (turmoil, moral corruption caused by unrestricted interaction between men and women). Within the emerging dis-

---

[6] Molla Nasreddin was first published in 1906 in Tiflis (Tbilisi). Molla Nasreddin's editor and main author, Mirza Jalil Memmedguluzade managed to put together an outstanding team of writers that made Molla Nasreddin into the most popular Muslim magazine in late Imperial Russia.

[7] Molla Nasreddin, N 19, 21, 23, May-June, 1907.

[8] The suggestion only involved the exposure of women's faces in public. Molla Nasreddin never proposed complete unveiling.

[9] Heyat Farideh, Azeri Women in Transition. Women in Soviet and Post-Soviet Azerbaijan, Routledge, 2002, p. 62.

[10] Namehrem – the category of men with whom marriage is not prohibited.

course of nationalism, the parties strived to define how the state of the nation would be affected by changes in the appearance of its women. The discussion focused on this impact and tended to treat "our Muslim women" (*muselman ovretlerimiz*) as a collective identity rather than as individuals.

The veil controversy in colonial settings turned Muslim women into an "item" on the emerging national agenda and formulated the "issue" as one to be decided by another collective entity, Muslim men (thus preserving the system of gendered domination). The uncovering of female body was formulated in the emerging national imagination as a collective act of transforming the nation, the act to be decided upon by men and performed by women.

By drawing the connection between exposing a part of the female body (in this case, going out with her face uncovered) and women's education, Muslim reformers established the association between the revision in women's dressing practice (uncovering part of the female body), the change in modes of socialization (entering schools and other public spaces), the transformation of women's social function in a new national form of patriarchy (educated mothers and wives[11]) and the advancement of the national community.

Although the official Soviet policy towards the veil was dramatically different from this approach, it also strongly relied on the association between veiling, the transformation of women's social function and the advancement of society. The Soviet discourse of class struggle and modernization defined "Muslim women" as a homogenous group, subjected to double (class and patriarchal) oppression[12]. Eradication of this oppression was considered necessary for society's advancement towards communism.

Unlike Muslim cultural reformers whose agendas Bolsheviks partly incorporated, the Soviet activists stayed away from designating men as primary decision makers in the issues pertaining to the position of Muslim women. Tools of Soviet agitprop (such as the popular magazine "*Sharq qadini*", women's clubs[13] and sewing courses) addressed women directly and aimed at engaging them in new forms of socialization. The Soviet project of Muslim women's "liberation"

---

[11] For more on the emancipatory possibilities and disciplinary impositions of modernity in relation to women, please see: Najmabadi Afsaneh, Crafting an Educated Housewife in Iran – in Remaking Women. Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East, ed. Lila Abu-Lughod, Princeton University Press, 1998, pp. 91-125.

[12] Northrop D., Veiled Empire. Gender & Power in Stalinist Central Asia, Cornell University Press, 2004, pp. 59-66.

[13] Ali Bayramov Club in Baku, clubs in Balakhani, Ganja, Nuha were among the most active women's clubs (Azerbaycanda qadin fealliginin eneneleri – Traditions of women's activism in Azerbaijan, http://www.gender-az.org/index_az.shtml?id_doc=508).

entailed a profound transformation of both the public and private spaces that this group inhabited and the dismantling of the social fabric that kept Muslim communities together. Among the first decrees issued by the new Soviet authorities were legal provisions aimed at granting women the right to divorce and child custody rights, eradicating child marriages (by raising marital ages to 16 for girls and 18 for boys) and banning polygamy and temporary marriages (*sighe*).[14] Starting in 1927, the Soviet state introduced mass campaigns advocating for women's literacy and denouncing the *chadra*.

Chadra and the practice of complete veiling occupied a prominent position in the Bolshevik struggle for liberation of Muslim women and the Sovietization of Muslim society.[15] The symbolic value of the black *chadra* within the Soviet poetics of liberation is evident from numerous texts and illustrations representing the act of unveiling as a transition from darkness, ignorance and oppression to light, education and equality[16]. The accounts of discarding the veil were described in the texts of the period as liberation from "prison" (*esaret*) based on woman's decision that frequently encountered fierce resistance from the immediate social environment (especially male relatives)[17].

The acts of removing the *chadra* were sometimes deliberately conducted in public and thus manifested the destroying of the border between private and public. The casting off the veil in the theatre during "Sevil" (a popular play by Jafar Jabbarli describing an illiterate young housewife's life and its transformation under Soviet rule) illustrates the charged interaction between public and private in the early years of Sovietization. Whether demonstrative or more subtle (as in frequent cases of slow transition from *chadra* to headscarf, or other forms of head covering) the abandonment of *chadra* along with adoption of women's new social function (as worker, student, mother-educator) shattered the system of gendered domination in many families and communities. Soviet appropriation of the *chadra* and the act of discarding it on the one hand stressed the individualized nature of this decision and on the other invested it with the ability to transform the society.

---

[14] Heyat F., Azeri Women in Transition. Women in Soviet and Post-Soviet Azerbaijan, Routledge, 2002, p. 88.

[15] Northrop D., Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia, Cornell University, 2004, pp. 67-69.

[16] For example, the cover of the first issue of Sharg Gadini (November 1923) magazine depicted the women that takes off her chadra while looking at the huge rising sun. For the image of the cover please see: http://www.diyarim.narod.ru/sherq_qadini_jurnali.jpg, retrieved on 30 January 2009.

[17] Iz Vospominaniy Shabanovoy Karayevoy (From the Memoirs of Shabanova Karayeva), Muzey jenskogo dvijeniya (Virtual museum of women's activism in Azerbaijan), http://www.gender-az.org/index.shtml?id_doc=2068, retrieved on 30 January 2009.

In the years after the anti-veiling campaign (hujum), the development of the nationalist discourse in Soviet Azerbaijan not only further re-established *chadra* as the symbol of "otherness" (mostly set in historical terms as a "remnant of the middle ages") but also sanctified other forms of head covering (*kelagai*) as a symbol of authentic national femininity.[18]

The legacy of the chadra

Eighty years later, the discarding of *chadra* as a metaphor for liberation (and the donning of *chadra* as a metaphor for restriction and pressure) continued to live in texts produced in a present-day Azerbaijan. In September 1998, Heydar Aliyev, president of the Republic of Azerbaijan, invoked the image of the *chadra* in his speech to the 1st Congress of Women of Azerbaijan: "…huge changes took place in the life of Azerbaijani woman starting in 1920 and within a short period of time – in historical terms - women dropped the *chadra*, became liberated, independent, received equal rights, gained the opportunity to show their talents and occupy their own position in society, and managed to demonstrate to the world their inner and outer beauty".[19]

The president placed the act of casting off the veil within the narrative that described the liberation of Azerbaijani women "starting in 1920".[20] Aliyev's speech placed the liberation of Azerbaijani women within the larger narrative of national movement towards independence and thus drew a connection between the removing of the *chadra*, the emancipation of the nation's women and the liberation of whole national community. Overall, the speech presents women as a synecdoche of the nation. The president's address lists key components of freedom for women as defined by the current Azerbaijani administration: equal rights, social mobility, self-actualization and a certain measure of bodily exposure. Unveiling described as an act of a woman's will ("dropped her veil", *chadrasini atdi*) starts the motion that ends in revealing

---

[18] In independent Azerbaijani Republic wearing kelagai is customary for women participating in theatralized performances celebrating national holidays (such as celebration of new year on Novruz Bayrami, 20-21 March) or mourning ceremonies (Black January, the day of commemorating the violent and lethal break-up of protesters by the Soviet Army in Baku on 20 January 1990).

[19] Khalq gazeti, №249, 17 September 1998.

[20] 1920 was the year of Azerbaijan's Sovietization.

women's "inner and outer beauty" (previously concealed) that concludes the narrative of liberation.

An article in a popular oppositional newspaper[21]used the donning of *chadra* in a context unrelated to the discussion of women's issues in Azerbaijan. Haji Zamin, Azadliq's commentator, in a piece titled "Newspapers will soon put on the chadra" criticized the government's decision to apply censorship to newspaper publications that, according to explanations provided by some government officials, were not in line with the "national mentality" (*milli mentalitet*).

"Generally, the attempts to put *charshab* [here the same as *chadra* – A.V.] on outlets of mass communication are not new for Azerbaijan. But this time I would like to ask the Ministry of Press and Information and Glavlit why the state bodies that are supposed to act exclusively based on existing legislation are relying on such abstract and, in essence, subjective concepts as mentality, national morals, customs and traditions?"

Haji Zamin uses the act of covering the body with *charshab/chadra* to describe the restrictions of the freedom of speech imposed by the government on the independent press. He compares the government's reference to tradition and national mentality in restricting free speech to imposed veiling. The association between covering the female body with *chadra* and imposed restrictive tradition presented in *Azadliq'*s article complements the positively charged image of discarding the veil (as an achievement of liberty and independence) in the president's speech.

New Muslim women in Azerbaijan

In the late 1990s, the historic connection of unveiling with the narrative of emancipation and liberation in Azerbaijan largely informed negative responses to the "issue of hijab" by those who read Muslim headscarves as an act of re-veiling, i. e. returning to "prison", seclusion and subjugation.

Women who started adhering to hijab in Baku in the end of the 20th century defined themselves against this powerful historical narrative and were shaped

---

[21] Haji Zamin, Qazetler tezlikle chadra geyinecek (Newspapers will soon put on the chadra). Azadlig, November 05, 1998.

by it to no lesser extent than hijab opponents. The interviews with members of Muslim women groups in Baku that I conducted in spring-autumn of 2005 as a part of my research for the Heinrich Boell Foundation's Scholarship Programme for Social Scientists feature personal stories of donning the veil that demonstrate preoccupation with the idea of personal agency (described through the reference to personal choices) and are frequently organized around the themes of pressure and choice, liberation and imprisonment.[22]

Two statements below illustrate the connection that both covered women and critics of new veiling drew between the certain extent of covering (or exposing) the female body and the condition (state) of personal freedom. "I do not understand how one can choose this seclusion, this prison, over freedom! Someone forces them to do it, most probably a husband or brother" (graduate of Azerbaijan Oil Academy, speaking about women in Muslim headscarves).

"I feel sorry for women wearing tight clothing, that reveals their shapes. It seems to me that they are locked in this attire like in a prison, trapped like in a cage. I hope Allah will grant them a life as free as the life we live" (newly covered medical student from Baku).[23]

In the late 1990s the collapse of the Soviet system allowed a rich inflow of Islamic knowledge to enter the newly independent Azerbaijani Republic. An important feature of this cultural influx was that it unfolded within the general post-Soviet movement toward democratization of private and public life and the coming to prominence of the nationalist discourse. The "re-appropriation" of the national and religious heritage featured prominently in official and private narratives describing the nation's liberation from its Soviet ideological prison. In independent Azerbaijan official nationalist discourse powerfully connected the ideas of national liberation (in the form of an independent state), re-appropriation of national heritage (including Islam) and personal freedom from the pressures of totalitarian Soviet state.

On the state level the freedom to practice Islam was linked to the achievement of national independence and the celebration of national unity: for exam-

---

[22] The supporters of new veiling sometimes brought up the modernist Islamic constructions of the veil as spiritual liberation as opposed to the "western" freedom of the body. Frequently used in the texts criticizing the West these interpretations of "hijab" oppose it to "hijabsizlig" (absence of hijab) described as the exploitation of women. This position is argued in "Hijab", book by Iranian ayatollah M. Motahhari, translated in Azerbaijani and widely sold in Baku. Please see: Motahhari, Morteza. Hijab, "Dinin Fakhri", 2000.

[23] Aliyeva Sh., Hijab qadinin zeruri geyim formasi (Hijab, the compulsory dress code for women) Yeni Musavat, 2 March 1999.

ple, by including Islamic holidays of *Ramazan Bayrami* and *Gurban Bayrami*[24] in the list of national holidays alongside Independence Day, Republic Day. Over the years, the government of Azerbaijan gradually increased its centralized control over the religious sphere. The creation of the State Committee on Work with Religious Associations in June 2001 signalled the government's strengthening of efforts to control religious communities by instituting a multi-staged registration procedure, monitoring imported and local religious literature and shutting down mosques with a strong following.[25]

For urban centres, and most of all Baku, the small degree of influence local Muslim clerics had on the process of re-appropriating religion was striking. In interviews held in Baku, Muslim women defined themselves not only in opposition to the "girls in miniskirts" but also, and even more frequently, to the caricaturized character of the greedy and ignorant local mullah, as a representation of an uneducated (*elmsiz*), distorted Islam that "frightens our educated people". The Islamic interpretations and practices were disseminated first mostly by self-educated Azerbaijani Muslim intellectuals and later by recent graduates of foreign religious institutions through informal meetings, religious literature, educational facilities, charitable organizations, TV and radio programs.

Scholars studying the current religious situation in Azerbaijan list three major factions in the country's highly segmented and complex Islamic milieu: Shi'ism, prominent in the South and Absheron peninsula, Salafis active in Baku and the Northern regions on the border with Dagestan, and Nurcular, mainly organized around particular Turkish educational institutions.[26] The majority of men and women that constituted the newly emerging Muslim groups in Baku regardless of specific affiliation were members of the educated urban class, products of the Soviet-style mixed-sex secular education system that focused on skills necessary for the accumulation and appropriation of a vast body of knowledge and facilitated socialization through co-education.

A broad spectrum of Islamic interpretations informed the production of knowledge that took place in what soon became an alternative (Muslim) public

---

[24] Ramazan Bayrami (the holiday that celebrates the end of the Islamic month of fasting) and Gurban Bayrami (the holiday celebrating the Ibrahim's (Abraham) sacrifice of his son as an act of devotion to God) are national holidays and non-working days in Azerbaijan.

[25] International Religious Freedom Reports 2001-2009, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/index.htm.

[26] Yunusov A., Islam v Azerbayjane (Islam in Azerbaijan), Baku: Zaman, 2004, pp. 198, 220.

sphere: a variety of private educational institutions, informal discussion and study groups, mosque communities, newspapers and magazines, internet sites and forums, and brochures and books, – both imported and locally produced, self-distributed or sold in the bookstores. It is within this rapidly developing alternative public sphere that new Azerbaijani Muslims actively appropriated imported Islamic knowledge and pre-Soviet local Islamic tradition to explain and analyse the profound socio-economic, political and cultural changes taking place in the country. Among the most striking visual manifestations of popular interest in Islam was the growing number of regular mosque attendees, the proliferation of official and popular sites of Islamic worship, the emergence of basic Muslim infrastructure (bookstores, clothing stores, magazines) and the increased visibility of women in a specific version of Islamic dress.

In the 1990s female bodies covered in accordance with Islamic rulings were by no means new to the streets of Baku. Little old women wrapped from head to toe in black, worn-out *chadras* were familiar figures that inhabited the narrow streets of Icheri Shahar (historical downtown of Baku), big bazaars or small vegetable kiosks in urban neighbourhoods all throughout the ideologically suf-focating years of late Soviet rule, in the stormy days of *perestroyka* and the first decades of independence.

This figure was and still remains to this day "invisible" in the eyes of the public, despite its continued presence. In independent Azerbaijan these old women were never put under public scrutiny, and their acceptability was never considered an is-sue. Their veiling was acknowledged as a respectable traditional practice and nev-er described through reference to the language of freedom and personal choice.

New Muslim women were as socially and culturally different from this old familiar character as their flowery, colourful or dark headscarves with matching jackets, coats, pants and skirts of diverse fashion styles were different from long dusty *chadra*s. Predominantly urban, mobile, educated and often profes-sionally successful, the first groups of new Muslim women in Baku emerged as a part of a popular re-appropriation of Islamic religiosity in post-Soviet Azerbai-jan. Mostly products of the Soviet education system with its long-time focus on encouraging female diligence in education these women were socialized to actively engage in the process of learning.

It is important to note, that unlike the effects of new veiling in some Middle

Eastern settings[27], for the majority of Azerbaijani women who started wearing the hijab in the late 1990s in Baku, it meant the narrowing of mobility, impediments in education and career and partial loss of established social networks. All the women I interviewed told stories about family members, friends and colleagues who were upset, disappointed and embarrassed by their decision and their new look, and many had problems at the university or workplace. However being used to relying on large urban networks of female friends and colleagues for support and information-sharing, women started creating new networks, incorporating in them old connections and gaining new ones. In the absence of accepted religious authority figures, self-education, discussion and information exchange constituted the main mode of interaction within these groups.

The meetings took place in private apartments or, less commonly, in public spaces (libraries, clubs, even government offices after working hours) and were open to basically any woman acquainted with one of the participants. Some women in these early meetings did not practice veiling or even the most basic Islamic rituals (like *namaz*, daily prayer). Weekly meetings were often organized similar to classes in Soviet schools, with a teacher (women self-educated in Islamic teaching) first explaining the topic and then answering questions and assigning homework. A considerable portion of the group was Russian-speaking Azerbaijani women, who preferred to use Russian rather than Azerbaijani translations of Islamic sources.

Headscarf and passport

The mere fact of physical appearance in the streets of Baku did not make women in Muslim headscarves visible in the public sphere. They entered it in autumn of 1998 as active participants of a situation that most newspapers described as "confrontation" (*qarshidurma*) or "conflict" (*munaqishe*). The "conflict" referred to the ban on passport and ID pictures featuring women in hijab by the Passport and Registration Department (PRD) of the Ministry of Internal Af-

---

[27] The effect of new veiling increasing women's mobility in certain historical periods and socio-cultural settings was noted by several researchers. Please see: Mi-Hosseini, Ziba, Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran, Princeton University Press, 1999; Charrad M. M., Cultural Diversity within Islam: Veils and Laws in Tunisia. In: Women in Muslim Societies, ed. Herbert L., Bodman and Nayereh Tohidi, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998, pp. 63-79; Gole Nilufer, The Forbidden Modern. Civilization and Veiling, Michigan University Press, 1996.

fairs[28] and the refusal by some women wearing Muslim headscarves to submit pictures portraying them without hijab for personal identification cards and foreign passports. The situation was discussed in numerous newspaper articles, public debates, conferences, radio and TV shows.

In the following sections I analyse the use of the human rights discourse in discussion of the contemporary hijab controversy in Azerbaijan. It is important to note that the conflict over passport pictures constitutes only a part of the general discussion on hijab that continued in Azerbaijan for over a decade and is still in progress. Defining the act of veiling within the language of human rights is only one of many discursive appropriations of hijab in this discussion.

The controversy around passport pictures engaged a diverse spectrum of public actors, including informal groups of Muslim women, NGOs, government institutions and media. In the summer of 1998 several covered women applied for new passports and were told by the Passport and Registration Department to submit a photograph without a headscarf. A group of Muslim women sent letters to the Head of the PRD and later to the president of Azerbaijan asking permission to wear headscarves in the pictures. The PRD's position remained unchanged while the number of women who could not get their passports kept growing. Later the same year, three organizations working in the field of religious rights protection (Islam-Ittihad, Intibah and Tereqqi) founded the committee for the protection of women whose rights were violated in the process of the issuance of national passports (renamed the committee for the protection of the rights of religious women in 1999).

The Committee soon emerged as the most vocal opponent of the PRD in the conflict. The intensity of outreach organized by the Committee to present its case to the general public considerably exceeded that of the government. The Passport and Registration Department rarely presented the government's point of view regarding the "hijab issue" in newspapers and radio shows and almost never sent its representatives to TV shows, meetings or conferences discussing the problem.

The Committee, on the other hand, issued appeals to the general public and

---

[28] The Passport and Registration Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs is "a separate structural unit registering the Azerbaijani nationals, foreign citizens and persons without citizenship by their residence and whereabouts, issuing identity registration documents including the uninational passports of Azerbaijan citizens, granting citizenship, restoring and cancelling the Azerbaijani citizenship and managing immigration issues within the competence of the Ministry" (http://www.mia.gov.az/?/en/content/28978/, last accessed on 28 Jan 2010).

government institutions calling for an end to the "violation of human rights" of women who "cover their heads based on their religious beliefs".[29] Together with country's leading human rights activists the Committee organized a conference on the hijab issue, issued a letter (signed by the representatives of political parties, civil society organizations and members of academia) with joint appeal to the Head of Parliament and presented the case to a mock Constitutional Court chaired by the Head of Helsinki Citizens' Assembly in Azerbaijan.

In June 1999 a group of nine Muslim women filed a suit with Nasimi district court in Baku against the Passport and Registration Department. Public attorneys in the trial included representatives of leading human rights and women's rights NGOs, religious rights organizations and informal Muslim groups (Helsinki Citizen's Assembly, Society for Protection of Women's Rights, Islam-Ittihad, Centre for Rights Protection and club Intibah). The Deputy Head of the PRD of the Ministry of Internal Affairs represented the defendant. Around 2000 covered women assembled in front of the court house to support the lawsuit. On 23 June the ruled in favour of the plaintiffs and obliged the PRD to accept passport and ID photographs of women in headscarves.

On 20 July the Nasimi district prosecutor's office appealed against the decision of Nasimi district court but Baku City court upheld the ruling in August of 1999. Shortly after that it was once again appealed and on 22 September 1999 a session of the Supreme Court's[30] panel of judges overturned the previous decision allowing for passport photographs of women in hijab. Since then, despite new appeals to the court from Muslim women's groups, collective petitions (including one addressed to the Special Envoy of the European Union in the South Caucasus) and protests supported by leading human rights organizations, in Azerbaijan women are still not allowed to cover their heads on passport or ID photographs.

It is important to note that only some Muslim women in Baku used the human rights approach in dealing with the passport problem. As an example of other frameworks used to discuss the "hijab issue", I would like to mention an interview with a young married women, a successful medical student, whom

---

[29] Avropa olmaq arzusu ve ya Azerbayjanda dine inananlarin insan huquqlari varmi? (About a dream to become a European country, or do religious people have human rights in Azerbaijan), DEVAMM, 2001, p. 38.

[30] Subject to Article 131 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Supreme Court is the highest instance court on civil, economic, criminal, administrative offences cases and other cases previously tried by the general and specialized courts.

I met in Baku in autumn 2005. She explained that she does not see any use in protesting against the passport problem because her suffering adds to her *savab* [deeds to be rewarded by Allah – A.V.]. The interview placed hijab within the narrative of Islamic martyrdom that promised a reward for Muslims suffering injustice imposed by the 'infidel state'.

At the end of 2000, activists of the Committee founded DEVAMM, the Centre for the Protection of Freedom of Conscience and Religion. One of DEVAMM's initiatives was the organization of courses for women that introduced training for activists specializing in defending religious freedom. The coordinator of DE-VAMM, the imam of the Juma mosque[31] in Icheri Shahar, Hadji Ilgar Ibrahimo-glu, became the leading figure of civic activism for the repeal of restrictions on hijab in passport and ID photographs. In June of 2005, DEVAMM and several other public groups founded the Assembly for the Support and Protection of Hijab.

Starting in May 2002, according to personal accounts and media reports[32], students at the Baku State University (BSU), the Medical Academy and several other educational institutions received unofficial warnings prohibiting the wear-ing of Muslim headscarves in classes. On 3 May in BSU students and profes-sors wearing Muslim headscarves were invited to attend a conference titled Woman in Islam. At the event, two of the interviewees said, the Chairman of SCFWRA, Dr. Rafik Aliyev, and other speakers argued that hijab is not compul-sory for Muslim women and should not be worn in the university. This argument generated a strong negative response among covered women present at the conference. In the years to come DEVAMM regularly presented reports on the pressures applied to covered women in educational institutions. In spring-sum-mer 2005, newspapers covered the case of Shahla Aliyeva, a biology teacher dismissed from her position at the Istedad lyceum in Sumqayit for wearing the Muslim headscarf in class. With the support of DEVAMM, Shahla Aliyeva sued, won the case and was reinstated in her position.[33]

Both the format and content of the reaction to the passport problem dem-

---

[31] Juma mosque in Icheri Shahar was mainly frequented by Shia Muslims. It was shut down by the government in July 2004 and re-opened in 2008. Although the leading activists of DEVAMM belonged to the Juma mosque community, my research confirmed that Muslim women of different creeds applied to DEVAMM for protection of their rights and received assistance.

[32] See for example, Bashibelali hicab (Wearing hijab creates problems), Bizim esr, N 11(530), May, 2002.

[33] See for example, Uchitelnitsu uvolili za to chto ona pokrivayet golovu platkom (The teacher was fired for cover-ing her head with the headscarf), Zerkalo, June 2, 2005.

onstrated by the group of Muslim women, the Committee and later DEVAMM placed the "hijab issue" within the area of human rights. The issue was brought to court as a "severe violation of human rights" protected by the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan (articles 25, 26, 44, 47 and 48) and major international treaties adopted by Azerbaijan, UN Declaration of Human Rights (articles 2 and 18) and UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (articles 18, 19 and 27).[34] The violation was attributed by the plaintiff to "bureaucratic obstacles".[35]

Their opponents from the PRD described the situation as a refusal by a group of citizens to obey by the law. "It is impossible to make exceptions to existing legislation in order to accommodate a few dozen religious women" explained Tofik Madatov, the head of section at the PRD.[36] At the last court session Gulzar Rzayeva, the deputy chairman of Supreme Court, also referred to the Constitution, specifically section II, article 48 ("The freedom of conscience"), clause IV that reads: "Religious beliefs and convictions do not excuse infringements of the law".

Changing tradition

Both parties constructed their interpretations of the regulations regarding passport pictures within the general legal frameworks described above. In the course of court proceedings the sides presented clashing interpretations of the Regulation of application of the Law "On the exit from the Country, entry into the Country, and about Passports" (approved by parliamentary decree N 928, of November 29, 1994), that provided detailed guidelines for the standards of passport photographs. Close reading of arguments offered by the two sides of this conflict reveals the tensions created by the discursive appropriation of the veil through the language of human rights.

Before proceeding further with my argument I would like to comment on an important difference between the discussion of veiling in the early 20th century and the contemporary hijab controversy. The debate initiated by *Molla Nasreddin* in spring 1907 exclusively focused on the exposure of a woman's face in

---

[34] Avropa olmaq arzusu… DEVAMM, 2001, p. 38.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Zerkalo, N5, Feb 6, 1999.

public. The opponents of *Molla Nasreddin* rejected its suggestion that uncovering the female face is acceptable according to the Quran and accused him of distorting the mainstream interpretation of divine commands regarding obligatory covering. According to them, Quran and hadith command covering the female face because it is a strong source of sexual attraction for men.[37]

In contrast, Muslim women and religious rights activists involved in the passport controversy as well as other Muslim women that I interviewed in the course of this research never described required Islamic covering as hiding one's face. For them the woman's face did not count among the body parts that needed to be concealed, based on their religious belief. "According to unanimous opinion of Islamic scholars around the world", writes DEVAMM, "covered women may keep their faces exposed".[38] This difference clearly signals the essential change in the mainstream interpretation of Islamic sources that define the form of veiling in Azerbaijan.

Challenges of translation

I present below the translation of the paragraph pertaining to the appearance of citizens in passport pictures. The italics in my translation of the Regulations mark the parts of text that were differently interpreted by the plaintiff, (the group of nine Muslim women and human rights activists supporting them) and the defendant (PRD):

"6. In order to receive a civil passport the citizen has to submit to the relevant office of internal affairs at the place of residence along with application and other documents photographs produced from the same film, of equal size. Photographs should feature the front view of citizen's face without *hat/headcovering (papaqsiz) with look and attributes (such as glasses, beard, moustache, etc.) specific for him/her (ona khas olan xarici gorkem ve elametlerle)*".[39]

The plaintiff insisted that the term *papaqsiz* should be understood in its literal meaning, "without a hat" and thus can't be applied to woman's headscarf. They also insisted that the headscarf is a part of a look specific to them as required

---

[37] Taza Hayat, №№ 39, 41, 1907.

[38] Avropa olmaq arzusu.., p. 11.

[39] Ibid., p. 36.

by the Regulations. The defendant, on the other hand, considered "papaqsiz" to be a generic term covering all types of head covering, including headscarf. The PRD also argued that the text of the Regulations does not mention the headscarf among the attributes of citizen's specific looks.

These interpretations are based on two conflicting ways of defining the veil and veiling in relation to the law. The interpretation provided by the group of Muslim women considers Muslim headscarf a manifestation of the freedom of conscience. The wearing of the Muslim headscarf within this line of argument seen as exercising the right to the freedom of conscience proclaimed in the Constitution[40]. The PRD's position defines the Muslim headscarf as a way of dressing that should be subsumed by general regulations that standardize citizen's look in the passport photograph. Religious legitimization of dress, according to this view, does not give the group following this practice grounds to be exempt from law and claim special treatment.

In the course of the discussion, the PRD employed a method of argumentation that immediately caught the attention of the local media and generated ironic responses from hijab supporters. While building their argument, PRD experts translated word "papaqsiz" from Azerbaijani into Russian and after establishing the meaning that they considered correct, translated it back into Azerbaijani. Odd as it may seem, this step reveals a connection between the current headscarf controversy and the cultural battles over the "remaking of Muslim women" in nation's colonial past.

The fact that government officials of a sovereign state in order to substantiate the interpretation of an unclear legal provision had to translate it into the language of the former empire suggests that the situation could be productively explored within the post-colonial context. The Russian language, within this context, still carries authoritative power. Notably, in the present-day hijab controversy, this power was used once again to place the covered body of Muslim woman outside of the borders of "normative" and "acceptable". "*Golovnoy ubor*" (headgear, headwear), the Russian expression selected by the PRD for its translation, provided a foundation for a universally applicable (non-gendered) rule. Recourse to the authoritative power of Rus-

---

[40] This position was announced by the group in numerous statements after the proceedings were over, for example, in the statement Hijab yavlyayet soboy odno iz proyavleniy svobodi sovesti (Hijab is one of the manifestations of the freedom of conscience), a public appeal issued by the Committee, DEVAMM and several other public organizations in September 2005, (Zerkalo, September, 2005).

sian language assisted the government in rendering a culturally different group "invisible" before the law. However the Azerbaijani word ("*papaqsiz*") used in the original text of the Regulations drew a clear distinction between masculine and feminine. Moreover in Azerbaijani the word "*papaq*" not only designates a hat specifically worn by men, but is widely used in various cultural contexts as a symbol of male honour. Both media and hijab supporters immediately challenged the cultural "adequacy" of the translation provided by PRD. "What does a woman's headscarf have to do with a man's hat?" asked the headline in popular *525-ji qazet*.[41]

The unifying function that the PRD attempted to invest into the Azerbaijani word by translating it into Russian and turning it into gender-neutral expression supported the general principle used by the PRD in its treatment of the "hijab issue": equal protection of the law for all citizens. "Equal protection" in this reading meant that certain specific characteristics of a citizen or group of citizens are insufficient to exempt them from general legal requirements. Gender unification (or gender-blindness)[42] here becomes an important element of the "equality" principle while the claim for recognition of faith-based and gender specific characteristics of individuals (or groups) presents an impediment for its successful application.

Equality and unification: Constructing a normative citizen

Interaction between the discourses of nationalism and human rights was manifest in the conflicting interpretations that the opposing sides derived from another part of the Regulations: "Photographs should feature the front view of citizen's face without the *hat/head covering (papaqsiz) with look and attributes (such as glasses, beard, moustache, etc.) specific for him/her (ona khas olan xarici gorkem ve elametlerle)"*. The idea of "specific look" presupposes a stable set of attributes and physical characteristics unique for a particular individual. Displaying these attributes in a picture is supposed to assist the state in identifying the citizen (mak-

---

[41] Novruzova I., Qadin leceyinin kishi papagina ne dexli? (What does a woman's headscarf have to do with a man's hat?) 525-ji qazet, September 23, 1999.

[42] Notably, two of the "specific" attributes that, according to Regulations should appear in a passport picture (beard and moustache) are relevant for men only and the remaining one (glasses) is gender-neutral. Clearly, the text of Regulations is not very gender balanced despite its universal appeal.

ing the connection between her physical body and photographic representation). Together with the format for displaying physical features ("front view of a citizen's face") the "attributes" constitute the template of picture identity necessary for successful identification. Thus the Regulations determine the parameters of the normative look that the citizen should conform to in order to receive a passport and be accepted by the state as a part of the national community.[43]

The PRD maintained that the list of attributes that should appear in the passport picture ("glasses, beard, moustache") did not include the Muslim headscarf and that religious women should remove the hijab in order to reveal their "specific look". The group of Muslim women argued that covering was a manifestation of their faith and wearing headscarf was a daily practice that produced the look specific to them. The opposing sides clearly disagreed on the position of the Muslim headscarf in relation to personal identity. While the group of Muslim women considered hijab an intrinsic element of their personhood, the PRD placed hijab outside the picture identity normative for the Azerbaijani citizen. Here the interaction between the language of the modern nation state with its focus on defining the borders of the national community and the discourse of human rights centred on protecting the borders of individual identity produced a paradox: women are required to submit a passport picture with a look different from their everyday appearance in order for them to be successfully identified in future.

The hijab controversy elucidated the deep connection between the unification of characteristics of the normative citizen, made by the Regulations, and the principle of equal treatment maintained by the PRD. While unification regulated by the state serves to set the borders of "acceptable" and marginalize certain types of identity (covered women), the principle of "equal treatment" works to enforce a change that will transform people from marginalized categories into normative. These measures work through the institution of citizenship to protect the privilege of the state to determine the borders of the national community.

My research demonstrated that in a huge number of media responses to the "hijab issue" the authors analysed new veiling in the context of the opposition of national unity and division, thus appropriating it into nationalist discourse. One of the first articles examining the conflict had a title "Our way of building the national

---

[43] On the connection between the citizenship and nationality, please, see: Brubaker R., Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany, Harvard University Press, 1998.

community: women in chadra and women in mini-skirts". The author expressed concern over the impact of the hijab controversy on Azerbaijani society and suggested that this conflict will "lead to the further division of our society which is already divided by parochialism, pro-Russian or pro-Turkish sympathies and other political and social affiliations". He said that headscarf problem would become an impediment in the process of nation building in Azerbaijan.[44] The headscarf in this narrative was defined as a part of re-appropriated national tradition.

The article in the popular Russian language newspaper *Ekho* outlines the directly opposite view of new veiling in Azerbaijan, though it stays within the same discourse. "It is completely clear that the average modern urban hijab by no means signifies adherence to the traditional way of dressing…To be honest, the hijab is not a protection of cultural heritage in dressing style, but very much a direct and serious threat to this cultural heritage".[45] The idea of national "cultural heritage" as a homogenous entity derives from a certain way of imagining the national community. The commonly used metaphor "*dovlet quruculuqu*" (nation building) provides a good example of how this narrative describes the nation as building its own nation-state in order to reach the highest level of sovereignty. Birlik (unity) is the main mechanism for achieving national goals and cultural homogeneity, as illustrated by the quotes above, carries vital importance for "unity". Attempts to centralize and regulate the production of Islamic interpretations, described earlier in this article, fit into the same framework of unification of national values. Consequently, within this narrative the diversity of cultural and political affiliations is frequently perceived as dissent, an action detrimental to national unity.

Given the historically important role of cultural battles over the exposure (or veiling) of a woman's body for the formation of nationalist discourse in Azerbaijan, it is not at all surprising that the issue of hijab was frequently defined with reference to the opposition of national unity and dissent. The appropriation of the Muslim headscarf through the language of human rights led to a tensed interaction of the two discourses. The right to enjoy the freedom of belief manifested by hijab, as it was constructed within human rights discourse, in a number of media responses turned into the threat of division and dissent undermining national unity.

---

[44] Haji Zamin, Milli cemiyyet guruculugumuz: cadralilar ve mini yubkalilar (Our Way of Building the National Community: Women in Chadra and Women in Mini-Skirts), Gun № 160, September, 20, 1998.

[45] "Hijab" – trebovaniye religii, vernost traditsii ili politicheskaya deklaratsia? (Is hijab a religious obligation, a loyalty to tradition or a political declaration), Ekho, № 69, April 14, 2005.

Hijab: A duty and a right

The group of Muslim women lost the case to the PRD in 1999. However, the "hijab issue" remained in the focus of public attention in Azerbaijan. In May 2000, *Azadliq's* correspondent directly asked the Head of the Caucasus Muslim Spiritual Board, Sheikhulislam Allahshukur Pashazade, if his female relatives wore headscarves in the passport photographs. Sheikhulislam said: "We all have diplomatic passports and my female family members wear headscarves in their passport pictures. I would never agree to a woman who shares my beliefs not covering her head. If I myself do not adhere to the laws of Islam, I should not be in this position [position of the Head of Muslim Spiritual Board – A.V.]".[46] The media responses to this statement questioned the integrity of the PRD's approach given that some religious women in Azerbaijan were, clearly, privileged to be treated differently with regard to the "hijab issue".[47]

The challenge that this new development presented to the PRD's position revealed yet another tension generated by the use of the human rights discourse in the hijab controversy and elucidated the ongoing struggle over the definition of the role of Islam in Azerbaijan. Not only the Sheikhulislam's statement but his singularly privileged position assigned and defined by the Azerbaijani state[48] undermined the principle of "equality" employed by the PRD. Refusing to recognize the Muslim headscarf as a manifestation of individual beliefs protected through the human rights discourse the Azerbaijani state at the same time placed Islam in a privileged position of the "nation's religion" (*milletimizin dini*) within a secular state. This seeming inconsistency was pointed out by a

---

[46] Haji Allahshukur Pashazade "Diplomatik pasportda ailemin bashi ortulur" (Haji Allahshukur Pashazade: My family members' heads are covered in the pictures in their diplomatic passports), interviewed by Z. Ahmedli. Azadlig, May 11, 2000.

[47] Bashi ortulu pasport shekli chekdirmeye icaze verilmir (No-one has permission to wear the headscarf in their passport picture), Rafiq, Yeni Musavat, May 14-15, 2000.

[48] Caucasus Muslim Board was founded by the Tsarist administration in 1872 and re-established by the Soviet government in 1944. (For detailed history please see, Huseynli R., Azerbayjan Ruhaniliyi (Clerics in Azerbaijan), Baku, Kur, 2002 and Yunusov A., Islam v Azerbayjane (Islam in Azerbaijan), Baku: Zaman, 2004). Presently the Caucasus Muslim Board (formally independent from the state) shares with SCWRA the function of the body responsible for control over Islamic communities. Current law on the Freedom of Religious Belief stipulates that "...in the Azerbaijan Republic, Islamic religious communities are subordinated to the Caucasus Muslim Board, in terms of organisational matters…" (Article 8). For obtaining the registration with the State Committee on Work with Religious Associations all Muslim communities are requested to submit a letter of approval from the Caucasus Muslim Board (International Religious Freedom Report 2008, US Department of State, http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2008/108435.htm).

number of Muslim women I interviewed. A 45-year-old university professor who started covering her head three years ago brought up the presidential inauguration ceremony: "...everyone saw, all the foreign countries witnessed that the president, when inaugurated in front of everyone, all people, the nation, placed his hand on the Quran and took the oath…If the president of some country puts his hand on the Holy Quran and knows what this book says, that means the president accepts the message of the Quran. Subsequently the laws should be based on it."

The selective appropriation of Islam is a part of the state-endorsed model of the national community in Azerbaijan. An "Islam" that belongs within the borders of this national community is constructed through a series of inclusions and exclusions that together form a specific mode of Islamic religiosity. The Azerbaijani state, despite its proclaimed secularism, endorses this specific mode of Islamic religiosity as an integral part of "national values" (*milli deyerler*). Certain practices like the president's taking oath on the Quran, performing the pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj) or celebrating certain Islamic holidays (Ramazan Bayrami, Qurban Bayrami) are safely located within the realm of "national values". Donning the Muslim headscarf is not included in this category. President Aliyev's address (noted earlier) drew the connection between the discarding of the veil, the emancipation of the nation's women and the liberation of the national community. "Re-veiling" within the logic of this narrative was bound to carry dangerous connotations, which is illustrated by the next argument used by the PRD. In an interview given to the *Panorama* newspaper the representative of the PRD explained that "Islamic fundamentalists could use veiled women in their acts of terror"[49] thus posing a threat to the well-being of Azerbaijani nation.

The Sheikhulislam's statement presents important evidence of the shifting discourses used by the actors involved in discussion of Muslim headscarf. In his response, Pashazade explains the decision to wear the headscarf as adherence to the commands of Islam. A similar approach is displayed in the article headlined "The true value of woman" (published in popular religious newspaper "Islam heqiqetleri"). The author Gulbeniz Novruzova writes, "A woman's hijab is one of the most important commands of the holy religion of Islam. It is vacib [action obligatory for any Muslim held responsible for her/his actions – A.V.] in

---

[49] Panorama, N 167, Nov 3, 1998.

the same way as namaz, oruj, khums, zakat, and hajj[50]. An important task for us is to demonstrate to our people the value of hijab as an obligatory command of Islam."[51] In the fashion mindful of the discourse used by *Molla Nasreddin's* opponents in early 20th century these statements place hijab within a system of obligations imperative for Muslims and prescribed by divine command.

The difference between the two discursive appropriations of hijab is striking. As a religious obligation the practice of veiling is an adherence to a divine command and is not a subject to individual discretion. Its legitimacy in passport pictures and public places is argued through reference to the privileged position of Islam as a part of "national values". Within a human rights discourse hijab is a manifestation of an individual's right to freedom of belief and is commonly described with reference to self-expression and personal choice. Its legitimacy is established through the reference to legally binding commitments of the Azerbaijani state. Another quote from the same interview with the Sheikhulislam demonstrates how two discursive appropriations of hijab are used alongside each other within the same paragraph. "The covering of women's heads derives from the Quran and sharia [Islamic law – A.V.]. In any historical period women's desire to cover their heads is their right. If we talk about building democracy, we can't deny women their rights".

The study of the contemporary discussion of the "hijab issue" in Azerbaijan allows us to identify different ways in which the concept of "Islam" functions within varying discourses. Within the discourse of human rights, frequently (although not exclusively!) employed by the group of Muslim women actively involved in passport controversy, DEVAMM, individual human rights activists and most of the veiled women interviewed by me, "Islam" constitutes an element of conscience inseparable from the individual. It reveals itself in specific manifestations of Islamic faith (for example the practice of wearing the Muslim headscarf) that are protected and respected within the right of a private individual to have her own beliefs, her own "views and unique inner world".[52]

In the discourse of the secular nation-state mainly used by the PRD, "Islam" constitutes a set of values, rules and practices that are located outside the in-

---

[50] Daily prayer (namaz), fasting in the Holy month of Ramadan (oruj), paying Islamic tax (khums), giving alms (zakat) and going on the pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj) are actions made by Allah's command obligatory for every Muslim accountable for his/her actions.

[51] Novruzova G., Qadinin heqiqi deyeri (A True Value of a Woman), Islam heqiqetleri, № 05(07), April 04, 2005.

[52] Avropa olmaq arzusu…, p. 41.

dividual. For the smooth operation of the state apparatus the individual should be disengaged from this outside element.

At the same time, as demonstrated by articles quoted earlier in this research, nationalist discourse allows another way of constructing "Islam". Within this framework, "Islam" is constructed as a specific mode of collective religiosity and located within the realm of "national values". In this capacity it requires protection, assists in strengthening national unity and is incorporated into selected operations of the state (like state holidays). This discursive appropriation of "Islam" connects it to tradition and defines veiling as a traditional practice that helps protect and promote "national values" and the national community.[53]

N. Fairclough wrote that "language is always simultaneously constitutive of (i) social identities, (ii) social relations and (iii) systems of knowledge and belief".[54] The use of the human rights discourse was largely constitutive for a formation of a new type of Muslim female identity in contemporary Azerbaijan; it introduced women to new types of social interaction, created an opportunity for new political alliances. It facilitated the engagement of informal groups of Muslim women in a new mode of public activism (the legal process, petitions, media advocacy, conferences and debates) and brought them into contact with a wide range of public actors (government officials, NGOs, human rights activists, journalists). However it also strongly impacted the way Islam and Islamic religiosity are discussed. Despite the controversial public reaction, the "hijab issue" became one of a very few bridges connecting human rights activists and Muslim communities in Azerbaijan. In public discussions as well as in personal stories, it strongly connected the practice of veiling with ideas of personal choice and the right to self-actualization, thus partly transforming the knowledge and belief that defined the meaning and function of "hijab".

Through juxtaposing and contrasting a wide spectrum of opinions formulated within the variety of discourses, the discussion of the "hijab issue" articulated tensions and struggles that extended far beyond the issue of the Muslim headscarf.

---

[53] See, for example, the article by M. Haqq in Ayna ("Medeniyyetler mukalimesi"ne aparan yol. The Road to the Dialogue of Civilizations, Ayna, September 17, 2005) where the author suggests, as a solution to hijab issue, to allow special place in the Constitution for the recognition of Islam that "constitutes the foundation of moral values of our people" without turning Azerbaijan into a religious state.

[54] Fairclough N., Critical Discourse Analysis and the Marketisation of Public Discourse: The Universities. In: Discourse and Society, 1993, vol. 4, N 2:133-168, p. 134.

The hijab issue: Five years later

Five years later, in 2010, the problem of passport pictures for Muslim women in Azerbaijan still remains unresolved. Court complaints, petitions, peaceful protests, media advocacy and other forms of democratic civil engagement compatible with defining hijab within the human rights discourse proved so far unsuccessful.

Women mainly use other strategies such as deception to avoid getting their picture taken without a headscarf. Some resort to wigs or computer techniques to produce the required look. Others arrange for the picture to be taken at their home by a woman photographer. There are also many who accept the need to obey the law as interpreted by the PRD.

Along with recurring bans on public performance of azan (call to prayer)[55] and regular impediments created for the activity of some mosques and communities, the unresolved "hijab issue" demonstrates the failure of the Azerbaijani state to engage growing communities of practicing Muslims into a productive and inclusive dialogue. The government's policy in the religious sphere largely relies on efforts to strengthen centralization and control[56] and pushes informal Muslim groups outside of the boundaries of legal activism. In this situation the decline of the human rights discourse as a way of negotiating the concerns of Muslim groups will result in a situation where public grievances are articulated through other, probably, less dialogue-oriented discourses.

Given the continuous failure of opposition political parties and independent candidates to engage in decision-making and governance through existing electoral mechanisms, as well as persisting legal and political impediments hampering the activity of civil society organizations, the situation in Azerbaijan inevitably generates a lack of popular confidence in legitimate channels of introducing social change.

---

[55] Government officials in Baku and some regions attempted to ban azan in December and May of 2007. In autumn 2009 the SCWRA instructed mosques to stop using loudspeakers to transmit the azan. The government imposed selective restrictions on the import and dissemination of Islamic literature. Several mosques and Quranic courses were closed by authorities in 2007-2009, (See: International Religious Freedom Reports 2006-2009, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, US State Department, http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/).

[56] Recent changes to the Law on the freedom of religious belief adopted in May 2009 expand the state's control over religious communities (http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1296).

References:

1. Ahmed L., Women and Gender in Islam, Historical Roots of a Modern Debate, Yale University Press, 1992.

2. Azerbaycanda qadin fealliginin eneneleri (Traditions of Women's Activism in Azerbaijan), http://www.gender-az.org/index_az.shtml?id_doc=508.

3. Brubaker R., Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany, Harvard University Press, 1998.

4. Charrad M. M., Cultural Diversity within Islam: Veils and Laws in Tunisia. In: Women in Muslim Societies, Herbert L. Bodman and Nayereh Tohidi (ed.), Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998, pp. 63-79.

5. Chatterjee P., The Nation and Its Fragment, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1993.

6. Fairclough N., Critical Discourse Analysis and the Marketisation of Public Discourse: The Universities. In: Discourse and Society, 1993, vol. 4, N 2, pp. 133-168.

7. Faith and Freedom, Women's Human Rights in the Muslim World. Afkhami M. (ed.), Syracuse University Press, 1995

8. Gole N., Forbidden Modern, Civilization and Veiling, The University of Michigan Press, 1996.

9. Heyat F., Azeri Women in Transition: Women in Soviet and Post-Soviet Azerbaijan, Central Asia Research Forum, Routledge, 2002.

10. Huseynli R., Azerbayjan Ruhaniliyi (Clerics in Azerbaijan), Baku, Kur, 2002

11. International Religious Freedom Reports 2006-2009, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, US State Department, http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/.

12. Mir-Hosseini Z., Islam and Gender, The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey 1999.

13. Najmabadi A., Crafting an Educated Housewife in Iran. In: Remaking Women. Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East, Lila Abu-Lughod (ed.), Princeton University Press, 1998, pp. 91-125.

14. Northrop D., Veiled Empire, Gender & Power in Stalinist Central Asia, Cornell University Press, 2004.

15. Russia's Orient Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917, D. R. Brower, E. Lazzarini (ed.), Indiana University Press, 1997.

16. Tohidi N., Guardians of the Nation: Women, Islam, and the Soviet Legacy of Modernization in Azerbaijan. In: Women in Muslim Societies, Herbert L. Bodman and Nayereh Tohidi (ed.), Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998, pp. 137-161.

17. Yunusov A., Islam v Azerbayjane (Islam in Azerbaijan), Baku: Zaman, 2004.

Sources:

1. Molla Nasreddin, №№ 19, 21, 23, May-June, Tiflis, 1907.

2. Sharq Qadini, № 1, Baku, November, 1923.

3. Iz vospominaniy Shabanovoy Karayevoy (From the memoirs of Shabanova Karayeva), Muzey jenskogo dvijeniya (Virtual museum of women's activism in Azerbaijan), http://www.gender-az.org/index.shtml?id_doc=2068.

4. President H. Aliyev's address to the 1st Congress of Women of Azerbaijan. Khalq gazeti, №249, September 17, 1998.

5. Haji Zamin, Qazetler tezlikle chadra geyinecek (Newspapers will soon put on the chadra), Azadlig, November 05, 1998.

6. Aliyeva Sh., Hijab qadinin zeruri geyim formasi (Hijab, the Compulsory Dress Code for Women) Yeni Musavat, 2 March, 1999.

7. Avropa olmaq arzusu ve ya Azerbayjanda dine inananlarin insan huquqlari varmi? (About a dream to become a European country, or do religious people have human rights in Azerbaijan), DEVAMM, 2001.

8. Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, http://www.president.az/browse.php?sec_id=52.

9. Bashibelali hicab (Wearing hijab creates problems), Bizim esr, №11(530), May, 2002.

10. Uchitelnitsu uvolili za to chto ona pokrivayet golovu platkom (The teacher was fired for covering her head with a headscarf), Zerkalo, June 2, 2005.

11. Zerkalo, № 5, Feb 6, 1999.

12. Taza Hayat, №№ 39, 41, 1907.

13. Hijab yavlyayet soboy odno iz proyavleniy svobodi sovesti (Hijab is one of the manifestations of the freedom of conscience), Zerkalo, September 5, 2005

14. Novruzova I., Qadin leceyinin kishi papagina ne dexli? (What does a woman's headscarf have to do with a man's hat?), 525-ji qazet, September 23, 1999.

15. Haji Zamin, Milli cemiyyet guruculugumuz: cadralilar ve mini yubkalilar (Our way of building the national community: women in chadra and women in mini-skirts), Gun № 160, September, 20, 1998.

16. "Hijab" – trebovaniye religii, vernost traditsii ili politicheskaya deklarasitya? (Is hijab a religious obligation, a loyalty to tradition or a political declaration), Ekho, № 69, April, 14, 2005.

17. Haji Allahshukur Pashazade "Diplomatik pasportda ailemin bashi ortulur" (Haji Allahshukur Pashazade: My family members' heads are covered in their pictures in diplomatic passports), interviewed by Z. Ahmedli, Azadlig, May 11, 2000.

18. Interview of the representative of Passport and Registration Department, Panorama, № 167, Nov 3, 1998.

19. Novruzova G., Qadinin heqiqi deyeri (A True Value of a Woman), Islam heqiqetleri, № 05(07), April 04, 2005.

20. Haqq M., "Medeniyyetler mukalimesi"ne aparan yol (The Road to the Dialogue of Civilizations), Ayna, September 17, 2005.

21. Law of the Azerbaijan Republic about exit from the Country, entry into the Country, and about Passports. The web-site of the Passport & Registration Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, http://www.mia.gov.az/index.php?/en/content/29033/.

22. "Dini etiqad azadlığı haqqında" Azərbaycan Respublikasının Qanununa əlavələr və dəyişikliklər edilməsi barədə Azərbaycan Respublikasının Qanunu (Law on the Changes and Additions to the Law on Freedom of Religious Belief), Baku, 8.05.2009, № 812-IIIQD.

CONSTRUCTION OF KURDISH AND YEZIDI IDENTITIES AMONG THE KURMANJ-SPEAKING POPULATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA[1]

Tork Dalalyan

The article discusses the problems of constructing the Kurdish and Yezidi national identities among the Kurmanj-speaking population of the Republic of Armenia (RA) in the post-Soviet period, marked by the intensification of ethno-confessional processes throughout the territory of the former Soviet Union. The term "Kurmanj-speaking population" derives from the Kurmanj language spoken by Kurds and Yezidis and relates to those citizens of the Republic of Armenia, who consider the Kurmanj language[2] as their mother tongue or the language of their ancestors. To a certain extent, this term may offend the majority of our informants, as, according to the 2001 census, most of the Kurmanj-speaking population of the Republic of Armenia consider themselves Yezidis (40,620 persons). However, others (1,519 persons) prefer to be called Kurds, although they speak the same language and profess the same religion – Yezidism. Thus, for the purposes of this article, the use of the term "Kurmanj-speaking population" will replace the differing, often contradictory endonyms of this particular community.

The Kurmanj-speaking population represents the largest minority group in the republic of Armenia (RA).[3] The 2001 census (as the previous censuses)

---

[1] The author gratefully thanks Alexander Iskandaryan (Caucasian Institute, Armenia), Levon Abrahamian, Hranush Kharatyan and Gayane Shagoyan (Department of Modern Anthropological Studies of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the Academy of Science of Armenia) for their valuable advice and guidance.

[2] We do not include several thousand Kurmanj-speaking Armenians in this category who are immigrants from Western Armenia. Professing Christianity, they used Kurmanj in family settings (although, apparently, did not consider it as their mother tongue), but have now all learnt Armenian.

[3] According to the results of the latest 2001 census, this group amounted to only 42,139 people (little more than 1.3% of the total population of Armenia). There are about 200,000-250,000 people around the world professing Yezidism, although some sources put this number as high as 80,000 (see, for example, http://www.commission-refugies.fr/IMG/pdf/Georgie_-_les_Kurdes_yezidis.pdf).

do not differentiate the numbers of the persons who consider themselves as "Kurds-Yezidi", and those who identify themselves as "Yezidi-Kurds". But our personal discussions with the supporters of "the Kurdish orientation" demonstrated the dual identities professed by the majority of the group members: by naming their national identity (a Kurd), they were at the same time underlining their religious attachments (Yezidi-Kurd, or Kurd-Yezidi), thus emphasizing the fact that they are not quite identical to the Muslim Kurds. According to data of Gr. Kharatyan, the former Chairperson of the Office for National Minorities and Religion at the government of Armenia, currently there are only about two dozen Muslim Kurds residing on the territory of the RA[4]. Given their effective absence from the socio-political life of Armenia, our research does not involve the Muslim Kurds.

It should be noted that the Kurmanj-speaking Muslim Kurds live mostly in Turkey (10-15 million persons) in so-called Turkish Kurdistan and in historic Western Armenia, as well as in northern Iraq (4-6 million persons), in Syria (about 1-2 million), in Azerbaijan, Russia and European countries (mainly in Germany, France, Belgium, Denmark, etc.). Groups professing Yezidism live in the same countries, except in Turkey and Azerbaijan. About 14,000 Yezidi migrants from the RA also reside in Georgia (mostly in Tbilisi). These migrants maintain close contacts with their relatives and tribesmen in the RA. The considerable fragmentation of the Kurmanj-speaking community into numerous tribal groups is a significant obstacle on the road to acquiring independent statehood.[5]

From a scientific point of view, studying issues of (national) identity of ethnic and religious groups scattered throughout the world is not very productive within the boundaries of one country. However, since our study is based not only on scientific materials accumulated by various scientists, but also on personal

---

[4] Prior to the Karabakh war, several thousand Kurdish Muslims lived in Armenia. According to 1989 census, 0.1% of the population of the Armenian SSR (4,151 people) called themselves Kurds. Moreover, most Kurds were Muslims. Most of the Kurds living in the Armenian SSR professed Sunnism, specifically the Shafi variety of orthodox Islam. Muslim Kurds migrated to Azerbaijan, where they almost lost their own language and were assimilated by Turkic Azerbaijanis. According to unofficial data, currently there are about 150,000 Muslim Kurds living in Azerbaijan.

[5] For information about Kurds and the Yezidis in the world, see, e.g., Bois Th., The Kurds, Beirut, 1966; Lescot R., Enquête sur les Yesidis de Syrie et du Djebel Sinjār, Beyrut, in 1938 (1975); Guest J. S., The Yezidis, A Study in Survival. London. New York, 1987; Guest J. S., Survival Among the Kurds: A History of the Yezidis, London u.a., 1993; Andrews P. A., Ethnic Groups in the Republic of Turkey, Wiesbaden, 1989; Bruinessen M. van., Kurds and Identity Politics, London, 2001; Kreyenbroek Ph. G., Allison C. (eds.), Kurdish Culture and Identity. London, 1996; Kreyenbroek Ph. G., Yezidism in Europe: Different Generations Speak about their Religion (in collaboration with Z. Kartal, Kh. Omarkhali and Kh. Jindy Rashow), Wiesbaden, 2009.

observations and field data collected in Armenia[6], the scope of the study was deliberately narrowed to one country. Nevertheless, the inevitability of parallels with other countries led us to use comparative materials for our study.

In the first part of this article we will try to consider the basic mechanisms and strategies for constructing the Kurdish and Yezidi identities among the Kurmanj-speaking population of the RA, and will also examine the problem of dual identity. The second part will analyse the basic cultural elements which contribute to the formation of the identity of Kurmanj-speaking Kurds and Yezidis.

"Kurds" and "Yezidis" in Armenia: One nation or two?

When considering the Kurmanj-speaking population of the RA as a single community, it is still necessary to take into consideration contradictions existing among the members of the group. And even if they speak the same language, follow the same religion, have the same literature (in the broadest sense of the concept, having in view the written and literary tradition, rather than a writing system, which now is no longer the same for the Kurdish and Yezidi orientations) and folk customs, the Kurds and the Yezidis in the RA are trying to define themselves as separate ethnic and cultural groups. We will analyse the causes and the factors of this split.

Ideology of the Kurdish orientation: From religion to politics

For as long as the Muslim-Kurds lived in the territory of the Armenian SSR, it was important for the Kurmanj-speaking population to contrast their interests in the religious sphere. After the Muslim Kurds left, a new "subject of tension" was formed – the part of the population confessing Yezidism as a religion, but ethnically identifying themselves with the Muslim Kurds – though without converting to Islam. At this stage, most of the Kurmanj-speaking population of the RA continues to identify themselves as Yezidis, considering this to be a designation of their nationality (ethnicity). However, a small group considers themselves as Kurds, and the term "Yezidi" is used only for denoting their religion. "Do you also feel that we are

---

[6] Our fieldwork was undertaken from 2002 to 2008 in the Kurmanj-speaking villages of Armenia and in Yerevan.

different people?" – This was the first question, asked of me by the acting editor of the Kurdish newspaper "Rya Taza" when I entered his office and said hello to him. "Unfortunately, there are stupid people in our nation who call us Yezidis. They do not realize that this is our religion, not nationality", the editor continued. "We are all Kurds; we just kept our pre-Islamic ancient religion".

Differences in the interpretation of the terms Kurd and Yezidi reflect a division that has occurred in the community of the Kurmanj-speaking population of the RA. Two parallel events taking place in Yerevan in late August 2007 can serve as an illustration of this split in identity. A group identifying themselves as Yezidis organized a large demonstration at Republic Square in Yerevan, protesting against the violence and killings of the members of their religion by the Muslim Kurds in the northern Iraq. At the same time, representatives of the Kurmanj-speaking population, considering themselves Kurds, gathered near Shaumyan Square in solidarity with the Muslim Kurds in Iraq and to protest against threats of military attack by Turkey. Media covering these events could not understand who the Kurds were and who the Yezidis were in Armenia and how they related to each other. Not all reporters knew that, for example, two close relatives could participate in the two different demonstrations. One of them considers himself/herself Yezidi, and the other – Kurdish, despite the fact that they came from the same environment and even from the same family. This example clearly shows that "the choice of their own nationality" among the Kurmanj-speaking population is largely determined by political views and sympathies.

Those identifying themselves as Kurds thus seek to become a part of "the Kurdish national movement" in Turkey and Iraq. Commenting on their choice, they underscore the real advantages of choosing this "orientation", most importantly the notion that it will give the Kurds a greater chance of acquiring their own state. For the sake of the independent statehood the representatives of the Kurmanj-speaking population of the RA, choosing the orientation of the Kurdish "are ready to forget the recent historical past of their ethno-confessional groups and the profound religious antagonism existing between the Muslim Kurds and the Yezidi Kurds".

"It is right to be a Kurd [the word right could be understood as "profitable" – T. D.], because this way we will have our own land [i.e. country]".[7] Proponents

---

[7] The Situation of School Education among National Minorities in Armenia: The Armenian Centre for Ethnological Studies Azarashen, ed. Kharatyan L. and S. Saratikyan, Yerevan, 2005, p. 18 (in Armenian).

of the "Kurdish orientation" held regular demonstrations of solidarity requesting protection of Abdullah Ocalan, the leader of the Kurdish national movement in Turkey.

However, members of the aforementioned first demonstration – the supporters of "Yezidi orientation" are also regularly holding various activities (press conferences, marches on embassies, demonstrations), during which they demand autonomy for the Yezidi people in Iraq within the Kurdish or any other state. The organizers of these events believe that their compatriots and coreligionists in Iraq are under the threat of extinction and that the only guarantor for the preservation of their religion and the "Yezidi" national identity is real cultural and economic sovereignty.

Factors perpetuating the Yezidi identity: The problem of education

As our research demonstrated, the ideologists of the Kurdish orientation are mostly people with higher education, representatives of the intelligentsia of the Kurmanj-speaking population of the RA, for whom religion is not important. They see the future of their ethno-religious group in general in a secular state together with the Kurds, where Islam or Yezidism will not play a significant role.[8] On the other hand, those representatives of the Kurmanj-speaking population of the RA who continue to consider themselves Yezidis do not agree to build the future of their group on the principle of forgetting the past. They believe that religion is the foundation of their identity and that it must be decisive in the choice of political affiliation, otherwise the identity of the people will be threatened. Ideologists of the "Yezidi orientation" are mainly members of the clergy who belong to the Sheikh or Pirs families, and, to a lesser extent, intellectuals from these families.[9]

Considering that education affects the religiosity of a nation, and hence threatens their identity, they seek to strengthen and to extend the tradition-

---

[8] But at the same time they have been reluctant to talk about their possible relocation to an independent Kurdistan (the propagandists of this ideology are based in Moscow and other Russian cities. They have a good command of Russian along with Armenian and Kurmanj).

[9] Today, relics of the caste devices are not so tenacious, yet everyone knows which family belongs to which caste. The whole nation is divided into two large groups – murids (laymen) and the clergy. The clergy has two divisions – the sheikhs (the highest degree of the priesthood) and the peers (Yezidi leaders, the lower the degree of the priesthood, associated with lower origin).

al view that education is a "devilish" notion, harmful, or even incompatible with religious feelings. Traditionally, the ideologists of the Yezidi orientation explained "their negative attitude towards education" by ethnic customs (adat) and historical inertia: "Our ancestors lived surrounded by the Muslim population. Attending a school meant learning Arabic and reading the Koran, and raised the undesirable prospect of becoming a Muslim".[10] To date, the cautious attitude towards education among the older generation of the Kurmanj-speaking population is explained by the concern that by obtaining education, their sons would be compelled to reject their roots, their nationality thus becoming... Kurds.

Notably, the negative attitude towards education is associated not only with religious directives, but also with the economic system of the Kurmanj-speaking family. Since the representatives of the Kurmanj-speaking population mostly engage in seasonal cattle rearing (traditionally gardening had little significance and there were virtually no craftsmen and traders among them), education was considered an unnecessary luxury.[11] To date, lack of education is quite common also among the wealthiest families of the Diaspora. According to the researcher, Yezidi parents achieving during so called "wild businesses" in the 1990s usually do not have higher education and cannot serve as an example of the usefulness of a high school diploma for their children.[12]

The main focus of raising children in the Kurmanj-speaking families, especially in rural areas, until recently remained the oda (room, bedroom with a shed). In this room, the older members of the family recounted stories about their ancestors, the heroism of national heroes, the abduction of women, tribal feuds and other elements of the traditional life. All these left a deep impression

---

[10] In the early 20th century, the British attempted to open a special school for Yezidis in the northern Iraq, but the process encountered many difficulties. First of all, Arabic letter "sh", words beginning with that letter and sounding like the Arabic word Shaitan (Satan) had to be removed from the textbooks. This is due to the fact that according to the sacred "Black Book" Yezidis are forbidden to utter the word Satan (this is the name of a Yezidi God) and similar-sounding words (§ 24). So, for example, the word Shatt "river" has been replaced by a synonym Nahr. Nevertheless, the opening of the Yezidi school was accompanied by protracted local conflicts. Within weeks, four students were drowned in the river, and Yezidis attributed this to God's unhappiness and dissatisfaction with their education (see: Luke H. Ch., The Worshipers of Satan: Mosul and Its Minorities. London, 1925. p. 35).

[11] When analysing why he refused to enter university, a respondent belonging to the Kurmanj-speaking community of the RA made the following points: "You have how many students…? 10 or 20 on each course… And how much money do you earn? Okay, do not tell me... Well, so much that even you are not able to feed your family and have children... I have 20 sheep, and they are enough for me to feed my family, parents, my wife and three children" (Among the Kurmanj-speaking population livestock is the main indicator of the wealth of the family).

[12] Savva M. V., Kurds in the Krasnodar Region, Research, Krasnodar, 2007, p. 19.

on the psyche of children. The latter, especially girls, to this date are brought up in the spirit of obedience and unquestioning submission to elders and men. Observations made by Azarashen, the Armenian Centre for the Ethnological Studies (Chaired by Gr. Kharatyan) demonstrated that over the past 15 years only one girl from the community of the Kurmanj-speaking families of the RA received a higher education, while the vast majority of mothers "attend school only to grade 6 or 8".

In many situations, a girl is treated as a "commodity". The representatives of the Kurmanj-speaking population consider higher education for women not only unnecessary, but also dangerous. It is considered that girls may get abducted by potential suitors on the way to school (although such a fate can befall even married women). Also, it is feared that educated girls might become disobedient wives avoiding the heavy housework for which they are prepared from childhood. The woman has no right to choose a husband herself and is not allowed to resist to the choice of her father or brother. Gender discrimination is also reflected in the fact that feasts are attended only by men, while women serve them and enter the room only to serve a new dish or remove it from the table. An elderly woman – the mother of the head of the household – may stay with guests long enough to talk to them and express views on some issues, but she should stand up all the time. During the busy feasts women always sit in a separate room. Perhaps this explains the lack of toasts pronounced by women within the Kurmanj-speaking population.

It should be noted that the current lack of a sufficient number of relevant scientific and professional personnel greatly complicates the resolution of problems related to education, literature and science among the Kurmanj-speaking population of the RA. Most people are only interested in topics related to business and daily activities. As a result, "labour education" of children prevails among this group. Traditional ideology is transmitted to children and school education is cast aside. Higher education is truly rare among the representatives of the Kurmanj-speaking community of the RA having Yezidi identity.

The problem of a dual identity

Nowadays, among the Kurmanj-speaking population of the RA, the most common terms used for the identification of their own national identity (but not nationality!) are Yazidi/Yezidi, Kurd, Kurd-Yezidi or Yezidi-Kurd. From the point of view of the "semantic ethno-psychology" or "ethno-psychological semantics", the notions Kurd and Yezidi are in a relationship of confrontation and interrejection. Moreover, determined by certain historical and political events of the past, adherents of each of these two groups claim superiority over others and are inclined to see in each other an opposing camp repudiated from the common notion of the nation. The terms Yezidi-Kurd and Kurd-Yezidi represent some form of a compromise intended to soften categorical terms – Kurd and Yezidi. However, the terms – Kurd-Yezidi and Yezidi-Kurd hardly define an identity unequivocally. Rather, their use reflects oscillations of representatives of the Kurmanj-speaking community concerning its national affiliation. Besides, the selection of the self-identification by a specific member of the community depends not only on its social and religious status, or age, but also on geographical and economic circumstances, as well as is determined by the situation in which the conversation takes place.

Levon Abrahamian, anthropologist and the member of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia very interestingly recalled Mamoe Halite (Darveshyan), also an anthropologist, "who himself experienced the duality of the Yezidi-Kurdish identity: in his society, he was a respected Yezid in everyday life. As a scientist he thought of himself as a Kurd considered Yezidi only by tradition".[13] The oscillation of the Kurmanj scientist regarding his identity was also expressed by his use of two last names: the surname Darveshyan pointed to his Yezidi identity. By signing as Mamoe Halit, he emphasized his Kurdish identity. Similarly, Karlen Chachani, the famous Kurdish historian has used the parallel forms of his surnames: Chachanyan/Chachani. However, another Kurmanj-speaking ethnographer and writer, Amine Awdal, did not use other forms of his last name, since he clearly followed the Kurdish identity.

---

[13] Abrahamian L., Armenian Identity in a Changing World, Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda Publishers, 2006, p. 111.

Mamoe Halit wrote about the problem of the dual identity among Kurmanj-speaking population of the RA: "The Soviet Yezidi-Kurds have written "Yezidi" as their nationality in the section of the national passport and consider themselves as Yezidis, and not Kurds. Under the word Kurd they only denote Muslim-Kurds. Even today an elderly Yezidi would get extremely offended if called a Kurd. However, recently, especially after the recent exchange of passports, a part of the Yezidi intelligentsia preferred to call themselves as Kurds".[14] Mamoe Halit wrote these words in the mid-1980s. In his monograph about Armenian identity, Levon Abrahamian recalls that "in the late 1980s, I witnessed a demonstration of an extremely aggressive Yezidis, who protested in front of the building of the Communist Party of Armenia about the fact that the famous Kurdologist, himself of Yezidi origin [Shakro Mgoyan – T. D.] in a television interview called his people Yezidi-Kurds".[15] In the early 1980's, L. Abrahamian personally witnessed an incident in a Yezidi village in Armenia in which an angry man almost killed an Armenian ethnographer (now deceased), who called his interlocutor a Kurd.

A decade later, in the book "Nationalities of Armenia", published in 1999 by the Academy of Sciences of Armenia, the Kurds and Yezidis are presented as separate communities: an article on the Yezidi community written by Jamal Sadahyan, the Chairman of the National Union of Yezidis in Armenia, and an article about the Kurds was written by Amarike Sardar, the chairman of the organization of Kurdish intellectuals.[16]

The National Union of Yezidis in Armenia publishes "The Voice of the Yezidis", its official newspaper, in the native language. In addition, the national radio of Armenia broadcasts daily 30 minutes-long programs in the "Yezidi language" (a term used by Jamal Sadahyan). The group with the Kurdish identity also has its own newspaper in the Republic of Armenia. The name of the newspaper is "Rya Taza", published since 1930.[17] In addition, the Union of Writers of Armenia has a section of Kurdish writers. The branch was established in Soviet times.

---

[14] Halit M., Prohibition of Marital Customs of the Yezidi Kurds / Small and Dispersed Ethnic Groups in the European part of the USSR (The geography of settlements and cultural traditions), Moscow, 1985, p. 120.

[15] Abrahamian L., Armenian Identity in a Changing World, Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda Publishers, 2006, p. 112.

[16] Nationalities of Armenia (editors: Hovhannisyan N., Chatoev V., Kosyan A.), Yerevan, 1999, pp. 61, 69. The Kurds and the Yezidis of Armenia are also presented separately in the next book, which appeared three years later: Asatryan G., Arakelov B., Ethnic Minorities of Armenia, Yerevan, 2002, pp. 8 and 20 (in Armenian). See also: Mkrtumyan Y. (eds.), Minorities of the Republic of Armenia Today, I, Yerevan, 2000, pp. 24-25 (in Armenian).

[17] At one time, "Rya Taza" was the only newspaper in the Soviet Union published in Kurmanj.

The impossibility of clearly dividing the boundaries between the Kurds and Yezidis of Armenia is determined by the complexity of the myriad factors shaping their identity. Often, identities do not coincide and vary not only within one village or kin, but even within the same family.[18] Due to the complexity of this factor there is an ambiguity in the interpretation of national values and ideals within the representatives of these two communities. This process can be described as "an active search for an identity" or "construction of their own nationality".

A variety of external factors (political and socio-economic) significantly affects the national self-identification of the members of the Kurmanj-speaking community. For instance, activities of the Kurdish emissaries from Europe were mentioned several times as they were distributing popular literature among the Kurmanj-speaking population of the RA. Perceptions of their own national identity for a particular individual may vary not only at the different stages of his/her life, but also under the influence of specific meetings, discussions or events. In other words, there is a lack of common view and perception among the Kurmanj-speaking population of the RA about their identity. Often the definition of the identity is situational, i.e., depends on who is asking about the identity – a foreigner or a local, a young or an elderly person, an educated or an illiterate person.

Thus, the largest national minority of the RA – the Kurmanj-speaking population – is a vivid example of an ethnic group in the process of building its own identity (its new identity).[19] Part of the Kurmanj-speaking population, which now calls itself the Kurds, has a completely new entity, and demands the attention of researchers. We do not deal with the revision of identity in the Caucasus very often, especially within a group that is in many ways archaic such as the Yezidis. In other words, the case of the Yezidis and the Kurds in the contemporary Armenia is ideal for the analysis of an identity within the constructivist paradigm.

---

[18] During the interviews and surveys conducted by the Armenian Centre for Ethnological Studies Azarashen – 971 people out of 1,912 called themselves Yezidi-Kurd. Interestingly, in 35 cases in which the representative of the community called himself a Kurd or a Kurd-Yezidi, other members of his family defined themselves as Yezidis. It is also noteworthy that during interviews conducted by the same centre among schoolchildren of the Kurmanj-speaking population, children who considered themselves Kurds, in some cases have defined Yezidi as their mother tongue, and conversely, some Yezidis believed that the Kurdish language was their mother tongue. Yezidi parents explained the choice of the term "Kurdish" by their children by the influence of schools as they still continue to have classes in the "mother tongue" written in "Kurdish".

[19] According to the 2001 census, the total number of national minorities of Armenia was 67,657 people, 73% of whom were Yezidis, 1.5% – Kurds.

The main elements of the construction of identities of the "Kurds" and "Yezidis" in Armenia

As noted by Karl Deutsch, for the formation of a national self-consciousness, first something should be formed that will be consciously recognized.[20] Can we attribute these words to the Kurds and the Yezidis in general, and to the Kurmanj-speaking population of the RA in particular?

The part of the Kurmanj-speaking population of the RA, which prefers to be called Kurds, presents the following arguments: 1) "we and the Kurds [reference to the Muslim Kurds – T. D.] speak the same language"; 2) "in our historic homeland – in northern Iraq – the Yezidis, or "those professing Yezidism" live surrounded by the multimillion Muslim Kurdish population"; 3) "we have the same origin as the Muslim Kurds, and 4) "our religion – Yezidism is an early pre-Islamic creed of all Kurds".

The other part of the Kurmanj-speaking population of the RA, which prefers to be called Yezidis, responds to these arguments with a following proposition: 1) "our language is not Kurdish, it is Yezid and the Kurds simply took it over"; 2) "our historic homeland – that is the area of Lalish (Sinjar) in the Northern Iraq, and the Kurds – non-identical tribes from different regions"; 3) "consequently, we have completely separate origins than the Kurds"; 4) "our religion has nothing to do with the religion of the Muslim Kurds".

We will try to separately analyse the four above-mentioned ethno-differentiated traits; their different interpretations form the basis for the construction of the Kurdish and the Yezidi identities.

The language of the Kurds and the Yezidis – Kurmanj

The language of the Kurds and the Yezidis belongs to the north-western group of the Iranian languages. The closest related languages to Kurmanji belong to the Caspian sub-group of the Iranian branch.[21] According to Evliya

---

[20] Hroh M., From National Movements to a Fully-Formed Nation: The Process of Nation-Building in Europe / Nations and Nationalism (translated from English), Moscow, 2002.

[21] On the Kurdish language and dialects, see, for example, Mackenzie D. N., Kurdish Dialect Studies (I-II),Oxford University Press, 1961.

Çelebi, the XVII century Turkish traveller, the Kurds speak 13 languages and 42 dialects. From "the Kurdish languages" the author mentions Sorani, Hikkari, Sinjar, Zaza, Ruziki, etc., at the same time noting that the speakers of these different languages did not understand each other without an interpreter.[22] The first language – Sorani, is the language of the Iranian Kurds and is considered a south-western Iranian dialect (not a north-western Iran dialect, like the Kurmanj). The Zaza language also differs from the Kurmanj and belongs to the Caspian group of Iranian languages. Sinjar seems to be the first reference of the Yezidi language, or more precisely – the Yezidi dialect of the Kurmanj language.

In Armenia, people who call themselves Kurds (i.e. supporters of the Kurdish orientation) consider Kurdish or Krmandzhi (in Armenian – K'rderen) to be their mother tongues. People with Yezidi identity consider Ezdki or Yezidi (in Armenian – ezdieren) to be their native language, thus emphasizing the fact that this is their own national language, not the language of the Kurds. In reality, it is a single language. There are even not minor stylistic differences in literary forms. The term Yezd – is actually a secondary form deriving from the name of the ethno-confessional group of Yezidis. People with Kurdish identity, accordingly, do not consider it right to use this term as the name of the language.

The issue of drafting a textbook in the native language of the Kurmanj-speaking population of the RA for the same reason led to heated debates and a controversy several years ago: what should the textbook be called – Kurdish or Yezidi? Moreover, a new book by A. Tamoyan and H. Tamoyan designed to teach "the Yezidi language" in elementary schools was banned in the Kurmanj-speaking villages were supporters of Kurdish identity reside. For these communities the term "the Yezidi language" is unacceptable. Such attitudes are primarily formed by village elders, school principals and other influential community representatives.[23]

---

[22] Chalabi E., Book of Travels (translated from Turkish into Armenian, foreword and commentary by Safrastyan A. K.), Yerevan, 1967, p. 192. Interestingly, in the present the self-definition of Zaza people in Turkey also sounds like Kurmanj – message V. Voskanian, Department of Iranian Studies Yerevan State University. Kurds living in Batumi define themselves in a same way.

[23] Also see relevant to this subject, interviews with public figures with the Kurmanj-speaking community representatives and with officials: http://groong.usc.edu/orig/ok-20061011.html.

During the Soviet period (from 1940's),[24] all Kurmanj-speaking groups in Armenia used the Cyrillic alphabet, unlike the Kurds and the Yezidis residing in Europe, Turkey, Syria and Iraq (who have been using the Latin alphabet or Arabic script). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, representatives of the Kurmanj-speaking population of the RA professing Kurdish identity began to publish their own newspaper – "R'ya T'eze" (New Way) in the Latin alphabet, thus demonstrating their unity with the Kurds in Turkey and Europe. However, most of the Kurmanj-speaking population of the RA who recognize Yezidi as their mother tongue prefer to use the Cyrillic alphabet. They continue to do so. Groups with the Yezidi orientation publish its newspaper "Dange Ezdiya" (Voice of the Yezidi) in Cyrillic. With this they tend to emphasize their right to have their own Yezidi language – with a script other than the one used by the Kurds.

Historic home

The Kurmanj-speaking population migrated to the territory of modern Armenia mainly during the 19th century, in the period of the Russo-Persian and Russo-Turkish wars. For the majority of Yezidis, considered "infidels" by Iranian and Turkish authorities, the flight to the Russian Empire represented a chance of physical survival. According to some reports, during the Russian-Turkish War of 1828-1829, Yezidis headed by Hassan Aga were fighting on the side of the Russian Army.[25] The term "Yezidi" and attribution of the members of this confessional group to "devil worshipers" demonstrate the negative attitude of the dominant nations in the region to the Yezidis. Before becoming an endo-ethnonym, the term Yazidi/Yezidi was an exo-ethnonym and literally meant "wrong", and

---

[24] In the late Middle Ages, before starting to use Latin or Cyrillic, cases writing short phrases and certain texts by using Armenian alphabet for writing in Kurmanj were known. The most ancient phrases written in Kurmanj deemed the manuscript N 1771 in Matenadaran, which is the Kurdish translation of a passage from the Gospel (Chachanyan K., Contribution of the Armenian Intellectuals in the Study of Kurdish Culture and History (1850-1990), Yerevan, 2004, pp. 25-26, 132, 164-166 (in Armenian). Later, in the early 20th century, a Kurdish alphabet for Kurds living in Armenia was based on the Armenian alphabet. In 1922, when Soviets came to power in Armenia, the Yezidi alphabet was created based on the Armenian alphabet. The author of this alphabet was the Armenian linguist Lazo (Hagop) Ghazarian, who also issued the first Yezidi alphabet – "Shams" (literally – the sun). In Soviet Armenia, the first school for Kurmanj-speaking children was opened in 1929 and the alphabet by Lazo was replaced by the Latin alphabet. In 1944-1945, a Kurdish alphabet based on Russian was introduced and used until the collapse of the Soviet Union.

[25] Halfin N. A., Struggle for Kurdistan, Moscow, 1963, p. 68.

contrary to the true believers – Muslims.[26] Muslims deemed "infidels" support-ers of Malake Tousey,[27] the main Yezidi deity, who did not agree to renounce the faith of their ancestors under threat of death and destruction.

In the Middle Ages Yezidis were also referred as Adawa, Sharga and Dasyni. Sharga is the term in Arabic simply meaning "east". Adawa derives from Sheikh Adi, the founder (or, according to other interpretations, a key reformer) of the Yezidi religion. We could not find an explanation of the term Dasyni in the sci-entific literature on Kurdology and Yezidology. In the 16th century Kurdish author Sharaf Khan uses the ethnonym Tasnim (amended Dasyni) as the name of one of the Yezidi tribes, along with Khalidi, Basyan, Dumbuli etc.[28] Interestingly, until recently there are patronymic groups of Dasyni[29] among the Yezidis of Armenia calling themselves Yezidis from modern Syria.[30] According to Kh. Ch. Luca, the British Orientalist and traveller, in the beginning of the 20th century the term Da-snayi denoted all Yezidis. Apparently, the ethnonym Dasin/Dasnayi is the most ancient of the Yezidis' endonyms. It certainly has a connection to the area of Dasn Ghawar, mentioned many times in medieval Armenian sources. This area is located approximately in the same place as modern Mosul and Sinjar. From the south, it bordered the Dothan ridge, which was the southern boundary of the Armenian Arshakouni kingdom in the fourth century.[31]

In the village of Lalish, located in the vicinity of Mosul and Sinjar, is the only place of pilgrimage for devotees of Yezidism – a temple with the tomb of Sheikh Adi. Yezidis believe this region is not only its historic homeland, but also the centre of the universe, where God decided to live after the creation of the world. The groups with Kurdish identity also consider Lalish

---

[26] Such use of the term Yezidi occurs even in the Armenian Ashough poetry, for example in the songs Sayat-Nova says: "From your love, I become a Yezidi, had melted and depleted for you" (ešxemet darril im ezid, halvec'a mašvec'ak'izit).

[27] Malake Taus (literally "the peacock angel"), also known as Malak Taus (literally "the peacock angel", which is interpreted by some priests as "the head of all angels") is depicted as a peacock. Such a representation of the Yezidi supreme deity played an important role in shaping the stereotype of the Yezidi as followers of Satan as the peacock, was considered a symbol of the devil by many in the East. On the genealogy of the image of Malake Tousey, see: Asatrian G. S., Arakelova V., Malak Tāwūs: The Peacock Angel of the Yezidis / Iran and the Cauca-sus, 2003, vol. 7, No 1-2, pp. 1-36.

[28] Sharaf Khan Bidlisi wrote: "All Kurdish tribes profess shafi in compliance with Islamic teaching and its Sunni... which are truly old and zeal, except for a few tribes who subordinate to Mosul and Syria, for example [tribes] Tasneem Khalid and Basyan, as well as the [tribal] Boght, Mahmood and Dumbuli who profess Yezidism" (Sharaf Khan ibn Shamsadin Bidlisi. Sharaf-Nameh T. I., translation, forword, notes E. I. Vasilyeva, Moscow, 1967, p. 83).

[29] Luce H. Ch., Op. cit., p. 122.

[30] Halit M., Ordinance, p. 127, ca. 2.

[31] Districts Dasn, Nihorakan and Mahkert-tun were part of the province of "strengthened country of Marov" (Ma-rats amur ashkharh).

as their historic homeland, but did not ascribe to it such great ideological significance. Since they mostly are not very religious and atheists, it is not vital for them to emphasize the connection of their historic homeland to Yezidism. By choosing to be called Kurds, they are not inclined to emphasize their connection with Yezidism. Thus, by using the term Kurd as an autonym they try to associate themselves with the millions of Kurds throughout the world. Though, we are not aware of any case of converting to Islam by representatives of this group.[32]

Intellectuals with Kurdish orientation associate the genesis of the ethnonym Kurd to the name of the early-medieval district of Korduk and the tribes that inhabited the district in ancient times. The district of Korduk was a part of the Arkashidi Southern Province in close proximity to the abovementioned area of Dasn. However, groups in Armenia who profess Yezidi identity do not agree that the ethnonym Kurd has a geographical origin. At the level of folk etymology (Volksetimologie), they elevate it to the "Yezidi" verb kərt, meaning "to cut, cut off" and consider the Kurds as splinters of different peoples. Thus, those with "Yezidi orientation" not only show their attitude towards this term, but also create a fertile ground for the construction of their own nationality.

The study showed that representatives of the Kurmanj-speaking population of the RA, both "the Yezidi" and "the Kurds" were well-integrated in Armenia and not planning to migrate to another country. Even those who consider themselves Kurds, very vaguely expressed or were sceptical about possible relocation to an independent Kurdistan. Most of them even preferred not to talk about it[33]. Some members of the Kurmanj-speaking community, who have moved to Russia, achieved considerable success in business. They own cafes, shops and other outlets. Sometimes due to the "Armenian" endings of their surnames Yezidi families in Russia are considered Armenians. And because the word "Yezidi" does not mean anything to most people in Russia, to avoid further

---

[32] Rather, they are Jehovah's Witnesses: over the past two decades, the spread of this sect in some Kurmanj-speaking villages was almost endemic. Also, we are aware of cases where Yezidi immigrants (usually illegal) in Europe are Jehovah's Witnesses.

[33] It should be noted that after the proclamation of Armenia's independence in 1991, because of the difficult social conditions, about 10% of the Kurmanj-speaking Yezidi population has left the republic. See: Sadakhyan J., The Yezidis / Nationalities of Armenia (eds. Hovhannisyan N., Chatoev V., Kosyan A.), Yerevan, 1999, p. 64. Studies show that during 1989-1999, nearly 10,000 Yezids and representatives of the Kurmanj-speaking communities left Armenia and mostly settled in Russia (Krasnodar, Stavropol, Moscow and Moscow region, Yaroslavl, Vladimir, etc.) and some have moved to Ukraine, Poland, Germany and France. Most of this emigration is in the context of the total emigration from Armenia for earnings in the near and far abroad.

questions, representatives of the Kurmanj-speaking population are simply considered Kurds.

Thus, supporters of the Kurdish and the Yezidi identity in the RA are united in their "attachment to a particular territory", to a common historical homeland in northern Iraq, or to Armenia, their "second home." However, groups with Yezidi identity do not feel solidarity towards the groups with Kurdish identity and do not share with them a common history, including the "myth of origin".

Myths about origin

"How can I say that I am a Kurd, if Kurds killed my grandfather?"[34] – is a typical answer of a representative of the Yezidi community to our question: "Who is s/he in terms of nationality – a Kurd or Yezidi? "The Kurds – are not a nation, they are wastes from various nations and nationalities" – say our respondents – "And the word Kurd is an expletive for us. The Kurds are murderers and robbers. How can we be Kurds?"[35]

Groups with Yezidi identity have their opinions about the historical past of the Kurds. Some representatives of the Yezidi clergy believe some Kurds are actually Islamized Yezidis. At the same time, in their opinion, the great majority of the Kurdish population in Turkey is a mixture of different nations – Arabs, Assyrians, Turks and even the Armenians, who over time became Kurmanj-speaking (in the case of Armenians and Assyrians, they are considered converts to Islam). This is how they explain the fact that they speak the same language while at the same time underlining their different ethnicity. Consequently, they consider wrong the tendency of some Yezidi groups to consider themselves as Kurds.

As mentioned earlier, it is very widespread among persons within the Kurmanj-speaking population having the Yezidi identity to consider that the term "Kurd" comes from the verb meaning "to cut" or "to cut off". Therefore, Kurds are considered splinters of different nations, including of the Yezidi. In contrast to this opinion, they consider their own genealogy as "pure", deriving from the

---

[34] The situation of school education among national minorities in Armenia, p. 16.

[35] Notably, a Kurdish historian Sharaf Khan, describing his people, writes: "For the most part they are brave and daring, generous and proud. A remarkable bravery and courage, extraordinary courage and zeal, they have earned the reputation of thieves and robbers" (Sharaf-han, Ordinance Op. p. 83).

mythical ancestor common to all Yezidis. Yezidi legend says that Adam and Eva (Hawa) had 72 sons and daughters, who married each other and from them 72 nations were formed.[36] All children abandoned their poor parents; only the disabled son Shahid bin Ger (alternatives of the name – Scheid Byndzher, Saidi Byndzher, Said Bndzher) stayed. God Malake Taus (an Angel in the form of a Peacock) sent a heavenly woman, Hopu, to Adam. The parents talked it over and decided to marry the woman to their disabled son. The legend states that Yezidis originate from this marriage.

The Muslim-Kurds have a completely different story of their origin. According to Sharaf Khan Bidlisi, the first Kurdish historian living in the 16th century, the Kurds first appeared during the reign of the Arab despot King Zohhak[37] and were named after the ancient Iranian demon Aji Dahaka. Sharaf Khan wrote that in order to save their lives, young men hid in the mountains of Kurdistan and the Kurdish tribe derived from them.

Representatives of the Kurmanj-speaking population of the RA, who call themselves Kurds of course, know the legend about Scheid Byndzher. They usually do not take seriously such "fairy tales" and believe that they have a common origin with the Kurds. Interestingly, some supporters of the common Kurdish identity would immediately cite the legend of Sharaf Khan. The only difference in their story is that they have forgotten the name of the evil King and young men are finding shelter in the mountains of Yezidistan. The nation descending from these men is called the Yezidis[38] (meaning people confessing Yezidism as a religion).

Religion as an element of identity

Representatives of the "Kurdish community" of Armenia confessing the religion Yezidism repeatedly quote the words of Odjalan, the leader of the Kurdish

---

[36] Awdal A., Beliefs of Yezidi Kurds, ed. S. Obosyan, Yerevan: Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the Academy of Science of Armenia, 2006, pp.17-18 (Armenian). A short version of the legend was recorded by S. A. Yegiazarov at the end of 19th century. According to this version, a man named Ezdi by an order of Malake Tousey, married one of the heavenly Hopu and Yezidis are their descendants (Yegiazarov S. A., Brief Ethnographic Sketch of the Kurds Erivan Province: Notes of the Caucasus Department of the Imperial Geographical Society. Book 13. Tiflis, 1891, p. 171). Another version of the same tale has been recorded by us in 2007 from the priest (fakir) Tayara Musaferyana, village Jrashen.

[37] Sharaf Khan. Ordinance. cit. p. 81. The first versions of this tradition, without mentioning the Kurds, are found in the "History of Armenia", Moses Khorenatsi (V in.) and "Shahname", Firdows (X-XI cent.).

[38] Awdal A., Ordinance. cit. p. 18.

National Movement in Turkey to prove their affiliation to the Kurds. Odjalan appealed to the Kurds to return to their roots and to Yezidism, the religion of their ancestors. Thus, it is assumed that all Kurds in the distant past were followers of the Yezidi religion, which clearly contradicts historical sources left by medieval authors.[39]

In connection with the reconstruction of the "Yezidi" past of Kurds, it would be worthwhile to quote the words of E. J. Hobsbaum about the historical distortion: "Forgetting history or even distortion of history (l'erreur historique) plays an important role in nation building. The progress of historical research often represents a threat to a nationality".[40]

Representatives of the Kurmanj-speaking population of the RA consider that the term Kurd should be used in a broader sense and should include not only Muslim-Kurds, but also "the Kurd-sun worshipers". "There are the Catholic-Armenians and Protestant Armenians living in Yerevan," says one respondent from the village of Shamiram, – "But this does not hinder them from being considered Armenians like the rest of the Armenians, who belong to the Armenian Apostolic Church. Similarly we have Muslim Kurds and the sun-worshipping Kurds. But we all are Kurds".

However, people with the Yezidi identity do not agree with this thesis. "To say that we are Kurds is to deny the existence of the nation", said one respondent, a representative of the Yezidi clergy of the village of Ferik. According to the Yezidis, there are approximately 5 million Yezidis living throughout the world. Clearly, this estimate is an exaggeration and statistical data varies from 200,000 to 250,000 persons. Those who profess Yezidi identity believe that religion is a sufficient basis to consider them a separate nation. They often cite the example of Serbs, Croats and Bosnians, who speak the same language, but confess different religions and are considered to be separate nations. According to our respondent: "There are different people in the world who speak the same language… Why can the Croats and Serbs be considered as separate nations? After all, they speak the same language!"

---

[39] According to the latest, the Kurds, before converting to Islam, were considered pagans. This point of view is not shared by scholars.

[40] Hobsbawm E. J., The Principle of Ethnicity and Nationalism in Modern Europe / Nations and Nationalism, Moscow, 2002, p. 332.

Thus, representatives with Yezidi orientation do not accept the opinion that they and the Kurds are a single nation.[41]

The data we collected allow us to consider that religion is the most important indicator of the Yezidi identity. According to the Yezidi faith, it is not possible to convert to Yezidism – the status is only obtained by birth. It is prohibited among Yezidis to address strangers with the words: "my brother" or "my son". Genealogical legends clearly demonstrate the importance of religion in the Yezidi identity (despite the fact that many supporters of the "Yezidi orientation" do not know and cannot explain the main principles and dogmas of their religion).

According to the abovementioned legend of Shahid Byndzher, the husband of heavenly Hopu, from whose marriage Yezidis originated, "Adam, who was a very religious person, conveyed his religion to Shahid and the latter, in turn, to their descendants".[42] Another legend which was recorded by us says: "When God was distributing religions of the world, Yezid also approached him. God asked: "What din (religion, faith) shall I give you? Yezid pointed out at one of his parcels and said: el din (Armenian "this religion") and this is how the nation came to be called: Yezidi".[43]

Yezidis call their religion by different names: Sharfadin, Yezidism, Shams and sun worshiping. The word Shams comes from the Arabic word meaning sun. Yezidism – is a secondary form deriving from the name of the religion – Yezidi. "Molitva kochakov" makes uses the term Sharfadin, but the majority of Yezidis do not like it. When asked by strangers and foreigners about their religion, they answer: "We are sun worshipers". But this term does not exactly characterize the specifics of the Yezidism. Elements of sun worshiping as pagan relics can be also observed in the religions of other nations in

---

[41] Notably, it is interesting to observe that there is approximately the same number of Muslim Kurds and Yezids residing in the Krasnodar region and the majority of the Yezidis distance themselves ethnically from Muslim Kurds. This is manifested, for example, by use of the ethnonyms: Yezidis do not usually describe themselves as Kurds. In the list of members of the community, drawn up by residents in the village Neberdzhayevskaya, Yezidis, in the column "nationality" are listed as "Yezidi" and under "religion" – "sun worshiper". Thus, the differences in the Yezidi faith become the basis of ethnic identity (Sawa M., Ordinance. Op. p. 19).

[42] Kreyenbroek Ph. G., Yezidism – Its Background, Observances and Textual Tradition, New York, 1995, p. 37.

[43] In a recorded by us in the summer of 2007 version of the genealogical legends, a mother of a tribe is called Leil, which corresponds to the Jewish Lilith (the image of the latter, in turn, goes back to the Sumerian Lilith or Leela). In the Jewish tradition, Lilith is the first wife of Adam, who, having failed to convince him that they are equal, flew and turned into a demon: she takes possession of men against their will to give birth to children, harms pregnant mothers and newborns. In the Yezidi tradition, by contrast, Lail is a beautiful maiden from the sky, which became the second wife of Adam.

the region.[44]

Sheikh Adi ibn Muzaffar (1073-1163) is considered to be the founder (or the reformer) of Yezidism. Yezidi often call him Shihadeh/Hadi. From him, according to legend, derive all Sheikh families. Yezidis consider Sheikh Adi ibn Muzaffar to be the messiah and think that he was created from God's shadow. Sheikh Adi ibn Muzaffar, as a real historical person, belonged to the Arabic noble family of Omeid mentioned in several middle-age Arabic writings. Sheikh Adi ibn Muzaffar was born in the village of Beytnar, located in the Baalbek region of historic Syria. He got his nickname Al-Khakkari after the name of the mountain (now located in Turkey) where he lived for a long time. After long travels he settled in Lalesh, the Syrian Nestorian monastery near Molus. Adi became the founder of the religious movement Adawi.[45]

Yezid religious notions clearly differentiate their religion from the three main world religions. Moreover, Shiite Muslims (Iranians) are referred to as distinct from Sunni Muslims. "The Black Book", one of the sacred books of Yezidism notes: "Until the birth of the Christ, our religion was called Paganism. Jews, Christians and Muslims, as well as Iranians, started to oppose our religion (§ 25)". We nevertheless find the most expressed patterns of rivalry with Sunni Islam traceable in the legends about founder Yezidi and Prophet Mohammed, as well as in "Yezidi and Kadie Shrogh", "the Prophet Mohammed and Ochag Shikhadi", "the Battle Yezidi with Arabs".

As we see, the rivalry of Yezids with Muslim Kurds (mainly with Sunni Muslims) is inherent to the very foundation of the Yezidi world-view. This is why even those who wholeheartedly aspire to the "material and spiritual cultural unity of Yezidis and the Muslim Kurds, recognize certain differences in certain cultural traditions: If Muslim Kurds, who, together with the Islam also adopted written traditions, developed quite early; Yezids, using their secret alphabet ini-

---

[44] For example, the custom to pray every morning, turning to the sun, was widespread in historic Armenia among the Armenians in different regions. The Yezidi clergy formulated the so-called "moral code" addressing the Ottoman government with a request to exempt Yezidis from serving in the army. According to the third paragraph of the letter: "Every day, during daylight, every Yezidi should be on their knees to pray on the spot where a sunbeam falls on condition that he did not see any Muslim, Christian or Jew." Indeed, to this day every Yezidi especially at the sunrise turns its face to the sun three times and bows to it.

[45] Asatryan G. S., Religion of Yezidis (main deity, the sacred books) / Historical-Philological Journal, 1989, N 4 (127), p. 136 (in Armenian). According to written sources, Adi was an outstanding scientist and philosopher, one of the most famous preachers in secular circles of his time. Some of the writings of Sheikh Adi (religious tracts, poems) were preserved, which, however, is still poorly understood and put into scientific circulation.

tially only for religious purposes,[46] over time have completely forgotten them; most of them were illiterate (literacy was the privilege only for a narrow circle of Yezidi clergy) and instead focused their energy and talents on folklore.[47]

Finally, we should mention that the majority of the Yezidi religious heritage (prayers, traditions and legends, not counting the two holy books, which constitute a small part of this heritage) were passed from generation to generation verbally[48].

---

[46] These are sacramental books of Yezidism – The Book of Revelation (Kiteb-i Jalwa) and The Black Book (Mašaf-i raš). The period of writing is still not precisely determined (see: Joseph I., Devil-Worship: The Sacred Books and Traditions of the Yezidis. Boston, 1919, online: http://www.sacred-texts.com/asia/sby/sby11.htm). Yezidi cryptography consisted of 33 letters, most of which came from the Syrian Nestorian alphabet.

[47] Rudenko M. B., Kurdish Ceremonial Poetry, Moscow, 1982, p. 7.

[48] For the latest publications, see: Allison C., Yezidi Oral Tradition in Iraqi Kurdistan, Richmond, Curzon Press, 2001; Kreyenbroek Ph. G., Rashow Kh. J., God and Sheikh Adi are Perfect: Sacred Poems and Religious Narratives from the Yezidi Tradition, Wiesbaden, 2005.

Conclusion

Analyses of our study revealed that the construction of the Yezidi identity is based on a conservative attitude towards education and traditional upbringing of children. This made possible to maintain Yezidism's considerable influence over all spheres of family and social life. So far, representatives of the Yezidi clergy – the main ideologists of the Yezidi identity – have failed to elaborate mechanisms for modernizing the Yezidi cultural and religious heritage, which could provide a solid foundation for the construction of the Yezidi identity in the 21st century.

The ideologists of the Kurdish orientation among the Kurmanj-speaking population of the RA, by contrast, have a positive attitude towards education and see it as a way to reduce the value of the Yezidism. However, the mechanisms for constructing the Kurdish identity are first and foremost based on political factors and lack serious cultural and historical research. Consequently, the future and the vitality of this orientation are entirely dependent on political developments in the region.

Analysis of the four major ethno-differentiating factors (language, homeland, origin myths and religion) which form the identity of the Kurds and the Yezidis, suggests that the supporters of the Yezidi and Kurdish orientations among the Kurmanj-speaking population of the RA interpret them in different ways to prove the uniqueness of their respective ethnicities. In regard to language, its name and the writing system play differentiating roles. In regard to the issue of historical homeland, the decisive watershed of the identity is considered an approach according to which the large, often even abstract and unreal pre-historical motherland is getting distant from the small historical homeland.

Thirdly, through the modification of the medieval literary tradition, a new origin myth is formed contrasting the existing traditional legend. And finally, the last factor (religion) influences the formation of identities depending on the level of religiousness of a particular individual: people who do not attribute much importance to the religion of their ancestors are thus preparing the ground for the reduction of the influence of the most essential element of the Yezidi identity – the Yezidi religion.

In our research we tried to analyse processes of constructing new identities among the Kurmanj-speaking population of the RA. However, our efforts are not sufficient to examine prospects for the Kurdish and the Yezidi national movements around the world. How is the national consciousness among Kurds and Yezidis in Europe, Russia, the Middle East and the South Caucasus expressed? What similarities can be observed between the groups of the Kurmanj-speaking population living in different countries, and what are the differences? What factors influence the formation and the transformation of the Kurdish and Yezidi identities in the world? All these questions await comprehensive study, one which takes into account the further development of globalization processes that reduce the value of the borders around the world.

References:

1. Awdal A., Beliefs of Yezidi Kurds. Yerevan: The Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the Academy of Science of Armenia, 2006 (in Armenian).

2. Asatryan G. S., Religion of Yezidis (The Main Deity, the Sacred Books).The Historical-Philological Journal, 1989, N 4 (127) (in Armenian).

3. Asatryan G., Arakelov B., National Minorities in Armenia, Yerevan, 2002 (in Armenian).

4. Yegiazarov S. A., A brief Ethnographic Sketch of the Kurds in Erivan Province: Notes of the Caucasus Department of the Imperial Geographical Society, Book 13, Tiflis, 1891.

5. Mkrtumyan Y. (ed.), Ethnic Minorities of the Republic of Armenia Today, I, Yerevan, 2000 (in Armenian).

6. Rudenko M. B., Kurdish Ceremonial Poetry, Moscow, 1982.

7. Savva M. V., Kurds in the Krasnodar Region, Research, Krasnodar, 2007.

8. Halit M., Prohibition of Marital Customs of the Yezidi Kurds / Small and Dispersed Ethnic Groups in the European Part of the USSR (The geography of settlements and cultural traditions), Moscow, 1985.

9. Halfin N. A., Struggle for Kurdistan, Moscow, 1963.

10. Kharatyan L., Saratikyan S. (ed.), The Situation of School Education among the National Minorities in Armenia: The Armenian Centre for Ethnological Studies Azarashen, Yerevan, 2005 (in Armenian).

11. Hobsbawm E. J., The Principle of Ethnicity and Nationalism in Modern Europe / Nations and Nationalism, Moscow, 2002.

12. Hroh M., From National Movements to a Fully-Formed Nation: The Process of Nation-Building in Europe / Nations and Nationalism (translated from English), Moscow, 2002.

13. Chachanyan K., Contribution of the Armenian Intellectuals in the Study of Kurdish Culture and History (1850-1990), Yerevan, 2004 (in Armenian).

14. Chalabi E., Book of Travels (translated from Turkish into Armenian, a foreword and a commentary of Safrastyan A. K.), Yerevan, 1967.

15. Sharaf Khan ibn Shamsadin Bidlisi, Sharaf-Nameh T. I. (translation, introduction, notes of E. I. Vasilyeva), Moscow, 1967.

16. Abrahamian L., Armenian Identity in a Changing World, Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda Publishers, 2006.

17. Allison C.,Yezidi Oral Tradition in Iraqi Kurdistan, Richmond, Curzon Press, 2001.

18. Andrews P. A., Ethnic Groups in the Republic of Turkey, Wiesbaden, 1989.

19. Asatrian G. S., Arakelova V., Malak Tāwūs: The Peacock Angel of the Yezidis / Iran and the Caucasus. 2003, vol. 7, No 1-2. pp. 1-36.

20. Bois Th., The Kurds, Beirut, 1966.

21. Bruinessen M. van, Kurds and Identity Politics, London, 2001.

22. Guest J. S., The Yezidis, A Study in Survival, London, New York, 1987.

23. Guest J. S., Survival Among the Kurds: A History of the Yezidis, London u.a., 1993.

24. Hovhannisyan N., Chatoev V., Kosyan A. (eds.), Nationalities of Armenia, Yerevan, 1999.

25. Joseph I., Devil-Worship: The Sacred Books and Traditions of the Yezidis. Boston, 1919, online: http://www.sacred-texts.com/asia/sby/sby11.htm.

26. Kreyenbroek Ph. G., Yezidism – Its Background, Observances and Textual Tradition. New York, 1995.

27. Kreyenbroek Ph. G., Yezidism in Europe: Different Generations Speak about their Religion (in collaboration with Z. Kartal, Kh. Omarkhali, and Kh. Jindy Rashow), Wiesbaden, 2009.

28. Kreyenbroek Ph. G., Allison C. (eds.), The Kurdish Culture and Identity, London, 1996.

29. Kreyenbroek Ph. G., Rashow Kh. J., God and Sheikh Adi are Perfect: Sacred Poems and Religious Narratives from the Yezidi Tradition, Wiesbaden, 2005.

30. Lescot R., Enquête sur les Yesidis de Syrie et du Djebel Sinjār, Beyrut, 1938 (1975).

31. Luke H. Ch., The Worshipers of Satan: Mosul and its Minorities, London, 1925.

32. Mackenzie D. N., Kurdish Dialect Studies (I-II), Oxford University Press, 1961.

DIFFERENT GOVERNMENTS IN TBILISI, SAME PEOPLE IN REGIONS: LOCAL ELITES IN THE YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE
(THE EXAMPLE OF GURJAANI DISTRICT, GEORGIA)

Giorgi Gotua

The ruling political regime in Georgia has changed three times since 1990. Twice the government was replaced through non-constitutional means. None of these regimes were able to consolidate and reach consensus with different groups vying for power regarding basic institutions and rules of game.

Researchers studying the transition from autocracy to democracy point out various structural factors (culture, socio-economic factors) which they say determine the successful consolidation of new democratic regimes. In recent years, more and more attention has been paid to political elites as essential actors able to decisively influence the direction of state development. Choices made by elites at certain stages of state development, the level of power and authority they exercise in society and the character of relations among various factions determine the success of the process of forming and consolidating a new regime.

Studies by G. Field, M. Burton and D. Higley demonstrate that the stability of a regime is directly linked to the degree of consensus among its various factions regarding existing institutions and rules of game (another way to guarantee relative stability of the regime, dominance of one group over another, is not discussed as an option within the framework of this research).[1] Georgia's case can serve as a good example demonstrating the correctness of this thesis.

During the period of independence three political regimes have changed in Georgia. The regime of President Zviad Gamsakhurdia – which followed the

---

[1] This thesis is presented in: Field G., Hihley J., Burton M., National Elite Configurations and Transitions to Democracy // Classes and Elites in Democracy and Democratization: A Collection of Readings / ed. by E. Etzioni-Halevy. NY: Garland Publ., 1997, p. 179.

Soviet collapse and came to power as a result of multi-party elections in 1990 – lasted approximately one year and was overthrown by a military coup in January 1992. The coup d'etat was followed by a civil war in which supporters of the ousted president were defeated. The subsequent regime, led by old Communist party functionary and former USSR Minister of Foreign Affairs Eduard Shevardnadze, achieved progress towards stabilizing the situation but was overthrown as a result of a bloodless revolution in November 2003 (the so-called "Rose Revolution") led by current Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili. As many observers point out, both regime changes, in 1992 and 2003, were caused by rifts in the elite and infighting among its various factions.[2]

In this connection, the issue of determining the main players of Georgian politics is of great importance. Analysts of processes under way in Georgia have on many occasions speculated about the influence of local elites under Shevardnadze's rule.[3] Do the local elite really exercise influence on the processes taking place in the country? Do the local district-level elite represent a single coherent group or an amalgamation of groups preserving power at the local level despite the regime change nationwide? And finally, how are actions coordinated and what kind of agreement is formed among the local and national elites? The present article is dedicated to finding answers to these questions.

Where and how the study was conducted

The present study was undertaken by the author in Gurjaani District in April-October 2006. The Gurjaani is located in Kakheti Province, eastern Georgia. This district was created in the late 1920's as a result of the administrative-territorial division of the country in the first years of the Soviet government. With the passage of time a type of identity took shape that was connected to the district and local patriotic moods started to play a certain role in the everyday life of

---

[2] Nodia G., Two Attempts to Establish Democracy in Georgia // Building Democracy in Georgia. Discussion Paper #1. Yerevan: International IDEA, 2003, p. 18.

[3] See, for example, Losaberidze D., Self-Government in Georgia (Development Trends). Tbilisi: Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, 1998, p. 28; Chiaberashvili Z., Tevzadze G., Power Elites in Georgia // After Shevardnadze: Georgian Security Sector Governance after the Rose Revolution. Geneva: Center for Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2004. <http://www.dcaf.ch/_docs/SSR_RRGeorgia/ChapterIX.pdf> (15 December 2006).

the district. According to 2004 data, the population of Gurjaani – the largest in Kakheti Province, was 71,500.[4]

The main branch of its economy is viticulture and winemaking. Its location in the fertile valley of the river Alazani is conducive to this type of activity. Most vineyards are owned by small-time farmers. Only recently have large estates been established owned by wine-producing companies.

The main source of information for the study was informal interviews with former and current officials of the district administration, representatives of the local "intelligentsia", journalists of local newspapers, and activists of local branches of political parties and nongovernmental organizations. Given the narrow circle of persons involved in the political process in this small area, such talks were the only way to obtain significant information about this closed topic.

The issues discussed in the interviews changed in the course of the research. Initially, as the researcher had almost no knowledge about the specificities of the process taking place in the district and had to ask questions based on general knowledge about the processes of political transformation in the country's recent history. As his knowledge about the situation in the district deepened, more attention was paid to various aspects of the local socio-political reality.

As discussions touched upon very sensitive topics, they were not recorded. Important information gathered during the interviews was written in a notebook and after each interview a brief report was drawn up. This made it possible to preserve the most important information, as well as comments made by informants on a particular topic. The absence of verbatim text explains the lack of citations in the article. For this reason the presentation of the main part of the article will have a narrative character – the character of a historical narrative and description of the different periods of the district's political life.

Another feature of this study is associated with the style in which many of the informants preferred to talk. Many of them, including those that were actively involved in the political life of the district, chose not to refer or not to focus on personalities and particular situations. Limited level of trust in the researchers, as well as the narrowness of the circle of insiders, were the reasons for their restraint. In view of this, many informants preferred not to give specific answers to the questions asked by the researcher and instead offered gener-

---

[4] Data of the Statistics Department of Georgia, <http://www.statistics.ge/main.php?pform=78&plang=2> (15 January 07).

alized analyses on issues of interest to the researcher. It is worth noting that these answers and comments served as an invaluable source of information for the study. At the same time, such conversations made it problematic to relate the analyses of the informants with real facts, as well as with the opinions of other informants. After analyzing the information collected, more attention was paid to the testimony of the informants whose analyses corresponded most to information obtained from other sources.

The problem of determining the region's political elite

The recent territorial-administrative division of the country broadly follows the model of the division of the republic during the Soviet era. The basic unit of the country's territorial division in 1991-2006 was the district. In total, there were 67 districts and five independent cities. Until 2006, the president appointed the heads of district administrations, who in turn were usually responsible for appointing heads of local executive bodies. In the mid-1990s, provinces were formed with their own administrations headed by a presidentially appointed governor. Provinces unite several districts and their borders usually coincide with historical Georgian regions. Kakheti Province is one such historical region.

In most cases, the local power is concentrated in the hands of the President's representatives (governors) and groups linked to him.

Thus, the establishment of this institution increased the element of centralization in the functioning of local government (as per the plan of its architects). At the same time, the establishment of this institution resulted in the creation of powerful regional elites led by regional representatives of the president. Governors were closely linked and often had personal ties with the country's president, and formed a separate group in the structure of the national elite during Shevardnadze's rule.[5]

The spread of informal practices in the local government is partly related to the lack of control by the elected representative government. City councils (district-level self-government bodies), which operated at the district level and were elected by the people, did not possess real power and were unable to

---

[5] Chiaberashvili Z., Tevzadze G., Op. cit.

affect the operation of the district administration. At the same time, the laws governing the functions of the local administration did not create conditions for the separation of powers between central, provincial and district-level authorities. In reality, this situation allowed for unlimited control over the activities of the district administration from the leadership of the province. It is also worth noting that the spread of corruption and clientalistic relationships at all levels of government was a feature of Shevardnadze's reign.

Taking into account the abovementioned, one of the major objectives of the study was to identify those who could be termed as the elite of the area. The district's political elite were defined as the vested with official power as high-ranking officials of the local administration and/or having influence over activities of the local authorities.

However, a circle defined by such criteria might include persons who fall into the category of provincial leaders, as well as national-level authorities. Despite the fact that during the study informants repeatedly pointed out the influence of higher-level authorities on the district administration, as well as the fact that it was often impossible to separate the management of the provincial administration and district-level authorities, during the analyses local players first and foremost were examined. Such an approach, as will be shown later, gave interesting results in terms of understanding the balance of power and the difference in the survival strategies of elite groups (cliques) at different levels.

In the study of elites three approaches were used to determine the circle of the persons belonging to the elite and the nature the power they wielded[6]: a) the positional approach, defining the membership of certain individuals of the elite according to the formal positions occupied by these persons in various spheres of social life; b) the reputational approach, which is based on expert opinion concerning the power and opportunities available to the individuals, c) the "who makes decisions?" approach, in which the criterion for determining membership of the elite is the degree of their participation in the process of solving important problems for the community, as well as the success of the particular group/individual in finding these solutions.

At the beginning of the study the positional approach was favored. Thus, the district-level political elite consisted primarily of the leadership of the local ad-

---

[6] See: Ledyaev V. G., Sociology of Power: Conceptual Issues // Power and the Elite in Modern Russia / ed. A. B. Dookie. St. Petersburg: A Sociological Association after M. M. Kowalewski, 2003, p. 5.

ministration. But over time, the importance of other groups in the district was revealed, which led us to use elements of other approaches. For example, in accordance with the "who makes decisions?" approach, the informants were asked questions about the impact of different groups on the most important decisions made by the district leadership – for instance, on senior level appointments in the district administration. In determining the relative influence of various groups or individuals the reputational approach was used.

At the same time, for understanding the nature of local elite groups the specifics of the area should be taken into account, in particular its small size. It should be kept in mind that when talking about the elite of the district we are talking about relatively small groups that may consist only of a few people. Accordingly, the relationships within these groups may have a more horizontal nature than may be the case with groups operating within the wider community. It is for this reason that in some cases this paper uses the term "clique".

Below are described the groups that in different periods have had a significant impact on the management of the district, and therefore can be attributed to the political elite of the district.

1) The administrative elite of the district. This is the head of district administration (prefect in 1991, gamgebeli after 1992) and the heads of its constituent institutions, as well as the chairmen of elected bodies. Often, the head of district administration would create a team of colleagues to whom they entrusted the most important positions in local administration that would fall apart with the departure of the leader from the position of the head of the district. During Shevardnadze's rule, the administration of the district, and in particular its head, were closely related and subordinated to the leadership of the province and its governor, as well as to the informal leader of the provincial authorities.

The structure of this group and relationships within it can be understood by how the informants described the process of distribution of senior positions following the appointment of a new district head. According to them, a new administration head had to balance between three different interests: a) his personal interests that dictated the appointment to important positions of persons to whom he/she personally trusted and with whom he/she was bound by personal commitments and b) the interests of the provincial and in some cases, the central government and c) the interests of local groups with their own stakes in the political and social life of the province.

2) The economic elite. Its formation is related to the shadow economy of the Soviet period. During that and following periods, these groups occupied important positions in the economy of the region and controlled some of the enterprises. The richest and most influential was a group that united people from the village of B. Economic groups repeatedly attempted to establish control over the district administration and achieved notable successes: officials associated with these groups, especially with the group from the village B and their lobbyists held significant leadership positions in the district, and in some periods – the post of head of the local administration.

Attempts by economic groups to establish control over the district administration were given a different explanation in the study. One of the explanations related to the illegal nature of the business during the Soviet era. By establishing control over the district administration, economic groups tried to reduce costs associated with the need to maintain good relations with the authorities. Correspondingly, with the decreasing importance of this factor the influence of economic groups began to fall in the late 1990's, according to one informant. In addition, another factor existed, but it was rather symbolic – the possession of certain economic resources pushed the representatives of economic groups to attempt to seize power, which in this case could be viewed as an end in itself. According to some informants "This area was run by people from the village B."

3) Criminal authorities. According to various sources, between two and four crime bosses (so called "thieves in law") operated in the district at a given time. Their intervention in the management of the district was less noticeable. With their own sphere of influence, in some cases, they interfered in conflicts between different groups of regional elites, and, apparently, worked closely with representatives of the old nomenklatura-type elite and business.

The respondents' stories about the activities of the criminal world shed light on an interesting aspect of the functioning of the elites in the post-Soviet society. Despite the fact that the main boundaries of this community were limited to its usual criminal sphere, in some cases it acted as a regulator of the power relationships between the various subjects of power. In certain cases, when difficulties arose in the course of proceedings between individual officials or groups of officials, the thieves acted as unofficial "judges" and took decisions on particular issues which were not subject to appeal. Thus, the thieves filled a certain vacuum in power relations.

4) Mkhedrioni. Mkhedrioni represented armed groups active in the years 1992-1995 countrywide. They played a dual role. On the one hand, in the civil war they were one of the pillars of Shevardnadze's regime and to some extent even gained the official status of militia, responsible for assisting the population during emergencies. However, they often displayed criminal behavior and their leaders attempted to usurp power in the country and establish control over the economy. The competition for power between the government and the Mkhedrioni turned into an open conflict, which resulted in the disbanding of the organization and arrests of its members. In 1992-1995, Mkhedrioni to a large extent controlled Gurjaani District, and already in 1993, local elites got involved in the fight among groups supporting Shevardnadze, and, together with the Mkhedrioni, scored a decisive victory.

5) Party activists. These players only occasionally appeared on the political scene of the district. Activists of the former informal unions formed the core leadership of the district in 1991, but were forced to cede power to the Mkhedrioni in 1992. Party activists who came to power after the 2003 revolution were unable to establish themselves in the leadership of the district, or took secondary positions and entered into a coalition with representatives of the old elite.

The episodic appearance of these players on the stage of the region's political life underscores the relative stability of the structures of the local authorities. Lack of appropriate resources, such as money or management experience, made the party elite completely dependent on the support of central authorities. The lack of resources prompted the aforementioned party activists to collaborate with other groups of local elites. Over time, party activists lost control over the management system and were partially or completely eliminated in favor of the "old" groups of elites.

Gurjaani District in 1989-2003: Regime change and the balance of local forces

In this section the change of power in the district during the period from 1989 to 2003 will be described. In addition, groups and individuals involved in the redistribution of power in the given period will be presented.

We are interested in how the change of the political regime in the country is linked to the struggle for control among various groups of the district. Is a change of the local government a direct result of the change of regime in the country or does the fight for power in the region have its own dynamics (albeit dependent on the results of the struggles in the capital)?

The fall of the Soviet regime, Zviad Gamsakhurdia's rise to power (1989-1991)

The period between 1989 and 1991 is characterized by the collapse of the Soviet system of power in the country as a whole and at the district level in particular. For the groups of local elites this period, as well as the next few years, was a period of struggle for survival and power in the new environment. Some of these groups still continue to play an important role in the political life of the district. First and foremost, it was the party nomenklatura of the district controlling local power institutions. Various representatives of the local nomenklatura had close ties with rival groups in the leadership of the republic, in particular with groups affiliated to Eduard Shevardnadze, former leader of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (in 1972-1985) and to Jumber Patiashvili, who held the same post in 1985-1989. At the same time, the party nomenklatura were closely related to the operation of shadow economic groups in the district. Since the second half of the 1980s, representatives of these groups, bringing together the villagers from B, showed a desire to enter into closer contact with the district leadership and establish control over its operations. Once the group achieved some success in getting power, other economic groups also began to seek and obtain access to the leadership of the district. Thus, by the end of the 1980's, a relationship based on symbiosis between business groups and regional authorities was formed.

At the same time, in connection with attempts to liberalize the Soviet regime, a nationwide social movement gained strength that supported the democratization of social life and favored national self-determination. After the bloody crackdown of April 9, 1989, a radical wing of the movement acquired dominant influence in the society, calling for immediate secession from the USSR and the restoration of Georgia's independence. On the political scene of the district,

a new character appeared – a group of activists of the movement for independence. The leaders and members of local branches of national organizations usually were young men, strangers to political life not related to the nomenklatura regime. Despite the sometimes sharp differences among various leaders resisting the Soviet party and organizations in the center, there apparently was close coordination among the activists of the independence movement on the ground.[7] First of all, the opposition positioned itself against the communist government of the district. However, over time, as the communist government lost its legitimacy and, consequently, its mechanisms of control, activists gained influence, and the need for some coordination between district authorities and leaders of the informal movement evolved. The period starting April 9, 1989 and ending with the coming to power of Zviad Gamsakhurdia is characterized by progressive paralysis of state authority. Therefore such cooperation, according to informants, was necessary for the normal functioning of the government.

Multiparty elections in late of 1990 resulted in a victory for Gamsakhurdia's "Round Table – Free Georgia" bloc. In accordance with the decisions of the new leadership of the republic, the district was headed by a prefect appointed by the president. Unlike many other districts, the prefect in Gurjaani was not a representative of the old nomenklatura, but the head of the local branch of a party belonging to the ruling bloc. According to witnesses of the events of that period,[8] two factors determined the election of this person, first as the majoritarian MP of the district, and then his appointment as prefect of the district: membership of the party headed by the president, and the shadow of popularity that the charismatic leader of the country cast over his supporters.

The district leadership had two main objectives: the formation of a new district-level authority and the normalization of relations with the existing powerful groups, primarily with economic groups, which included managers of wineries and other businesses. The district administration solved the first problem by completely sacking old personnel associated with the former regime. This, according to some informants, caused an acute shortage of qualified personnel. In regards to the second problem, the government began to establish control

---

[7] Information about the main events of the late Soviet regime and the relationships between various elite groups during the government of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, was obtained mainly from the local members of national parties. Among the informants were those who came to power as a result of victory of Gamsakhurdia's Round Table in the elections and those who had not received any job in the district leadership. The information obtained was compared to the observations of persons not involved at that point in the political struggle.

[8] In particular, this information we received from a local journalist.

over the income of different enterprises, and in some cases even tried to involve its henchmen in the management of enterprises. Despite the fact that the type of relations based on regular payments to the authorities was not new to businesses and business leaders of the Soviet period, the new prefect's intractability caused dissatisfaction among the economic elite of the district.

At the same time, a schism was growing between the new leaders of the district and activists of the national movement. When time to hand out posts came, party solidarity receded into the background and personal relationships came to the fore: people who had not even paticipated in the independence movement were appointed to positions in the district administration and some activists were dismissed from the power structures. As a result, a group of former activists of the national movement and the leaders of the provincial government was formed, which opposed the prefect of the district. In this struggle, according to some reports, the opponents of the prefect won the support of the old nomenklatura and the economic elite.[9] This circumstance further emphasizes the growing influence of the members of the "old" elite in the political process taking place in the country.

After a few episodes in which the confrontation between the prefect and his opponents became apparent, the prefect of the district was dismissed by the president. The deciding factor according to some witnesses of those events was the loss of confidence by the country's top leaders, including the president, in the prefect.

After a brief struggle for power, a delegate representing the district in the parliament of the republic was appointed as the prefect. Crucial to his victory was, apparently, a perfect combination of two factors: the ability to bypass the competitors at the level of the national authorities and the support of the local elite, including the nomenklatura. His arrival as head of the district government marks the return of representatives of nomenklatura to a range of high positions and the growing influence of the old elite. According to some informants, this is explained not only by alliances struck by the representatives of old and new elites, but also by the need for competent personnel necessary to govern the district. The subsequent period is characterized by gradual loss of the levers of power by

---

[9] I collected information about the details of the ensuing conflict of this period from an informant, who occupied a significant position in the leadership of the district during that period. The facts and analytical observations provided by this informant greatly helped the author in understanding developments during that period.

representatives of the ruling party and the growing influence of the old nomenklatura. According to one of the informants, as the district administration was losing control over the situation, another group – crime bosses, which enjoyed influence in the Soviet period – started to play an increasingly important role.

Return of Eduard Shevardnadze and the subsequent power struggle (1992 – 1995)

In January 1992, as a result of an armed coup President Gamsakhurdia was overthrown. A coalition consisting of National Guard troops, armed Mkhedrioni and Gamsakhurdia's opponents came to power. The number of Mkhedrioni members in the district by that time was considerable and this group played a leading role in the governance of the district.[10]

After returning to the country in March 1992, Eduard Shevardnadze[11] began to surround himself with representatives of the former nomenklatura elite. Representatives of the nomenklatura of Gurjaani District used old ties with the new head of the country and were appointed to senior positions in the local administration. In the beginning, representatives of the nomenklatura were supported by the Mkhedrioni, who apparently calculated that they could use the experience and networks of the new heads of the district for cover while they concentrated the real power in their own hands.

The Mkhedrioni gained ever greater influence, establishing themselves not so much in the political arena, as with threats of physical violence. Crime bosses had to temporarily retire, giving Mkhedrioni members their sources of income. Sources of income for members of the organization were looting, kidnapping and extortion. The attention of the Mkhedrioni was mainly focused on the representatives of the old district elite, which in Soviet times had managed to accumulate significant financial resources. However, compulsory levies were also applied to farmers. Mkhedrioni threatened not only the material wealth, but

---

[10] Information about the early stages of the formation of the Mkhedrioni was collected from one of the founders of the local branch of the Mkhedrioni. The story about events following the coup of 1992 is based on evidence gathered from different informants.

[11] Eduard Shevardnadze led the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1972-1985. After his appointment as the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the USSR, he continued to influence political developments in the republic through his supporters in the leadership of the Georgian Communist Party. In March 1992, he returned to the country at the invitation of the military junta, which organized the coup in the winter of 1991-1992 and was soon elected as the head of state. By 1995, he managed to consolidate power and was elected president.

also lives of the elite and local residents. Mkhedrioni established control over the activities of the district administration and began to pursue leadership positions through their proxies.

During the time when the Mkhedrioni fully controlled the district, the popular head of the district administration died in Gurjaani under mysterious circumstances. It was rumored that he was poisoned by one of the leaders of the Mkhedrioni. By that time, the conflict between Eduard Shevardnadze, the head of state, and the Mkhedrioni had ripened. Local elites, along with other supporters of Shevardnadze, became actively involved in preparations for the final battle with the militia as it was extremely unpopular among the population. The police stepped up after having been inactive during the terror of Mkhedrioni. The old district elite gradually started to gain ground and win back control of the district. The struggle against the Mkhedrioni in the region was led by N., the former first secretary of the district party committee of the neighboring Telavi District, who due to close ties with Shevardnadze achieved a high position in the regional nomenklatura. In summer 1995, mass arrests of members and leaders of the Mkhedrioni took place in Kakheti Province and elsewhere in Georgia.

The period of domination over the district by the Mkhedrioni and the fight against it demonstrated the viability of the old district elite and their ability to fight for power in the toughest conditions. In the ensuing struggle for power the district elite was able to take the side of the coalition supporting Shevardnadze and mobilized available resources for this fight.

Stabilization of Shevardnadze's regime (1995-2003)

The period from 1995 to 2003 was characterized by relative stability. After the victory over the Mkhedrioni, the local regional elite – represented first and foremost by the informal head of the district nomenklatura, N., established its power in the district.[12]

The very authoritarian governance of N. concealed a complex system of interactions between different groups, including between various district cliques.

---

[12] During the Soviet Union N. was the first secretary of the Telavi District Committee of the Communist Party. Later, during Shevardnadze's rule, she held the post of gamgebeli (administration head) of Telavi District, from which she effectively led the entire province of Kakheti. She secured this influential position in large part because of her close ties to the president's family.

Many features of the management system established during this period recalled the Soviet era. Noteworthy was the return of crime bosses to the district scene. Let us here consider only the most important features of the system of power distribution in the second half of the 1990's.

One of the characteristics of this period is the increased centralization of control. With the establishment of the structure of the provincial administration in the mid-1990's, formally headed by the governor, but having a more influential leader in the person of N., the district leadership came under the control of regional authorities. In accordance with the division of influences among the different elite groups during the Shevardnadze era, Kakheti was considered to be N.'s exclusive stronghold.[13] However, when an influential figure was appointed to the position of governor, who in addition had good communication with the central authorities and pursued an independent policy, he was able to partially counterbalance the impact of N.

It appears there was a certain distribution of spheres of influence between the president's provincial representative (governor) and the informal leader of the local elite. In this regard, it is important to note that the governor is a native of Gurjaani District and on various occasions held the position of head of the district administration.

Accordingly, a certain right to influence the district was prescribed to him and the "legitimacy" of his interests in the district was recognized. In any case, the regional center had a significant impact on political processes in the district, exemplified by the informal procedure for the approval of the deputy gamgebeli. According to informants, such approval was mandatory, though in some cases a formal procedure.

The role played in this system by the head of district administration shows the distribution of power in the district in 1995-2003. While in most cases, the government in the district was appointed by the provincial government (although in some cases, candidates came from the local elite), the head of the district administration, supported by his/her patrons, had the opportunity to form a team of "his/her" government officials, to whom he/she entrusted leadership positions in the local administration. But at the same time he/she was forced to consider the interests of local groups and appoint representatives of these groups to senior positions in the

---

[13] The fact that N. enjoyed unlimited power in the province is a matter of common knowledge regarding the distribution of power in the province during Shevardnadze's rule and it was presented as such by the informants. More precise information about the relations between N. and other actors was received by asking follow-up questions during the interviews, as well as several meetings with more informed persons, mainly representatives of the previous authorities.

local administration, or leave their positions untouched and enter into various transactions with their representatives. According to informants, positions in the district administration have always been held by individuals who retained the position for a long time and enjoyed the support of the regional administration or economic groups. The head of the district had virtually no opportunity to remove such people from their positions. Replacement of certain officials in the district administration by one gamgebeli trying to demonstrate his determination to carry out his own policy was one of the reasons for the collapse of his professional career.

During this period, old economic groups broke up, and their influence on the management of the district weakened. To a large extent this was due to increased centralization of the control over the district. The old economic elite apparently did not have sufficient economic resources at their disposal to counter the growing influence of the provincial authorities to manage the district and ensure the loyalty of local officials. The reduction in the influence of economic groups became apparent when in the late 1990's, a once-influential group established by businessmen from the village of V. was unable to ensure the appointment of their representatives in the district administration. However, the collapse of the old group did not mean the exit from the scene of their "representatives" in the government. On the contrary, many of them retained their positions in the district leadership, maintaining close contacts with individual businessmen and representatives of the upper echelons of power. Illustrative of how influential these economic groups were during a certain period of the political life of the district is the fact that until the late 1990s all the district leaders were from the village of V. or the surrounding villages.

The collapse of the system of power distribution in the district and in the region as a whole followed the fall of Shevardnadze's regime in 2003. The threat of regime change was felt by the elites. It can definitely be said that the local elite attempted to establish links with the opposition before the "Rose Revolution", which brought that opposition to power in the country.[14] However, after the revolution and the collapse of the old configuration of power, the problem of retaining their positions became more substantial. One of the tasks faced by the elite was to find a common language with politicians who emerged in top

---

[14] Thus, despite the unconditional support given by the local elite to the candidates from the ruling party in the parliamentary elections in 2003, many of its members supported the candidacy of the opposition party that later was included in the revolutionary coalition.

positions in the district administration as a result of the revolution and possibly neutralize their influence. Both of these tasks were largely met. Local activists of the United National Movement – the party which led revolutionary demonstrations in Tbilisi – got almost no top posts in the district administration and were largely relegated to secondary posts. Despite the fact that some new faces emerged in the district leadership after the revolution, people connected to the former nomenklatura regime gradually returned to power and their influence grew. Hence, the local elite has once again demonstrated its ability to regroup amid changes occurring in the country, thus preserving power and influence on events and processes taking place in the district.

Table: Key political events in the country and changes at the level of local elites

	Developments in the country	**Provincial elite**	**District elite**
1988-1989	The rise of the national movement		Emergence of local branches of national parties
1990-1991	The arrival in power of the Round Table – Free Georgia political bloc		Changes of the district authorities at all levels and the resulting crisis of local government
1992	Overthrow of President Gamsakhurdia		Return to power of representatives of the nomenklatura and shadow businesses, establishing control over the district by the Mkhedrioni
1995	Victory under the leadership of Shevardnadze's government over the Mkhedrioni		Dismantling of local Mkhedrioni groups and arrests of its members
1995-2001	Stabilization of Shevardnadze's regime	N. establishes control over the province, establishment the institution of governor	Local authorities cede power to regional cliques, influence of local economic groups falls
2003	Rose Revolution	Departure from the political scene of N. and affiliated regional cliques	The arrival of district government officials associated with the new regime

Key findings

Our study confirmed that the main characteristics of the local government after independence (since 1991) are the centralized nature of local governance and the dominance of informal practices over legal standards in the district administrations.[15] Both of these features are a legacy of the Soviet system of management and were propagated by the slow change of the legal framework, as well as through the influence of old local nomenklatura groups. This has in many cases to a large extent determined the choice of local elites in favor of adaptation strategies during different regimes. This strategy proved highly successful, as it enabled local elite groups to control power on the ground and at the same time not associate themselves with different regimes. In doing so, the local elites were able to evade responsibility for problems connected to the activities of this or that government and avoid the fate of the regimes replacing each other.

The study revealed the coexistence of two groups of elites at the local level – the provincial and the district-level elites. Provincial elites developed during the rule of Shevardnadze as a result of attempts by the center to strengthen the centralized governance. At the same time, the attachment of the provincial elite to the general structure of Shevardnadze's neo-patrimonial regime determined its instability during the subsequent regime change.[16] Various district groups, on the contrary, occupied a subordinate position in relation to the regional elite, but after changes in the central government, they had a better chance to retain power.

The main groups of district-level local elites were quite stable. Except for those brief periods when the control of the district moved to the hands of central authorities nominated by party activists, or to semi-criminal structures, power in the region was mainly concentrated in the hands of the same bureaucratic and economic groups that existed since Soviet times. At the district level, the gradual decline of the influence of economic groups and strengthening of the regional-level bureaucratic elite was observed, but officials connected in the past with economic groups did not lose their power and kept it within the framework of a corrupt bureaucratic system of government.

[15] Losaberidze D., Op cit. p. 43.

[16] Eisenstadt S. N., Revolution and the Transformation of Societies, Moscow: Aspekt-Press, (1999 [1978]).

The answer to the main question of this study – the role of district elites in the country – is the following: There was a circle of persons in the district during the present research period able to influence, and even control, the governance of the district. We can say that processes of power redistribution observed in the district took place to a certain degree in an autonomous regime and did have limited relation to events taking place in the country. After several regime changes nationwide, a redistribution of power also took place at the district level, but at the same time other processes were also observed: Certain groups and coalitions were formed and dissolved inside the district's elite – groups associated with the former regime prevailed over the representatives of the ruling regime (such was the case, for example, with Zviad Gamsakhurdia's short rule).

Due to the lack of resources, the district elite could not compete with higher-level elites during the process of political transformation. Therefore, the interests of local groups focused exclusively on the district authorities, but they were forced to share power with the elites connected with the upper levels of government (provincial or central). Resolution of conflicts between various groups in the local elite took place precisely at the highest levels of governments – at central or provincial levels. The purely local character of district elite and its hierarchical relationships with national elites hindered further connections and unions with other elites countrywide. The strategy of local elites was to adapt to successive central governments rather than to actively participate in politics at the national level. Provincial elites were also closely associated with the structure of government established under Shevardnadze, and met their end with the change of the regime. Thus, a local elite capable of participating in the power struggle at the national level has not yet been formed. There was no faction representing the interests of local groups among the various groups of the national elite fighting for power in 1990-2003.

It can be said that the absence of a group representing interests of local elites on the national political scene has narrowed the range of the main participants in the struggle for power and decreased the possibility of reaching a compromise between various elite groups on the rules of the game. This in turn became one of the factors contributing to the overall instability of the regime. At a time when a power struggle unfolded among small numbers of players, in many cases between two players, politics easily turned into a zero-sum game.

The struggle for power in such circumstances was uncompromised and continued until the full expulsion of the opponent from political life. At the same time, the political dependence of the local elites and their strategy for adapting to new regimes allowed them to attribute the inefficiency of local governance to the policy of the country's leadership and claim that it led to the erosion of the regimes at the lower levels of government. This, they maintained, was primarily manifested in the growing inefficiency of governance and the loss of trust in the regime locally.

References

1. Classes and Elites in Democracy and Democratization: A Collection of Readings ed. by E. Etzioni-Halevy, Garland Publ, New York, 1997.

2. Eldersveld S. J., Political Elites in Modern Societies, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1989.

3. Fieldeing N., Qualitative Interviewing. In: Researching Social Life ed. by N. Gilbert, Sage, London, 1999.

4. Losaberidze D., Regionalism and Local Self-Government in Georgia, Series: Building Democracy in Georgia, Discussion paper #3, International IDEA, Yerevan, 2003.

5. Bellamy R., Pluralism and Elitism. In: Blackwell Companion to Political Sociology ed. by Kate Nash and Allan Scott, Blackwell, London, 2001.

6. Belanovsky S., In-Depth Interviews, Nicholas M., Moscow, 2001.

7. Duka A.V., et al, Regional Elites in Russia: Problems, Approaches, and Hypotheses Institute of Sociology, St. Petersburg, 1999.

8. Kvale S., Research Interview, Smisl, Moscow, 2003.

9. Ledyaev V. G., Sociology of Power: Conceptual Problems in the Book: The Power and the Elite in Russia today ed. A. V. Dooke, Sociological Society after M. M. Kovalevsky, St. Petersburg, 2003.

10. Losaberidze D., Self-Government in Georgia, Trends (Georgian), Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, Tbilisi, 1998.

11. Organic Law of Georgia on Local Government, 1997.

12. Sociology of Politics ed. G. K. Ashin, E. D. Lozinski, C. A. Krashenka, Examen Moscow, 2001.

13. Eisenstadt S. N., Revolution and the Transformation of Societies, Moscow: Aspekt-Press, (1999 [1978]).

PHENOMENA OF INFORMAL RELATIONS IN THE SYSTEM OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT IN ARMENIA

Tatevik Margaryan

Nowadays in Armenian communities we notice the symbiosis of the written and traditional laws. Yet written laws are violated constantly when they contradict informal behavioral regulations. The aim of this paper is to analyse the factors and consequences of the dissemination of informal rules at the level of local self-government. The choice of the community as the object of research is based on the fact that the community is the smallest territorial-administrative unit where formal rules directly affect the interests of local residents. In addition, the community can be presented as a model of a society, with its micro structures of representative and administrative powers.

The main thesis of present paper is that the mechanisms of local self-government are mainly regulated by informal relations in the communities and they often contradict the norms prescribed by laws. In my opinion these contradictions are linked to the three main groups of factors that define the current situation in the communities. Firstly, these are the cultural features that are historically connected to the old local traditions; second, daily functioning informal norms of the Soviet times; and lastly, post-socialist conditions that compel people to look for new strategies and elaborate new rules.

In this research the case-study approach (description of certain cases) was chosen as the strategy. For this reason two communities were selected. Based on my observations and communications with local residents I tried to reveal the adaptive strategies used by them, their participation level in community life, and the forms of influence on the functioning mechanisms of local powers from the side of the residents. In addition, the corresponding legislation (normative acts) was analysed, and the materials of other studies[1] were used. The research was conducted in August-September 2004.

---

[1] Materials of the NGO "Against Violation of Law" were also used in this study, collected in the framework of the project: Monitoring participation level and strengthening community skills to overcome poverty during years the 2003-2004.

Before we begin the analyses of the influencing factors of the informal rules on the mechanisms of local self-government, it is necessary to briefly describe the formal aspects – legislative basis of the local self-government in Armenia.

Legislative basis of the institute of local self-government in Armenia

Principles, structure and powers of local self-government in Armenia

According to the Constitution of Armenia adopted in 1995, Armenia is divided into 10 regions (Marzes), not including Yerevan, which has the status of independent city. The regions comprise 930 communities that include 1,000 settlements. The population of communities varies widely – from 300 to 300,000 inhabitants. For the state policy on communities, for example, in determining the community grants according to the law on fiscal equalization, the population is a very important factor. In addition, the geographical location of the community is also a very important factor, as it determines its status as a cross-border and/or mountainous or highland community.[2]

In 1996 on the basis of the Constitution, the law of the Republic of Armenia "On Local Self-Government" was adapted which defined the concept of local self-government and regulated the powers of local self-government bodies. The law mainly corresponded to the European Charter on Local Self-Government. Over several years the gaps and shortcomings of the law were identified and were corrected in the new law adopted in 2002. The new law provides more opportunities for residents' participation in the management of the community and includes the provisions that correspond to the country's responsibilities before the Council of Europe. Let me briefly introduce the main provisions of the law that are important for this study:

By law, local self-governance is defined as the legally guaranteed rights and ability of local self-governments to resolve community problems, and under its own responsibility and within the framework of the law to dispose of community

---

[2] Tumanyan D., Local Government in Armenia, available at http://lgi.osi.hu/publications/2001/84/Ch–6–Armenia.pdf, (Local Governments in Eastern Europe, in the Caucasus, in Central Asia), last accessed in September 2004.

property in order to improve the welfare of all its residents.[3] The structure of local self-government consists of the Council of Elders and the Head of the Community (the Mayor in the cities and the Elder in the village communities). The Council is defined as a representative body and the Head of the Community – as the executive body of the community.

The basic principles of self-governance include, firstly, the overall competence implying the right to implement any activity that is in the interests of the community if not defined otherwise by law; and secondly, independence and responsibility in the implementation of self-governance complying with the law and the bounds of financial affordability and promotion of financially weak communities through financial equalization. These principles also include community accountability, transparency and openness of local self-government.[4]

Local self-government bodies play a dual role: on the one hand carrying out self-government in the community, and mediating between federal government agencies and the community on the other. Thus, the local implementation of government policies and program ultimately is carried out by local authorities. Under the law "On Self-Government" the function of implementing a government order is defined as the concept of ordered (delegated) authority. Among functions directly designated to local self-government ("own powers"), mandatory and voluntary functions of local self-government are distinguished.[5]

The duality of the community head's functions necessary for effective governance, at the same time lays the groundwork for a dual interpretation of the roles of local authorities. In fact, the head of the community is, on the one hand, the representative of governmental bodies, and on the other hand, an independent institution that regulates the internal affairs of the community in accordance with that community's needs and will.

The vulnerability of local self-government is also reflected in the weak financial self-sufficiency of local self-government bodies. More than half of the community budget consists of central government transfers which may be delayed and whose amount is often changed. As the collection of local taxes on land and private property is quite problematic, many inhabitants are not in a position to pay them. According to an estimate by the Urban Institute, the budget

---

[3] The Law of the Republic of Armenia "On Local Self-Government", 05 June 2002, Article 3.

[4] The Law of the Republic of Armenia "On Local Self-Government", 05 June 2002, Article 9.

[5] The Law of the Republic of Armenia "On Local Self-Government": Questions and Answers. Allowance for Residents of the Community, Yerevan, 2002 (in Armenian).

of the self-government bodies accounts for about 6% of the state budget.[6] For comparison, the budget of local councils in Wales consists of more than one third of the state budget.[7]

The law on the Local Self-Government offers sufficient opportunities for citizens' participation in the process of governing the community. First of all, the participation is guaranteed though the election of self-governance bodies – the head of the community and the council of the community. There is also an opportunity to organize a referendum in the community at the decision of the council. The referendum can be organized for resolving especially important matters. The law permits organization of marches, meetings and other mass-participation events within the framework of the relevant legislation. As such, citizens have the opportunity to express their opinions regarding certain issues and problems. The head of the Community is obliged to meet village residents, to review their suggestions, complaints and statements and take appropriate action. The members of the Council of Elders are also obliged to organize events for residents to inform them about the work of the council.[8]

At the local level, decisions regarding issues affecting the community are made by the Council of Elders and the head of the community. Such meetings are chaired by the head of the community, who has a consultative vote.[9] Meetings of the Council of Elders are open to the public and any local resident is allowed to participate in deliberations with the right to a consultative vote. Village inhabitants have the right to familiarize themselves with decisions made by the Council, the budget of the village and the village's three-year development plan. Information about the budget and the development plan should be posted in public places easily accessible for the community members.[10]

However, despite all the opportunities granted by the law, the level of participation of community residents in decision-making processes at the local level is very low, according to available data. According to the Urban Institute there are great difficulties in access to information about the activities of local

---

[6] Baseline Study for Armenia Local Government Program, The Urban Institute. March 2000, p. 9.

[7] About Local Government, Information Centre of UK Local Government, available at: http://www.local.gov.uk/default.asp?sID=1088162663359.

[8] Law of the Republic of Armenia "On Local Self-Government": Questions and Answers – Guidelines for the Community Members, Yerevan, 2002 (in Armenian).

[9] Law of the Republic of Armenia "On Local Self-Government", 05 June 2002.

[10] Law of the Republic of Armenia "On Local Self-Government": Questions and Answers – Guidelines for the Community Members, Yerevan, 2002 (in Armenian.).

self-governmental bodies. Rural residents are better informed about events in the community, but information about the community budget is not available to them. "They deeply believe that the community lacks the adequate financial resources and the only way to improve the situation is to get additional financial support from the government".[11]

However, according to the data of the same Urban Institute, comparative analyses in the cities where the organization has implemented its projects show that the percentage of those who are interested in the work of local self-government in 2002 increased by 10.5% compared to 2001 and the number has exceeded half of respondents; according to the same data the number of residents fully satisfied with the work of the municipality has increased by 15.7%.[12] Despite all the above-mentioned, according to the same data, residents' participation in municipality activities is very small and local referendums have not taken place at all.

It is worth noting that the study was conducted in urban areas where access to information is relatively good and the number of existing organized groups such as media and community organizations is also relatively high. There are many reasons to believe that in rural communities with limited access to information and a minimum level of NGO activity, the participation level of the community residents in the decision-making processes is much lower. We will have the opportunity to test this hypothesis using survey data.

Local self-government and community relations

The subject of my research was the formal and informal rules of social relations within the rural communities, in particular within the state powers, within the process of public participation in the decision-making process and community activities, as well as within its relations with external agents. The study included a description of two rural communities – L. and M. During the selection process various factors were taken into account which differentiate these two communities significantly. Thus, the population of the village L. is about 1,200

---

[11] Baseline Study for Armenia Local Government Program, The Urban Institute. March 2000, p. 33.

[12] Drampian A., Local Self-Government and Decentralization Reforms in Armenia. Paper presented at the CESS 4th Annual Conference, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, October 2003.

people whereas the community M. is inhabited by 300 residents. L. is located close to the nearest city – about 45-50 minutes walk from a regular bus route, while M. is 6 km away from the town and the shuttle bus runs only once a week. M. was inhabited by Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan in the early 1990s and as a social entity it is relatively young, whereas L. is a village of old residents. It is assumed that these different geographic and demographic characteristics also influence the nature of social relationships in the communities.

Legislative norms and work of local self-government bodies

Based on the analysis of the cases investigated we can assume that on the level of formal procedures the activities of local self-government in general comply with the legislation: election procedures, the structure of self-government; the necessary documentation is present in accordance with the law. However, the fundamental concept of local self-government does not correspond to the reality observed; the participation level of local society in decision-making processes and management of the community is minimal.

As noted above, in the legislation of Armenia local self-governance is defined as the legally guaranteed right and ability of local self-governments to resolve community problems, and under its own responsibility and within the framework of the law dispose of community property in order to improve the welfare of all its residents.[13] In reality the "right and ability" of the local self-government to solve community problems are rather limited. This is due to the low financial capacity and pressure from the regional government through the use of formal and informal instruments. Also, the basic principles of the local self-government are not always respected and taken into account. Primarily, this refers to the principle of independence and responsibility in the implementation of self-compliance with statutory powers, to the financial capacity to implement them and, in particular, the principle of accountability to the community, transparency and openness of local government.

Mandatory functions of the local self-government in the fields of public utilities, water, heating, construction of irrigation systems and community roads, etc. are implemented only with the support of other organizations mainly due

---

[13] The Law of the Republic of Armenia "On Local Self-Government", 5 June 2002, Article 3.

to the financial insolvency of local governments. The voluntary functions pre-scribed by the law that include the organization of environmental, cultural and sporting activities are carried out on a case-by-case basis.

According to law, the Council of Elders approves the three-year program of community development as well as the community budget drawn up by the Head of the Community which is approved after the discussions and amend-ments made by the council. In fact this procedure is often purely formal – eve-rything that is proposed is approved. In M., for example, the Elders' Council, as in many other villages, is a formal "appendage" to the headman in the structure of local government. The council comprises three people, two of whom have only primary education. The decisions are made by the Head, and the mem-bers of the Council (Avagani), being uninformed, merely approve them without actually participating in the decision-making process. This can be proved even by one response of a council member to my question – what is being done about the pollution of drinking water?

> *"Well, it's a question of finances. The Elder must apply to the N., then we'll see... Has he applied yet? Well, maybe he has already... I do not know, frankly." (Member of the Elders' Council of the village M., a middle-aged man).*

In both villages members of the council often are not even aware of their rights and responsibilities. They rarely understand the role ascribed to them, the role of the representative of the "voice of the people". Sessions of the council that ac-cording to the law must occur at least once every two months, take place less frequently; meanwhile the council members often engage in informal discussions. The sessions are initiated by the Community Head, who not only chairs but also regulates the decision-making process.

Residents' participation in local self-governance

As noted above, the revised law on local self-government provides more opportunities for residents in decision-making processes affecting their com-munities. However, in reality not all these opportunities are taken advantage of.

Casual participation mechanisms – rallies and marches as well as local ref-erendums – practically are not used in the researched communities. The same

can be said about the participation in the sessions of the council: by law, every resident of the community has the right to attend a session with the right of consultative vote; the information about the session date/time shall be made available to the public in a timely manner. However, in neither of the researched communities has there been any involvement of residents in the sessions:

> *"Participation at the sessions? This is not allowed by law... maybe it is allowed but so far that has not happened..." (Villager L, teacher).*

From the conversation with the Head of the Community L.:

> *– Of course, all meetings are open to all, anyone can participate...*
> *– And, do they participate?*
> *– No... But probably it's not interesting for them to come and listen.*

The reason for the passivity of the residents first of all can be explained by the lack of knowledge about their rights. However, in this regard a considerable role is played by the regulations of the representatives of local authorities. A Council member in L., for example, believes that there is no need to make efforts to disseminate information about what is happening in the village council.

> *"Every person knows at least one council member, and so they can ask him and find out that they can participate" (Head of the village L.).*

Members of the Council of Elders, however, do not hold reception hours for the residents; rather the meetings with them occur spontaneously in the form of informal conversations. The residents of the community get acquainted with the decisions of the council and the head of the community through informal informational channels. The community budget and three-year program of community development basically remains hidden information to them, although by law this information should be posted in a place accessible to all villagers.

Another possibility of direct participation of residents in decision-making are the community meetings, but they take place at most two or three times per year and are always initiated by the village council only. These sessions are held mainly to discuss the distribution of humanitarian aid and involvement in com-

munity work, or are conducted as a meeting in the framework of the pre-election campaign or during the appointment of a new head.

> *"We have had no session of that level yet... There is the principle: if you cannot – we'll teach you, if you don't want to – we'll make you..." (resident of village M., middle-aged man).*

As for the elections, for example, in the village L., the most important criteria when making decisions are not the experience and qualifications of candidates but their relations. As repeatedly noted by the respondents of this village, these choices are made on the basis of kindred-neighborly relations, and this is also a "known" practice for the country itself. This practice operates as a chain of relations, that is not only the close relatives and friends of the candidate but also friends and relatives of the latter are likely to vote for that candidate regardless of his qualifications, experience and performance. This trend has no coercive character (at least, judging by the responses of respondents), but the informal social sanctions like public opinion play a more effective role.

In contrast with L., in the village of M. kinship ties are not significant during the election nor in everyday life – almost all the residents are newcomers here and only a few people knew each other before the relocation. During the election other mechanisms – propaganda, the credibility of the candidate, and agreement are more important and affective. According to one of the respondents, Z., a current deputy elder also wanted to run for the post of elder, but because the registration period had expired he was unable to announce his candidacy. And then he reached an agreement with the current Elder F., then a candidate; he helped F. to be elected to the post only with the condition that the "real" elder – that is, decision-maker – would be Z. himself. The main reason for electing the current elder was the authority and power of Z.:

> *"During his chairmanship the theft, fights and other troubles have stopped.... this has happened either out of fear or respect for him... The village started to stand firmly on his feet " (resident of the village M., middle-aged woman).*

Thus, although the overall structure of formal and informal relationships in the local governmental administrations in both villages are similar, differences still

exist in implementation of these relations. Considering its closeness to the city and the larger population in the village L., the work of elders is more valued according to formal criteria. This differs from the situation in the village M. because it is a village of old residents, family ties in the election play a more important role, whereas in the resettled community M., patriarchal-type powers are dominant and the more importand factors are not family ties but power and authority.

Relations between local and regional authorities

The other area where legislation and actual practice vary considerably is the relationship between the local and regional authorities. By law the regions (marzes) in Armenia are not a separate level of government but represent a branch of the administrative structure of the central government. Regional government in marzes is implemented by the head of marzes – governor, appointed by the central government.[14] The relationship between the governor and the local authorities regulates the resignation or early suspension of the head of the community; provision of state support, the resolution of problems of community importance, state oversight and a number of other issues not dealt with here.

Although formally the power of Marzpet (regional governor) is limited to the coordination of activities of the executive branch at the level of marz, experience shows that the Marzpet actually exercises much more power. The traditional perception of the status of the head of the region as the only man in power has been preserved from the Soviet times; in addition there also exist weakly defined dividing lines between the local and regional level authorities on the one hand, and regional and central governments on the other.

Furthermore, taking into account the financial weakness of the community, it becomes clear that the few financial instruments wielded by the Marzpet (governor) – determination of development priorities in the field, distribution of state aid and financial control – become an important factor in consolidating power in the Marzpet's hands rather that with the local government. The informal power of the Marzpet includes his right to initiate

---

[14] The Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, 5 July 1995, Article 107.

the dismissal of the Community Head and the appointment of a temporary deputy, and his role in distribution of funds and legal and financial oversight of the activities of local governmental bodies. In such undemocratic environment corruption among officials is high and informal transactions become more and more dominant. This can be illustrated by one case in the village of L. in which through putting pressure on the Council, the Marzpet managed to make a council member illicitly redistribute land in favour of businessmen he patronized.

It should be noted that the use of informal mechanisms and relationships reflects the general situation in the country. The conflict between the village head of L. with the Marzpet illustrates the common practice of corruption and the connection of economic interests with the interests of politicians. At the same time, existing (or missing) legislation contributes to the strengthening of such practices in the relations between regional and local authorities. As already noted, the Marzpet has the power to put pressure on local governments in communities, including the power to dismiss the elder or apply other sanctions which not only weaken the power of the community head, but can also cause damage to the community as a whole (for example, the allocation of state subsidies). In addition, the authority of the Marzpet does not allow the community to speak out against his power, although formally such a possibility is not prohibited.

Factors affecting the relations within the community

The historical traditions and cultural heritage of the socialist period as well as the realities of the transformation period play an important role in the formation of informal practices in communities, particularly in the functioning of the local self-government. In real life all these factors are closely intertwined. Nevertheless, it is important to analyse and outline such important factors as teamwork and the importance of family and kinship relations, paternalism and subordination of power, focus on external sources of actions, inertia and fear and neglect of law as such. Next I will analyse the impact of these factors on community relations.

Collectivism and the importance of family and kinship relations

Obviously, the traditional collectivist villages no longer exist. Collective farms were scattered and competition is replacing cooperation. This is well illustrated by the stories of the residents of village L. At first, after the privatization started people still tried to jointly carry out agricultural work but later, when the conflicts arose due to insufficient crops, villagers came to the conclusion that each family should work by itself:

> *"After all, perhaps, your land is more productive, your seeds are of better quality, why should we join up? And in addition someone might not come to work and then still claim their share" (resident of L., teacher).*

In the village M. the crop deficit and cases of thefts from gardens contributed to the destruction of collective work. Although in recent years the number of thefts has declined significantly due to the authority of the elder, this year because of the small harvest they resumed again: "Steal, so as not to starve". These thefts cause the lack of trust among people, after all a neighbor might steal – and this leads to the isolation of families and the destruction of the old team:

> *"Here, everyone lives for himself, in this village there is no collective initiative" (resident of M., an employee at a pumping station).*

Nevertheless, it is still difficult to talk about the exceptional individualization of relations in the villages. The traditions of hospitality, relatives, neighborly relations, residents' solidarity with the outside world – all these promote cooperation and informal networking practices, which is mainly noticed in small villages. Thus, in M. villagers are well aware of each other; important sad and joyful events are celebrated together. In case of disagreements and violations of formal rules, for example, when a fight or theft occurs, the perpetrators are punished; this happens inside the community and in case of outside intervention the villagers always protect each other.

The significance of kindred-neighborly relations is also observed in the employment practices and during joint efforts to export products to the market. In

village L. cases of collectivism are also observed during elections, which here, as in many villages and towns of Armenia, are held under the banner of kindred-neighborly relations. As mentioned above, it is usual that not only the immediate relatives and friends of the candidate but also friends and relatives of those friends and relatives are most likely to vote for the candidate regardless of his/her qualification, experience and the personal characteristics of the latter:

> *"Whoever has more relatives, wins" (resident L., teacher, former secretary of the local administration).*

Judging from the respondents' answers, in these cases, no-one forces people to support a certain candidate, but the role of informal social sanctions are significant (e.g. public opinion). Thus, in the continuum of individualism – collectivism has shifted in the direction of individualization; traditions of community cooperation are preserved in the socio-cultural activities and when matched with individual interests are manifested mainly in the kin-neighborly relations.

Paternalism and subordination of power, focus on external sources of activities

One of the values firmly embedded in the mentality of Armenians is the high importance of family ties. It should be underlined that the family in this case is a broader concept than just the sum of direct relationships, and it even includes distant relatives. As noted by G. Poghosyan, according to the opinion of the overwhelming majority of respondents – family and children are considered to be the most important and necessary components of success for Armenians and this is far more important than having a job.[15] This evidences the importance of values such as parental authority and, accordingly, obedience to parents and elders: *"Patriarchal respect to the elders and especially to the parents is very typical for the Armenian mentality".*[16] In village M. we notice the paternalistic orientation: There is the subordination to a strong leader, with whom hope is associated. The informal leader Z. of the com-

---

[15] The Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, 5 July 1995, Article 107.

[16] The Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, 5 July 1995, Article 107, p. 10.

munity can make decisions not only as a headman in the area of his competence. He often intervenes in the privacy of the villagers never justifying his intervention, punishing (including physically!) whomever he chooses whenever he chooses. We hear the phrase "fear and respect" when describing the head of the community repeatedly. In Z. residents see the qualities of the truly strong leader their community needs. It is obvious that in the village the authoritarian system of rule dominates.

> "Z. can gruffly order something without explanation and if someone asks for an explanation, he says – it shall be the way I say" (a young man, temporarily residing in the village M.).

And another quote:

> "Z. works so well and efficiently – even if there is something in the village he should not interfere with – such as family affairs, [squabbles between] neighbors – he still intervenes to reconcile them. He is strict, no one would dare to argue with him" (resident of the village M., pensioner).

This style of governance is considered legitimate and is admired by many of the inhabitants; it illustrates the patriarchal type of society where the elder is perceived as the "father" of the village; and he has the right to reward and punish according to his own views. The need for such a leader can be explained by the transformational period the country went through – the uncertainty of the future, unclear legislation, rapid and dramatic changes and frequent crises. In L. villagers' hope for a better life and improvement is also connected directly to the leader:

> "Basically, it is a common attitude that no matter what happens in the village, the elder should solve it; it's because since the older times all was solved by the village council. No one thinks of budget or taxes. They constantly make demands..." (member of the council of the village L., nurse).

O. Mitroshenkov wrote in his study on the attitude of Russians towards the rule of law that the tendency of the population to seek a strong state expressed by an overwhelming majority of respondents shows that it is not due "to their

genetic predisposition to authoritarianism, but rather to a natural desire for stability and order after a period of vague changes and turmoil."[17]

In both villages, the elder is regarded as a mediator between the community on the one hand, and the government and international institutions on the other. In community L. international and other organizations – mostly charities – have in a way played an important role in transforming the paternalistic mentality. Because of the various projects undertaken by these organizations in the village, certain expectations have been formed; when referring to different problems in the village the residents and the council expect that these problems can be solved by western organizations, and the state structures are mentioned less frequently. As evidence for this we can consider the statement by a nurse regarding an organization that renovated a small clinic and provided insurance for a symbolic monthly contribution:

> *"Yes, the kindergarten has also been repaired, now we'll have a new house of culture; it would be great if they took care of the school too, the floor is totally destroyed there... Who? Well, we wish any organization would come up with such a project; we're waiting for that" (member of the council of the village L., nurse).*

Indeed, since the emergence of local self-governance in Armenia, a number of international organizations have initiated a wide range of activities in the field of humanitarian assistance and community development. Many program and projects have played a significant role in the development process of local self-government and the communities in the country. These initiatives cover diverse areas of activities, from support for agricultural development to development program on civic participation in communities.[18] As a result, almost all the inhabitants of L. in their narratives constantly mentioned these projects and organizations in a way that indicates they take them for granted; if more recently the responsibility for poverty, unemployment, and in general all the troubles were

---

[17] Mitroshenkov O. A., Attitude of the Residents and State Officials towards the Rule of Law // Sociological Researches, 2004, No. 5, p. 114.

[18] See for example: Development Interventions in the South Caucasus: Some Lessons Learnt from Past and Present Development Initiatives. Commissioned by the program: Food Security, Regional Cooperation and Stability in the South Caucasus implemented by GTZ GmbH, 2004; The International Fund for Agricultural Development, Armenia: Two Case Studies on IFAD/NGO/Government Collaboration in Armenia. Near East and North Africa Division Project Management Department, March 2000; Baseline Study for Armenia Local Government Program. The Urban Institute. March 2000.

attributed to the government, today – without giving up their claims against the state – people are accustomed to the new realities and are surprised not so much by the inaction of the state but by the "inaction" of the international organizations or by "lack" of assistance they provide.

The dominance of the external locus of responsibility (head of community in M. or international organizations in L.) contributes to a loss of initiative on the part of villagers. In both villages like in Soviet times, the strategy of residents' behavior is associated with passive adaptation to existing conditions that include the existence of formal local self-government and also support provided by the government and international organizations. Over the many years of the existence of the "self-government" few initiatives have come from "ordinary villagers", as opposed to representatives of local authorities or other leaders. Even the members of the elders' council who were obliged to improve the situation in the community are only intermediaries between the residents and community head (village L.) or deputy elder (village M.). The reasons are numerous: they are afraid of becoming a "black sheep" and challenging the head of the community, also the inactivity is due to fear of change or loss of earnings, and sometimes just the lack of relevant knowledge and skills to do anything.

Public participation in decision-making at the local level is done mostly informally – in the form of conversations, persuasions and requests on a personal level. The issue is not that people cannot determine who is responsible for what, as stated by Urban Institute researchers.[19] A much more significant role is played by socio-cultural factors: dependence on the leader, inertia and fear; also the focus on solving urgent needs and lack of faith in the effectiveness of participation. The first three factors are mainly inherited from the socialist past and are described above. In the next chapter we consider the effect of the factors that are more related to modern living conditions.

Informal practices as the means of survival

The residents of communities clearly demonstrate their focus on survival rather than development. Severe socio-economic conditions do not allow for

---

[19] Baseline Study for Armenia Local Government Program, the Urban Institute, March 2000.

the "luxury" that is voluntary work in communities and active participation in public affairs. Unpaid work on the local level is restricted mainly to cleaning irrigation canals and even then it is done only because it is in the direct economic interest of landowners.

In general, economic factors play a significant role in the development of informal practices. The scarcity of resources forces people to resort to any possible way of earnings, even if it makes them circumvent laws. It is appropriate to mention the practice of hiring teachers in a local school in village M. The school provides almost the only employment opportunity in the village, so it is considered primarily as a means to earn money and the fight for these jobs is of vital importance. Only people who are closely related to the village elder and the school principal have a chance to get employed at the school. At school the subjects are changed due to their own interest and benefit and sometimes one staff member might hold multiple positions (for example, one teacher for mathematics, computer science and geography). Teachers' qualification does not play the most important role – rather his/her relationship with the local authorities matters.

In village L. participation in projects of international organizations provides the opportunity for the residents to earn. The guarantee for such participation is also informal communication; as an example of this we can consider the project of an international organization to develop community initiatives. In the framework of the project the goal was to create groups of villagers which would implement a number of micro-projects in order to benefit the entire community. Paradoxically, this project, like many others, contributed to greater consolidation of separate clans rather than the whole community. Since the main role in selecting the participants for the project was performed by the village elder, primarily the residents closely related to elder were included in the project. In both regards – employment and the implementation of certain micro-projects – we can observe obvious conflict of interest and usage of informal relations win a "place under the sun".

A frequent cause of conflicts in the villages is the distribution of humanitarian aid. Such conflicts are naturally related mainly to the elder, who is considered to be responsible for making decisions when determining residents' needs.

> *"This is how it's done – in the village there are 300 families, of whom about 250 live in bad conditions, but aid comes only for 50 families. How can this be*

distributed fairly? That is the reason why they start to offend one another, the council members, the elder. And then the rumors start to spread" (member of the council in the village L., a nurse).

Such conflicts are often resolved informally once again: a formal list of fifty families is presented to the organization that provides assistance and in reality the aid is distributed among all the inhabitants of the village. Such a decision made by the village head of L., was adopted by majority vote and in such a way the conflicts among the villagers were ended. On the other hand this action often leads to the aid not being properly used. Certain families in village L. were provided with high quality wheat seeds to plant, but since the amount was uniformly distributed among all the families in the community, everyone got only a handful of seeds, which were not sufficient for the intended purpose; so they were used on farms without much benefit. In village M. the picture is similar, however due to the low number of inhabitants distribution problems arise less frequently.

Legislation against the unwritten law: The Soviet legacy

An enormous role in the behavioral patterns of people is played by their distrust for legislation and the culture of circumventing formal regulations. During the socialist regime the state's attempts to control all aspects of people's lives had the opposite effect – the development of informal relations and regulations that were in force alongside the formal and often controversial laws. A particularistic approach to work became one of the features of the regime. Private relations (social capital) played a significant role in the bureaucratic system of socialism; so the informal practices had an undeniable importance for the functioning of a socialist society. V. Voronkov mentions the role of unwritten rules in support of the formal laws themselves: "Written Soviet laws were so ineffective that the state had to 'silently' use the initiatives of individual citizens happened to improve the efficiency of economic processes".[20] In her book "The Private Poland", J. Wedel

---

[20] Voronkov V. M., Dominance of the Unwritten Law and Specifics of the (Post-)Soviet Public Sphere // Social Organization and Customary Law: Proceedings of the conference. Krasnodar: Floor Master, 2001, p. 234.

illustrates the striking differences between formal rules and informal norms of everyday behavior in socialist Poland. She claims that the private agreements were an integral part of economic and social life in the country.[21] It can be said with certainty that such practices occurred in other socialist countries as well. Accordingly the law was recognized as a formal declaration which had little to do with everyday life. The legal crisis that occurred in post-Soviet Armenia also played a significant role in the development of informal practices in the country. New social practices required legal regulation but the adopted legislation was not always supported by law enforcement, was often subjected to changes and was frequently contradictory. As a result, transformational processes once again have reinforced the negative attitudes of the population towards the laws and accordingly caused the distrust of governmental bodies. The permanently changing and contradictory legislation, a sense of instability, the ideological vacuum considered by L. Holmes as the characteristics of post-socialist countries[22] have encouraged the informal interpretation of laws.

In the villages studied, the formal requirements are still perceived by the residents depending on their interests: it is observed that a law is obeyed if it is in the interests of residents, but if the law is contrary to these interests it can be successfully bypassed. Of course we are talking about cases where the risk of punishment for violation of the law is low because of the connivance of the authorities or through certain private arrangements. The mechanism of such arrangements operates as an agreement within the community on the level of resident to headman, resident to council of elders, and also between the community and the external agent such as community to a governor or community to organization engaged in work on community development. The subject of this agreement can be economic or related to other values (e.g. power, prestige and respect); in such a way the head of the community can include a villager in the lists of the residents in need by formally decreasing the value of his property and in exchange the latter will pay his land tax on time. The elders' council members are reliant on the elder to preserve their positions in power; in this regard the elder is obliged to uphold non-formal requirements of the Marzpet (regional governor) in the name of preserving his position and in exchange for the potential benefits for the community that are under the authority of the Marzpet. In turn the com-

---

[21] Wedel J., The Private Poland. New York: Oxford: Facts on File Publications, 1986.

[22] Holmes L., Post-Communism: An Introduction. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995.

munity involvement in projects of the organizations that implement development programs are often conducted formally: the organization is provided with bogus lists where residents are listed without their knowledge, the decisions made at community meetings are dictated by the elder, paid work is made available only for the close relatives of the village council members, etc. The arrangements are made also during the elections to the post of head of the community. Thus, in M. in fact, there are two elders – a formally elected one and his deputy, who helped to elect the first one on the condition that he, too, would be given real power. It should be noted that violations of the law are associated not only with the "legacy" of socialism, but also with the lack of effective mechanisms to enforce laws in real life. From the example of the two studied communities we see that even if people were willing to act according to the law they always encountered barriers either intentionally or unintentionally built by the head of the community, the regional government or "public opinion". The rules and the law as such play a minor role in comparison with informal rules. If necessary, residents of the community prefer to seek advice not from the lawmakers but from the practical experience of their friends. A considerable role is played by the abuse of power by government officials, and in this case even the most law-abiding elder sometimes is unable to prevent the violation of law in the community. According to L. Alaverdyan *"the cultural aspects force the elder to be on the one hand the legitimate father of his community and on the other – the legitimate son of a certain governmental body in power".*[23] Typically, the head of the community is inclined to obey the stronger entity; that is why the community residents perceive him more as a government agent.

---

[23] Alavardyan L., The Role of the Civil Society in Armenia in the Process of Community Development / Armenian Community Today: Critical Factors and Challenges of Development (workshop materials). Yerevan: Publishing House of the World Bank, 2003, p. 83.

Conclusion

This study is an attempt to show, based on the example of two communities, the impact of written and unwritten rules in a country undergoing a transformation of social values and norms influenced by cultural traditions, a socialist past and a difficult period of economic, political and social change. It is obvious that given the public distrust of state institutions, widespread corruption, low level of civic participation, and finally the struggle for survival in the villages studied, informal rules are a dominant factor in everyday relationships and in community decision-making.

In the space of domination of informal rules, the only actors more or less acting according to formally established rules are the international organizations. Under these conditions their orientation towards formal laws leads to an extremely low level of efficiency of the implemented projects. International organizations and their expectations and concepts are perceived by the population as the possibility of yet another bargain. Undoubtedly the benefits can be significant for the community as a whole, but as a result the development programs often are not able to reach their goal. Without underestimating the significant achievements of development programs and their positive contribution to improving living conditions in communities, we must say that sometimes these programs have a negative component in the long run, namely increasing among the population the paternalistic set of dependencies, perpetuating the external nature of the locus of responsibility and avoidance of new initiatives. Moreover, distrust of government authorities and lack of civic initiative are further strengthened in the situation when the state shifts its functions and obligations to international organizations. Summarizing the above-mentioned informal practices and factors influencing them, we can draw the following conclusions:

1. One of the main preconditions for the formation of informal relations is the dominance of economic priorities for the community residents and the representatives of the self-government body itself. This situation has developed in recent years in response to the challenges of transformation and it is expressed in relations with "trade", in an inadequate perception of projects of international organizations, etc.

2. An important role is played by practices inherited from the socialist times including the rejection of initiatives, violation of laws as well as the high authority of the Marzpet and perception of the head of community as a government agent.

3. Traditional cultural rules play a minor role in the formation of the informal practices; they are mainly manifested in patriarchal relations, especially in village M., and during the elections through the neighbors' and relatives' relations and in employment practices.

Further dynamics of the informal relationships in the community depend on many factors. Without claiming to possess a universal recipe for a perfect system of local self-governance based on written laws and acting for the good of the community as a whole and each citizen, I would outline just a few ways to solve this problem highlighted in the research.

First and foremost, the development of community relations and local self-government depends on the community residents themselves. As rightly pointed out by Mitroshenkov – *"Improving the legal life of the country cannot be regarded as a one-way street or as the prerogative of some state or public institutions specially created for these purposes. Without denying the State's monopoly on initiatives, it should be emphasized that within the society itself it is important to identify the urgent needs, awareness of the need to act in this direction".*[24]

Only through active participation in community and public life can we achieve the gradual transition from the paternalistic and authoritarian model of governance to the practice of local democracy. The importance of civic participation in enhancing accountability and transparency of government and abolishment of corrupt practices has on many occasions been the subject of discussions at the international level. Furthermore, citizens themselves will be more willing to obey the decisions that were made with their own participation; that will overcome the habit of ignoring the formal requirements. Finally, the concept of local self-government in its true sense means precisely the management of the community by its own members. No matter how wide the powers and the opportunities provided to the local self-government are under the law, without the participation of members of the community the very concept of self-government is meaningless.

Naturally the government's regulations also play an important role in the development of institutions of local self-government in Armenia; here we consider the legal aspects that contain many contradictions allowing the government

---

[24] Mitroshenkov O. A., Attitude of the Society and Government Officials Towards the Existing Legislation // Sociological Research. 2004, No. 5, p. 120.

officials to interpret them subjectively as well as the mechanisms of implementation of these norms and government control. There should be a balance between a realistic view of things (in particular, the issue of financial viability of the communities) and the desired goals, including full compliance with the principles of the European Charter.

And finally, in order to adequately form the strategy of their activities and follow the principle of Hippocrates "Do no harm", all stakeholders such as NGOs and international organizations should be aware of the situation in the community, including its social and cultural context and both formal and informal relations in it.

References:

1. Hakobyan N., Formation and Development of Local Self-Government in the Republic of Armenia. Yerevan, 2001 (in Armenian).
2. Alaverdyan L., The Role of Civil Society Groups in Armenia in the Process of Community Development // The Armenian Community Today: Critical Factors and Challenges of Development (seminar materials). Yerevan: Publishing of the World Bank, 2003.
3. Voronkov V. M., The Dominance of the Unwritten Law and the Specifics of the (Post-)Soviet Public Sphere // Social Organization and Customary Law: Proceedings of the Conference. Krasnodar, Floor Master, 2001.
4. The Law of Republic of Armenia "On Local Self-Government", 05 June 2002.
5. The Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, 5 July 1995.
6. Mitroshenkov O. A., The Attitudes of the Population and Government Officials Towards the Existing Rule of Law // Sociological Research, # 5, 2004.
7. The Community and Local Government in the Development Processes of a Democratic Society. "Against Violation of Law" NGO, Yerevan, 2003 (in Armenian) .
8. Poverty Reduction Strategic Programme for the Republic of Armenia, 08 August 2003.
9. About Local Government, Information Centre of UK Local Government, available at: http://www.local.gov.uk/default.asp?sID=1088162663359, last accessed in July 2004.
10. Baseline Study for Armenia Local Government Program, The Urban Institute, March 2000.
11. Dedeyan A., Statement on the Question of Armenian Identity, 6 September 2000. Martin Luther University, Halle-Saale, Germany, available at: http://armenweb.alsy.fr/reflexion/dossier-1.htm, last accessed in June 2004.
12. Development Interventions in the South Caucasus: Some Lessons Learnt from Past and Present Development Initiatives. Commissioned by the Program: Food Security, Regional Cooperation and Stability in the South Caucasus implemented by GTZ GmbH, 2004.
13. Drampian A., Local Self-Government and Decentralization Reforms in Armenia. Paper presented at the CESS 4th Annual Conference, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, October 2003.
14. Holmes L., Post-Communism: An Introduction. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995.
15. The International Fund for Agricultural Development, Armenia: Two Case Studies on IFAD/NGO/Government Collaboration in Armenia. Near East and North Africa Division Project Management Department, March 2000.
16. Poghosyan G., An Armenian's Life in Armenia, Yerevan: National Academy of Sciences of Armenia, 1993.
17. Tumanyan D., Local Government in Armenia, available at http://lgi.osi.hu/publications/2001/84/Ch-6-Armenia.pdf, (Local Governments in Eastern Europe, in the Caucasus, in Central Asia), last accessed in September 2004.
18. Wedel J., The Private Poland, New York, Oxford: Facts on File Publications, 1986.

MIGRATION NETWORKS OF LABOR MIGRANTS FROM TIANETI[1]

Tamar Zurabishvili

Accaccording to the national Census conducted in Georgia in 2002, the population of the country had shrunk by more than a million since the last Soviet census in 1989. The decrease is triggered not only by a declining birth rate, but also by mass migration.[2] According to studies of international migration from Georgia, in 2003-2004, 8-10% of Georgia's households had an international migrant.[3] High unemployment and underemployment, protectionism and nepotism in hiring push many of the inhabitants of Georgia to search for work abroad, to work in another country and financially support their families back in Georgia. According to the National Bank of Georgia, in 2008 the amount of financial assistance that Georgian migrants sent to their families reached one billion dollars,[4] and, clearly, this money plays a very important role in the economic life of Georgia.

Despite the fact that going abroad can be quite expensive and that the host countries are doing their best to limit the number of migrant workers, the level of emigration from Georgia is not decreasing. In this situation, it is logical to assume that Georgians who are willing to go abroad for work, will actively use

---

[2] Vadachkoria A. G., External Migration Processes in Georgia (1989-2002), Georgian Academy of Sciences, Tbilisi, 2004 (PhD Thesis, in Georgian). Only those who at the time of the census resided in Georgia were covered by the census. For the citizens of Georgia who temporarily resided in other countries, a special "migrant" questionnaire was developed, but it was filled in by only some 114,000 households, while experts estimated the number of migrants at that time to be about one million. See: Tsuladze G., Emigration from Georgia, according to 2002 Census. Tbilisi: CRRC, 2005, p. 9 (in Georgian).

[3] See: Badurashvili I., Illegal Migrants from Georgia: Labor Market Experiences and Remittance Behavior. Paper at IUSSP Conference. IUSSP: Toure, 2005. <http://iussp2005.princeton.edu/ download.aspx?submissionId=51259> (25/12/2006); Dershem L., Khoperia T., The Status of Households in Georgia. Final Report. Tbilisi: USAID, Save the Children, IPM, 2004, p. 42.

[4] National Bank of Georgia. Annual Report: http://www.nbg.gov.ge/uploads/publications/annualreport/tsliuri_angarishi_2008_geo.pdf, 2008, p. 20.

migration networks, which reduce the costs of emigration, making it less risky and, therefore, could be considered as one of the factors driving the migration process.

In this paper we follow the definition of migration networks developed by Douglas Massey in his article "Why does immigration occur? A theoretical synthesis:" as "a set of interpersonal ties that link migrants, former migrants, and nonmigrants in origin and destination areas through the bond of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin".[5] In this context, migrants are seen not "as solo adventurers, but as actors linked to associates here and there, their social ties lubricating and structuring their transition from one society to the next".[6] Relationships constituting migration networks, as a rule, are extremely durable, since they are organically formed prior to migration on the basis of kinship and friendship ties.

Studies of migration networks indicate that even when the economic situation in the country of origin improves – a development that should theoretically result in a decrease in the level of migration – no such decline occurs, as reduced risks and costs associated with migration due to developed migration networks can maintain and even boost the existing level of migration.[7]

Studies of international labor migration from Georgia mainly focus their attention on the study of migration flows, the number, socio-demographic and ethnic composition of migrants, the character of their employment abroad and the amount of remittances sent by migrants to their families in Georgia[8], but up to now, no study has focused on the role of migration networks of Georgian migrants. Present research is the first attempt to fill this gap. The study of migra-

---

[5] Massey D. S., Why Does Immigration Occur? A Theoretical Synthesis, The Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience, ed. by C. Hirschman, P. Kazintz and J. De Wind. NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999, p. 44.

[6] Waldinger R., Lighter M., How the Other Half Works: Immigration and the Social Organization of Labor. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, p. 11.

[7] Massey D. S., et al. Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal, Population and Development Review. 1993. № 19 (3), pp. 431-466.

[8] See, for example: Vadachkoria A. G., cit.; Gachechiladze R., Migration in Georgia and Its Socio-Economic Consequences, Tbilisi: UNDP, 1997 (in Georgian); T. Gugushvili, The problem of External Migration and Demography in Georgia (1990-1998), Tbilisi: Office of the Press, 1998 (in Georgian); Tsuladze G., op. cit.; N. Chelidze Labor Emigration from Post-Soviet Georgia, Tbilisi: Lega, 2006 (in Georgian); Badurashvili I., Illegal Migrants from Georgia; Badurashvili I., Determinants and Consequences of Irregular Migration in a Society under Transition. The Case of Georgia, Caucasus, Paper at PAA conference, Boston, MA, 2004, <paa2004.princeton.edu/download.asp?submissionId=41960> (20/02/2007), Dershem L., Khoperia T., Opt. cit.; International Organization for Migration (IOM), Hardship Abroad or Hunger at Home, A Study of Irregular Migration from Georgia, Tbilisi, 2001; IOM, Labor Migration from Georgia.

tion networks, which are a specific form of social capital[9], can help us to understand and explain the nature and direction of labor migration from Georgia. The choice of some, and not other countries for migration is not determined solely by economic factors, as neoclassical theories of migration suggest. Instead, it is largely dependent on the presence of relatives, friends and acquaintances in the receiving countries, on whose assistance potential migrants rely.[10]

Research site and methods

Tianeti[11]

The village of Tianeti is located in the northeast of Georgia (Mtskheta-Mtianeti Region). According to the national Census of 2002, the population of Tianeti was 3,598.[12] According to a study of poverty in Georgia conducted in 2003, Mtskheta-Mtianeti Region in general and Tianeti in particular, were among the poorest regions and municipalities of Georgia:[13] 63% of the population of Tianeti lived below the poverty line, which is 16% more than the average for Georgia as a whole. Given that the economic situation in Georgia changed little between 2003 and 2006 (when the present study was conducted), there are reasons to believe that Tianeti was one of the poorest areas Georgia by the time the study was conducted.[14]

The Georgian Soviet Encyclopedia published in 1979, gave the following description of Tianeti: "Lemonade, cheese and butter, and asphalt factories, a timber mill. <…> Two high schools (including a boarding school), vocational, music and sports schools, a house of pioneers [Soviet youth club], a culture

---

[9] More about this see Massey D. S., Why Does Immigration Occur? op. cit. p. 44.

[10] The current paper does not deal with internal migration.

[11] In Georgian, status of Tianeti is defined as 'daba', a term used to describe a settlement that has properties both of a village and a township. In this paper, Tianeti is referred as a village.

[12] See: State Department for Statistics of Georgia: <http://www.statistics.ge/_files/georgian/census/2002/mosaxleobis%20ricxovnoba%20da%20gansaxleba.pdf> (05/12/2006), p. 47.

[13] Labbate G., Jamburia L., Mirzashvili G., Poverty Mapping in Georgia, UNDP, Tbilisi, 2003, pp. 6-18.

[14] Despite the fact that in recent years Georgia has a high rate of economic growth, this has not resulted in a reduction in poverty. Compared with 2004, in 2005, the level of urban poverty increased from 34.3% to 37.1%, and rural poverty – from 37.1% to 41.7%. The figures of inequality (Gini coefficient) of income (0.44) and consumption (0.39) remains high too. See: Country Program Action Plan 2006-2010 Between the Government of Georgia and UNDP, Tbilisi, 2006, p. 4.

house, a cinema, four libraries, a museum, a recreation park named after Va-zha Pshavela,[15] a hostel for tourists, a hospital, a pharmacy, a post office[16] operate in Tianeti". As we see, during the Soviet times, there were various employment opportunities for the population of Tianeti, and unemployment was the exception rather than the rule.[17]

Today, there are two high schools, two kindergartens, one technical school, a li-brary, a museum and a hospital functioning in Tianeti. A district administration and a local police department are also located there. A branch of one of the Georgian banks and a few private shops operate in the village. None of the enterprises that functioned during the Soviet era and employed most of the population of the district are active today. A small part of the population works in public institutions (schools, kindergartens, local government, hospital, post office, etc.). Income from agriculture and livestock make up a significant portion of the budget for Tianeti residents. How-ever, Tianeti has a shortage of arable land[18], climatic conditions are quite harsh, the land is not as fertile as in the plains, and in some cases, residents are not able to harvest before the arrival of the cold weather. It is precisely unemployment and low quality of life in the village that push many residents of Tianeti to emigrate.

Research methods

The present study of migration networks consisted of both qualitative (in-depth interviews) and quantitative (census of Tianeti households) data collec-tion methods.

1. In-depth interviews. In-depth interviews were conducted with returnees and family members of current migrant workers. In the interviews, motives, conditions, and migration experience, involvement in migration networks, com-munications of workers with a place of origin were discussed.

In April and September 2006, 23 in-depth interviews were conducted (18 women, 5 men, aged 22-72). In some cases, the same informant was both a re-turnee and a family member of a current migrant, or a potential migrant. Sixteen

---

[15] Vazha-Pshavela (1861-1915, birth name – Luka Razikashvili) – the great Georgian poet, originally from the village Chargali, the region of Mtskheta-Mtianeti.

[16] Tianeti, Georgian Soviet Encyclopedia, Book 4, Tbilisi, 1979, pp. 678-679 (in Georgian).

[17] Georgian Soviet Encyclopedia, Unit 4, Tbilisi, 1979, pp. 678-679 (in Georgian).

[18] Labbate G., Jamburia L., Mirzashvili G., Op.cit. p. 21.

informants were returnees; nine interviewees had a relative living in migration at the time when the interviews were conducted. Three of interviewed returned migrants planned to migrate again in the near future. Seven informants were members of migrant families with no previous migration experience.

Several Tianeti residents were extremely helpful in helping me to identify informants,[19] and without their help this study could not be completed. After conducting interviews with family members of current migrants, I realized that they often have a vague understanding about the migration experience of their relatives, and, thus, I decided to focus on returnee migrant workers as principal informants, regardless of the country of emigration and the duration of their emigration period.

2. Census of Tianeti population. In late August – early September 2006, a population census was carried out in Tianeti.[20] Since we did not have any reliable data about the level of emigration from the village, nor about the characteristics of labor migrants and their families, nor about migrants that have returned to Tianeti, it was hardly justified to conduct a random survey of the population. Instead, it was decided to survey all Tianeti households, i.e. to conduct a census and collect data not only on returnees, potential and current migrants, but also on the whole population of Tianeti and its economic situation.[21]

The census questionnaire was developed, consisting of seven blocks, including, among others, questions about the migration experience of family members (past, present) and plans for migration, their inclusion in migration networks, sizes and types of financial assistance provided by a migrant to his/her family.

As a result of the census, data on 1,062 households in Tianeti were collected. Given the fact that during the 2002 census, 1,237 households were recorded, we can assume that the present census reached over 85% of households.[22] This gives us reason to believe that findings adequately reflect the situation in Tianeti. Data obtained though both qualitative and quantitative research methods made it possible to compare data, and validate received results.

---

[19] These were my distant relatives living in Tianeti. They not only helped me to identify returnee labor migrants in Tianeti, but also mediated my first contacts with potential informants. With their assistance, I managed to avoid a situation in which I would end up as a "foreign" researcher in a small village, where all families know each other. The fact that I was recommended by well-known people in the village disposed informants to openness and trust.

[20] The Tianeti census was conducted in terms of a research grant awarded by the Caucasus Research Resource Centers in Georgia (CRRC).

[21] Census data presented in this article are the result of the initial analysis.

[22] Interviewers recorded 210 shuttered or dilapidated houses or houses under construction; they are not counted in the subsequent analysis.

Migration from Tianeti: General characteristics

After interviews and informal meetings with Tianeti residents, I was left with the impression that there was not a single family in the village that did not have at least one migrant. Moreover, there were many families with several migrants; that some families left altogether and their houses are locked.[23] As Tianeti residents say, the village becomes more and more "lifeless":

> Here, the house across the street – their two sons left, the husband is in Russia, sons are in Ireland, and Tamara[24] is in Greece. [The family] there – they are all in Greece; Katya with her two children – in Greece, Maria and her child – in Greece. I do not know what to tell you. I don't know how to say it: almost in every family one member has left, in some families – two, but on average, one. If <…> I and my only female neighbor also leave, there will be no women left here [in this neighborhood]. <…> Mostly women are leaving, only men are attending funerals, there are no women left (M, female, 49).
>
> It could be said that half of the residents of our district have left, perhaps, not only to Greece but also to other countries, more than half. <...> My friend's mother-in-law passed away, [the family lives] near the hospital. I went there and on this whole long road I did not see any woman – and just a couple of men. Tianeti is empty now… (N, female, 58 years).

Despite such assessments, according to the census we carried out, only 301 families (i.e. 28% of Tianeti households) had at least one migrant. Overall, the data was collected on 413 immigrants, which constitutes 13.5% of the number of total permanent residents of Tianeti. However, given that the average age of immigrants is about 35 years, at the everyday level their departure might actually be perceived as a kind of "exodus" of the population.

The general level of migration from Tianeti, compared with average data in Georgia, is very high. Women account for 68% of migrants from Tianeti con-

---

[23] We did not have the opportunity to "survey" families in which all members had migrated. Consequently, we can assume that the level of emigration from Tianeti is higher than the data of our census.

[24] Names of all informants have been changed.

trasting sharply with existing nationwide figures, according to which 65%[25] of all Georgian migrants are men. Thus, in the case of Tianeti we observe the "feminization" of migration. The gender imbalance depends on the countries of migration and on the demand for a certain type of labor. Thus, among the migrants who left for Greece, Germany and Italy, there are more women, while more men migrate to Ireland.

Most migrants work as unskilled laborers. About half of them work as house-keepers, nannies or care-givers to elderly (Table 1). Men are mostly employed in construction and repair businesses, work in factories and agricultural farms. Seven percent migrated to study – these are mainly young migrants living in Germany.

Table 1. Employment of migrants from Tianeti abroad[26]

Type of Employment	% from the number of migrants
Housekeeper	23
Caregiver to elderly	21
Construction worker	14
Unskilled manual worker	10
Students	7
Nannies/Babysitters	7
Unemployed	5
Other	13
Total	100

Among migrants from Tianeti there are more individuals with higher and specialized secondary education (40% have higher education, 7% – incomplete higher education, 30% – secondary specialized and only 22% – secondary education). Thus, Tianeti migrants mainly perform unskilled jobs that do not conform to their level of education. The reason for this primarily lies in their undocumented status, as well as in the fact that they often do not speak the languages of the host countries.[27]

---

[25] See, for example: Dershem L., Khoperia T., Op. cit. p. 45.

[26] The question was formulated as follows: "What is the main occupation of the emigrant abroad?"

[27] Although after some time, this barrier is usually removed and immigrants learn the local language.

After 2000, when Russia introduced a visa regime with Georgia, there was a clear change in the direction of migration flows of Georgian migrants.[28] Although migration from Georgia to Western Europe and the United States began well before 2000, the introduction of the visa regime was another reason that triggered migration to the West.

Table 2 demonstrates the distribution of Tianeti migrants (413 people) in the receiving countries, among which, according to our census, Greece leads by a very large margin. This could be explained with the relatively low cost of migration and the possibility to legalize undocumented status there, as well, as demonstrated below, by the presence of migration networks.

Table 2. Distribution of migrants from Tianeti according to the receiving countries (n=413)

Receiving country	%
Greece	59
Ireland	9
Germany	8
Israel	5
Russia	4
USA	4
Italy	4
Spain	2
France	2
Other countries (Azerbaijan, Belgium, Britain, China, Cyprus, Turkey, Switzerland, Sweden, Ukraine)	3
Total	100

The data provided in the Table 2 is confirmed by the 2002 census data, which showed that emigration from Mtskheta-Mtianeti Region was directed primarily towards Western Europe and the USA.[29] According to our data, only 4% of migrants from Tianeti lived and worked in Russia, providing a fundamentally different picture of the general picture of emigration from Georgia – as one of the studies conducted in 2003 claimed that about 50% of all migrants from Georgia lived and worked in Russia.[30]

---

[28] IOM, Labor Migration from Georgia, p. 26

[29] Tsuladze G., Op. cit. p. 45. See also: Dershem L., Khoperia T., Op. cit. p. 45.

[30] Dershem L., Khoperia T., Op. cit. p. 44.

We believe that the direction of migration from Tianeti to the West may be partly caused by the fact that, compared to other regions of Georgia, mass migration from Tianeti started a little later, when migration to Russia has already started to decline. According to our census, the number of migrants from Tianeti began to increase sharply starting from 2000, and the largest number of migrants (77) left in 2004. Our findings are partially confirmed by a survey conducted in February 2004, which found that about half of the migrants (44.8%) from Mtskheta-Mtianeti went abroad in the past two years preceding that survey, i.e. in 2002-2003.[31]

That the mass migration from Tianeti started relatively recently, was confirmed by the interviews with informants:

> *I was the first one [among the relatives], who went to Greece, there were only 3-4 people from Tianeti there [in 1996 – T. Z.] (A, female, 56 years).*
>
> *I then [in May, 1996 – T. Z.] went to Greece to support the family, it was something new to go there in order to support the family, only a few people from Tianeti lived there. I did not have any particularly close friends there that I hoped would meet and help me. I was very much afraid, thinking I would end up in the street, but the poverty [in Tianeti] was so overwhelming that I still went in order to help myself, my family and my child. <...> From Tianeti there were only a few people, perhaps no more than 20 when I left, but then after that, a lot of them arrived (O, female, 49).*

The majority of the current and returned migrants[32] from Tianeti went abroad to find work and support their families (around 90%), others – to study or to travel. The same was true for 50 out of 57 potential migrants from Tianeti, who also wanted to go abroad in order to find a job. Thus, we have every reason to believe that the migration from Tianeti is mainly for labor purposes.

---

[31] Ibid.

[32] Answers to the question: "What was the purpose of his/her migration?"

The functions of migration networks

"Our people abroad"

As studies of migration demonstrate, migration costs are highest for the first wave of migrants when they travel to new countries where they have no friends or acquaintances on whose assistance they can rely on. When they leave, migrants usually do not cut off ties with their families, relatives and friends who remain in their homeland. Today, with the development of communication technologies that led to decrease in the rates, many are calling their relatives several times a day; in some cases, migrants and their families back home buy computers and establish a connection via internet. Thus, they have the ability to communicate with their families almost on a daily basis, to exchange news and keep abreast of all developments "at home" and vice versa, and their families at home have quite detailed information about the lives of their loved ones abroad.

The first wave of migrants becomes an important resource for relatives and friends if they also decide to emigrate. The choice of the country of emigration depends on several factors: how much will it cost to get a visa,[33] how long will it likely take to find a job, what are the wages that can be expected in the receiving country and type of the migration policy of the host country. However, "apparently these networks function such that potential immigrants usually do not consider other possible destinations and instead go to those locations where strong network ties to the origin area already exist".[34] According to researchers of migration networks, for migrants of second and later waves, the selection of the receiving country depends on the level of development and penetration of migration networks.[35] This finding is also confirmed by results of our research.

For example, the daughter of L. traveled legally to Germany on an Au Pair program,[36] stayed there a year and a few weeks before her visa expired, she moved to Greece, because a close relative lived there:

---

[33] Most of the labor of immigrants from Tianeti travel abroad on a tourist or a fake visa, or cross the border illegally. In this process they are assisted by an intermediary, who provides potential immigrants with necessary documents and logistical support. The cost of these services varies by country of emigration and can range from 3,000 to 12,000 USD.

[34] Goza F., Immigrant Social Networks: The Brazilian Case. <http://www.bgsu.edu/downloads/cas/file35391.pdf> (09.01.2011), p. 17.

[35] Bauer T., Epstein G., Gang I. N., What are Migration Networks? IZA Discussion Paper № 200, Institute for the Study of Labor. 2000, p. 7.

[36] Au Pair (French term meaning literally "on equal terms") – an international program under which young people move to foreign countries for an extended period of time to work as governors/nannies in families and at the same time study the language of the host country. Besides housing, typically, they are provided with food, insurance and pocket money.

> *L.: Yes, yes, a relative of ours – my mother's niece, she is from here, if you look out from our yard, you can see their house. This woman is married, and was practically a teacher of my daughter and she [daughter] is very close with her children and her family, so I let her [daughter] go without any problems.*
>
> *T. Z.: That means, when she [daughter] moved to Greece, did you expect your mother's niece to meet her?*
>
> *L.: Yes, yes, I had thought about everything in advance and made sure this woman cares for her.*
>
> *T. Z.: What if your relative was not in Greece, but, let's say, in Spain or Italy?*
>
> *L.: Then I would have sent her [daughter] there, where there are more close people, because I would never let her go without knowing that there would be somebody to pay attention to her (L., female, 50 years old).*

Upon her arrival in Greece, a daughter of L. lived for a while with their relative, who also helped her in finding a job.

The husband of K. decided to go to Ireland because he had acquaintances there:

> *Yes, he knew he had a friend there, a friend met him. <...> perhaps he decided to go there because he was hoping for someone to meet him there. If there had been no one to meet him there, in that very foreign country... I would not have supported him and helped him to go, and he himself would not have gone. Still it is difficult when you don't know the language (K., female, 37 years).*

When the son of M. wanted to go abroad, M. advised him to go to France only for of one reason – she had relatives there:

> *I advised him [to go to France] because I had a cousin there. <...> He [son] wanted to go Ireland. In Ireland, they earn more, but for me money was not important, for me it was more important to have someone there to take care of him – and for me and my brother [it was important]. My nephew and my son went together after they got their papers in order (M., female, 49 years old).*

After J. arrived in Israel, she was met by friends who had helped her get an invitation letter. With their help she found a job on the third day in a family, where she worked for over five years. Nevertheless, it took her a long time to pay off her debts. J. later decided to bring her husband to Israel. Moreover, as

J. herself noted, "I brought with me everybody who could come". Indeed, her case, like the cases of Z. and T. (see below), clearly demonstrates how the migration of one family member leads to the migration of other family members and close and distant relatives:

> *First, the eldest sister of my husband left for Greece, then me, then my hus-*
> *band's brother's family. Then I went to Israel, took my husband and two relatives*
> *with me (J, female, 37 years old).*

Z. talks about her nieces, who helped her daughter to go to Germany. Interestingly, from her sister's family only her sister's husband is left in Tianeti. The sister has already been living in Israel for five years.

> *First the eldest niece left [Au Pair program, Germany, 2000], the eldest took*
> *with her younger sister with her child [in 2001], (Z., female, 56 years old).*

In the case of Z's daughter, who went to Germany on an AuPair program, the presence of relatives abroad was the key factor in making the decision to emigrate:

> *...Why did she go? She decided to leave because three of my nieces lived*
> *there. One of them has a husband there. The other two are also married, they*
> *have one child who is with them there, and because they were there, she also*
> *wanted to go. Of course, there was an economic aspect, too. [If we had had no*
> *relatives there] I would have never have let her go (Z., female, 56 years old).*

Z.'s eldest niece also helped her two friends from Tianeti to go to Germany as Au Pairs – one of them moved to Greece after spending one year in Germany.

The eldest son of T. moved to Ireland in 2000 and a year later brought his brother and uncle. T.'s brother went to Ireland after being persuaded by his nephew, T.'s son:

> *My brother, for example, was not going anywhere and went only after his*
> *nephew [the eldest son of T.] persuaded him. He was already old, he is now 57,*
> *and even then he had a good job <…> but still things were not going well [finan-*

cially]. And from Ireland, everybody was praising the situation there, [eldest son of T.] was calling and saying: "Come, you will not have any problems here" and so, he went... (T., female, 67 years old).

T.'s brother then took his eldest son to Ireland and now wants to take his wife and young son with him.

At this stage migration from Tianeti apparently became a mass phenomenon, and networks of migrants from Tianeti already developed and expanded to such an extent that for other residents of Tianeti, as in the case of G., it was not difficult to find close friends and/or relatives not just in one, but in several countries who could assist them in the process of migration:

Yes, I had relatives in Greece and in Israel as well. Yes, of course, there were people there from Tianeti, Georgian Jews. I had the address, and I knew I could rely on them when I got there (G., female, 49).

G. herself worked in Israel and sponsored her son's trip to Greece because she had a close relative there who promised to look after her son and find a job for him.

As we have seen, the presence of networking can be very important, and in some cases, can become the decisive factor not only in the process of choosing the country of migration, but also in making the decision to emigrate. "Very quickly these processes of network consolidation and expansion make migration a self-feeding phenomenon,"[37] creating "autonomous social structures that support immigration."[38] Consequently, it could be argued that with the development of migration networks the level of emigration increases, since the process of emigration is much easier, cheaper and safer.

How networks help

First wave migrants can often assist potential migrants and facilitate their migration at a lower cost. As noted by Franklin Goza, who studied Brazilian migrants,

---

[37] Waldinger R., Lighter M., Opt.cit. M., p. 11.

[38] Light I., Bhachu P., Karageorgis S., Migration Networks and Immigrant Entrepreneurship // Institute for Social Science Research., Vol. V, California Immigrants in World Perspective: The Conference Papers, 1990, April, Paper 1, <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/50g990sk> (09.01.2011), p. 1.

their social networks are instrumental in helping prospective migrants to obtain visas or illegally cross the border to enter the United States or Canada. After the arrival of new Brazilian migrants in the U.S. and Canada, they usually do not need to immediately look for housing, since they can stay with migrant family members, friends and acquaintances. According to Goza, those migrants who have been in Canada and had at least one relative there, were able to find a job on average four days earlier than migrants who did not have any relatives.[39]

According to the results of Tianeti census, about half of migrants (returnees and present) received some kind of assistance in the migration process from their relatives and/or acquaintances, and about a quarter of them later provided such assistance to other prospective migrants. In most cases, people help their relatives, both close and distant, and count on getting help from them. It can therefore be said that ties between relatives are quite strong and many potential migrants rely on them.

Data on potential migrants completes the picture: 36 out of 57 prospective migrants received assistance from their migrant relatives and/or friends. Most of them, as seen from the table below, were provided financial assistance:

Table 3. How/by whom is help provided?

Type of Assistance	Frequency of assistance[40]
Money	36
Assistance in finding a job	6
Will meet in the country of destination	4
Obtaining visa	4
Moral support	1

Several types of assistance provided by the migration networks to potential migrants have already been identified in various studies of migration networks.[41] Below we will discuss more in detail how these types of assistance work in case of migration from Tianeti.

---

[39] Goza F., Op. cit. p.17.

[40] Multiple answers were possible. Data for 57 potential migrants.

[41] E.g.: Choldin H. M., Kinship Networks in the Migration Process // Migration, Diasporas and Transnationalism / ed. by S. Vertovec and R. Cohen. Cheltenham, UK & Northampton, MA: An Elgar Reference Collection, 1999, pp. 5-13; Goza F. Op. cit.; Massey D. S. et al. Op. cit.; Light I., Bhachu P., Karageorgis S. Op. cit.; Waldinger R., Lighter M. Op. cit.

Financial assistance

Migrants provide financial assistance to each other both before and after migration. Before the migration takes place, financial assistance is provided to cover all or part of pre-departure expenses. In such case a migrant provides the requested amount or part of it (as an interest or interest-free loan) to a potential migrant, who spends it to get a visa, buy a ticket and pay for middleman services. Such financial assistance plays a very important role for residents of Tianeti, because it enables them not to borrow money at high interest rates or mortgage/sell their houses.

Below are several examples of how financial assistance works:

▸ N. sent money from Greece to her daughter and grandson, so that they could go to Ireland, where her son-in-law was already living.

▸ K.'s mother, working in Greece for ten years, sent 4,000 USD to her son-in-law, K.'s husband, so that he could migrate to Ireland.

▸ T.'s son, one year after settling in Ireland, sent money (3,500 USD each) to his younger brother and uncle, T.'s brother, and brought them to Ireland.

▸ M., who by then had been in Greece for a year, covered all costs associated with her son's travel to France – 2,500 EUR (in 2003). M. herself also received assistance from her friends, who lent her money to pay for middlemen services in order to emigrate to Greece:

> *Money for the trip [1,600 USD in 1999] I borrowed. Yes, Leia gave me a loan, part of it I borrowed from Zina. And when I left for the second time [Greece, 2002], I paid 2,000 USD. If my cousin, Zina had not brought the money [to the office in Athens], I would have been sent back from Thessaloniki (M., female, 49 years old).*

G., who worked in Israel, funded costs associated with her son's migration to Greece and also assisted three of her close friends and acquaintances from Tianeti to go abroad – both to Israel and Greece:

> *I was just asked for money, and I lent money to some of them, nothing more. You know, sometimes some of them [migrants] cannot return the money, but I took the risk because they were my friends, some of them were relatives... And I had no problems with them paying me back – they have returned all the money I lent to them (G., female, 49 years old).*

The sense of duty which migrants have in relation to their loved ones back home, was emphasized in the interviews. This feeling is binding and despite the risk, it compels them to assist them in the migration process. It was also underlined during the interviews that borrowers were making every effort to repay the debts:

> *I gave them money, yes, and then they also migrated. Of course, they paid me the money back. Well, when you give a loan to loved ones, and they come and see how you work, it happens very rarely that they don't return your money (J., female, 37 years).*

L. worked in Israel, but helped her sister and her sister-in-law (the wife of her brother) to go to Greece, because unlike Israel, in Greece they had an opportunity to legalize their status:

> *My sister and sister-in-law are in Greece. They worked there and returned the money that I gave them as an interest-free loan. My sister was a nurse, she had children, she had no prospects here [Tianeti] – now she has brought her daughter there and says that she does not plan to come back. Here I have a 600 EUR salary, and there [in Tianeti] I have nothing and why should I come [says L.'s sister]... Now my sister is waiting for citizenship, my sister-in-law is already a citizen, she comes every year to see her children and leaves, so she has all conditions (L., female, 52 years old).*

After settling in a new place, migrants provide financial assistance to newly arrived migrants to pay off debts by lending them money at a low, or no interest rate. In addition, migrants establish mutual assistance funds, lending each other money to buy/renovate apartments/houses in Tianeti and/or Tbilisi, or to bring their families abroad:

> *O.: I quickly paid off my debt because they helped me there, they helped me to send the total amount at once, and then it was easy to pay it off as I did not have to pay the interest. I paid some interest there too, but [it was smaller] compared to what I was supposed to pay here – 10% versus 20%.*
> *T. Z.: Who helped you?*

> *O.: Just friends from Tianeti who were there when I got there [in Greece]. They helped me. Then, when others came, I also helped. There were people who were willing to lend at less than 10% interest rate, and others like this, with no interest, in a friendly way, helping acquaintances (O., female, 49 years old)*
>
> *I lent money to a lot of people [in Greece] when they arrived there and had debts with interest. I helped a lot of people. I did not keep money at home, so then when I needed it, I did not have money. I helped people, because if there is no help, this debt increases with interest … it is necessary to help, otherwise it is very difficult [to repay] (M., female, 49 years old).*

M., who worked in Greece, had to borrow money to buy an apartment in Tbilisi:

> *We all have had our own networks, and we all helped each other. Zina, for example, lent me money when I was trying to buy an apartment – "just buy the apartment", she'd say. She lent me money once but I couldn't make the purchase, so she lent me money again (M, female, 49 years old).*

In the difficult economic conditions in which the residents of Tianeti find themselves, the presence of relatives, friends and acquaintances who can provide necessary financial assistance to potential migrants to cover expenses connected with the departure, is an important factor in making the decision to migrate. Potential migrants do not have to borrow at high interest rates, making migration less costly and risky and hence more attractive and profitable. Most migrants from Tianeti stay in the receiving country undocumented and therefore do not have access to formal financial institutions, and these informal mutual funds help migrants to quickly pay off debts or to make various types of investments in Georgia. By helping each other, migrants know that if necessary they have someone they can rely on to help them and that they will not be left alone facing their problems.

Informational assistance

With the help of migrants who have already settled in the receiving countries, potential migrants learn about living and working conditions, opportunities to get a visa, and ways to emigrate to this or that country.

Four family members of G. (female, 60 years) live currently abroad: daughter and a niece – in Germany, a nephew and his wife – in Ireland. G.'s daughter was the first to leave as an Au Pair to Germany. By the time when the interview was conducted, she has lived, worked and studied in Germany for five years. She helped her cousin (G.'s niece) and provided financial and informational assistance once she got to Germany:

> *Yes, she [G.'s daughter] helped her [G.'s niece] and covered her travel expenses and prepared all her documents. The person who goes first becomes a "bridge" for the next person. Last year, she [G.'s daughter] submitted documents for her cousin [G.'s nephew for the university]. Yes, like an older sister, because she is more experienced, she tries to take care of them so they face fewer barriers (G., female, 60 years old).*

G.'s nephew first wanted to immigrate to Germany, but since G.'s daughter said that in Germany it was very difficult to find a job for men, especially, if they are undocumented, he instead chose to migrate to Ireland with his wife at a cost of 4,500 USD.

D., (male, 40 years old) who migrated to Sweden, advised several of his friends not to come, because "there was no work there".

V.'s daughter who by the time when the interview was conducted, has already been living and working in the U.S. for seven years, served as a source of information on a new migratory route. In 2002, four of her relatives were able to leave for the U.S. for 3,500 USD, whereas the usual cost of departure at the time was 6,000 USD. The route was quite original – the potential migrants applied for a Nicaraguan visa, bought a ticket with a connection in Miami, and then turned themselves in to the US immigration authorities and applied for a refugee status.

> *T. [V.'s daughter] discovered this new route. A lot of Georgians went to the USA through this route, including the daughter of my sister-in-law, my cousin, my sister, and L. [V.'s distant relative], got there with the assistance of T. <...> So, she found out about this opportunity and took everyone to the US (V., female, 72 years old).*

Information about job openings or business opportunities that are available for recently arrived and/or potential migrants is rapidly disseminated through migration networks. After finding a job, the first wave migrants "recruit" their relatives, as soon as there are new vacancies, thus contributing to their emigration.[42]

Instrumental assistance

Migrants can help prospective migrants to obtain visa, provide them with official invitation letters, and refer them to trusted middlemen, who can guarantee that they get visas, and teach them what and how to say to immigration authorities when claiming political asylum upon arrival in the receiving country. Interviews with returnees and family members of current migrants demonstrate how migrants from Tianeti help newly arrived migrants after they reach the country of destination: Meet them at the airport/bus station and provide accommodation, where they can stay until they find a job. Often they are given a hand in finding a job.

When N. decided to leave with his wife to Ireland, he began looking for his friends from Tianeti there:

> *In England, they [N. and his wife] were met by [his] classmates, they accompanied them to Ireland. There, too, people from Tianeti met them and housed them for a few days, until they declared themselves refugees. Since then, they have been living in a hotel receiving 19 EUR per day (G., female, 60 years old).*

Some other examples of instrumental assistance provided to newly arrived migrants are presented below: V.'s daughter helped her neighbors from Tianeti who applied for refugee status in Los Angeles – she found an interpreter for them, and after the first hearing of the immigration court, lent them money to cover their travel expenses to come to New York.

N.'s daughter and son-in-law gave accommodation to their relatives in Greece for four months, because they could not find jobs. In the end, N.'s son-in-law helped them to find a job.

V., who went to Sweden, gave housing to several newly arrived immigrants from Tianeti. They called him upon their arrival in Stockholm to ask for help and stayed at his place for 2-3 weeks til they found a job.

---

[42] Waldinger R., Lighter M. Op. cit. p. 12.

T.'s son also lived with a former classmate during the first weeks after arriving in Ireland. Once he settled in Dublin, he brought his younger brother there and helped other friends as well:

> *I have a lot of locals asking for his phone number, there are so many people from Tianeti [in Dublin]. He [her son] says: "Sometimes I think this is Tianeti". I give them his phone number, and when they arrive, he arranges for them to be met and assisted... My son found jobs for many of them. <...> And yes, they stayed with them, of course, for 2 weeks, for a month, many friends stayed at their place (T., female, 67 years old).*

L. (female, 52 years old) now plans to leave for the US, she has relatives there who can help her to get an invitation letter. Upon arrival, L. says, they "will meet me and help me to get a job, provide an apartment and all that".

When G. became sick in Israel, she was fired and moved in with her friend for about a month. Her friend took her to the doctor and took care of her throughout the period of her illness, practically saving her life.

Even if the migrant does not contact his/her acquaintances, relatives or friends working abroad in advance of his/her arrival, others might do this for them, as in the case of L.:

> *When I arrived there [in Athens]… I was thinking, God, what I should do, whom I can go to… It so happened that the mother of one of my students was working in Greece… She called her and said that I was arriving and asked her to meet me… So, a woman, whom I even did not know, stepped in the bus and asked who L., the teacher was… I answered, it was me… She said: "Come with me", I said: "I will come, but tell me who are you?" She said: "Come with me and you will find out". She brought me to the hotel. She said that she was the mother of such and such. She said she had been unemployed for the past month and that she could let me stay that night at her place (L., female, 52 years old).*

In some cases assistance to newly arrived migrants is provided by people whom they hardly knew back in Tianeti. And when relatives, friends and acquaintances live abroad, a potential migrant, as a rule, has more chances to count on their assistance.

Moral assistance

"First wave" migrants also provide moral support to newcomers. Many of them require such assistance as they undergo the complex process of adaptation, feeling nostalgia for Georgia, their families and familiar environment. M. (female, 49 years old) speaks directly about such "psychological" support her friends provided her right after she arrived in Athens.

Meetings with relatives and friends on weekends are a common way of overcoming nostalgia and spending quality time. Thus, G.'s niece and daughter live not too far from each other and they try to meet regularly:

> *Yes, they live close to each other. They meet on Sundays, and if they cannot manage, they make it sure to meet on the next Sunday. They meet every Sunday unless something comes up. This means a lot in terms of overcoming nostalgia (G., female, 60 years old).*

In Athens, Greece, there is a special place where migrants from Tianeti meet each other. The place is called Omonia. Buses with letters and parcels from Tianeti arrive here every Sunday. From there, migrants send letters and parcels to their families back in Tianeti. Migrants often gather together, cook Georgian dishes and celebrate Georgian holidays, all of which helps them cope with being homesick. Returnees from Israel recalled that sometimes they organized joint excursions to visit historic places and that the Georgian restaurant in Jerusalem *Nana* was a place where migrants often met.

Many migrants regularly attend religious services at Orthodox churches, which often become places to socialize and exchange news. Some migrants take active part in religious ceremonies and sing in church choirs. It can be said that despite the absence of formal associations or unions of Georgian labor migrants abroad, they still find places to meet, communicate, tackle their problems, morally support each other, and engage in familiar cultural practices.

Concluding remarks

The present paper is the first attempt to analyze the role of migration networks in facilitating migration from Georgia on the case of a small migrant sending community, Tianeti. The findings demonstrated that "first wave" immigrants provide financial, informational, instrumental and moral assistance to newly arrived migrants. This assistance becomes a very important resource in the migration process, making the departure safer, cheaper and more profitable enterprise. Especially important are the informal financial assistance which compensates for migrants' limited access to formal financial institutions and the instrumental assistance that partly performs the same functions as the state welfare assistance, to which undocumented migrants have no access.

Based on the results of the research in Tianeti, we can conclude that migration from Tianeti has a mass character: twenty-eight per cent of households have at least one family member living abroad, a significant part of the population has family members living in several countries who could assist them in the migration process. Thus, potential migrants may have multiple choices in terms of countries of migration, that will be supported by migration networks. A potential migrant selects a country, taking into account such factors as the expected cost of travel, the migration policy of the host country (possibility to obtain legal status), the presence of a certain type of work, etc. The assistance received from "our people" located in one country can be used to migrate to another country, where there are other "our people" (such as when a migrant from Israel lends money to someone to depart for Greece). Consequently, the more developed the migration networks a potential migrant has access to, the greater his or her capacity to mobilize and combine different types of assistance provided by migration networks.

References:

1. Vadachkoria A. G., External Emigrational Processes in Georgia (1989-2002), PhD Thesis, Georgian Academy of Sciences, Tbilisi, 2004 (in Georgian).

2. National Bank of Georgia, Annual Report. http://www.nbg.gov.ge/uploads/publications/annualreport/tsliuri_angarishi_2008_geo.pdf, 2008.

3. Gachechiladze R., Migration in Georgia and Its Socio-Economic Consequences, Tbilisi: UNDP, 1997. (In Georgian).

4. State Department for Statistics of Georgia (05/12/2006).

5. Georgian Soviet Encyclopedia, Unit 4, Tbilisi, 1979, pp. 678-679 (in Georgian).

6. Gugushvili T., Problems of Migration and Demography in Georgia (1990-1998), Tbilisi: Press Office, 1998. (In Georgian).

7. Tsuladze G., Emigration from Georgia, according to Census 2002, Tbilisi: CRRC, 2005. (In Georgian).

8. Bauer T., Epstein G., Gang I. N., What are Migration Networks? IZA Discussion Paper № 200. Institute for the Study of Labor, 2000.

9. Badurashvili I., Determinants and Consequences of Irregular Migration in a Society under Transition. The Case of Georgia, Caucasus <http://paa2004.princeton.edu/default.asp> (05/20/2004), 2004.

10. Badurashvili I., Illegal Migrants from Georgia: Labor Market experiences and Remittance Behavior, IUSSP Conference, <http://iussp2005.princeton.edu/download.aspx?submissionId=51259> (25/12/2006), 2005.

11. Choldin H. M., Kinship Networks in the Migration Process // Migration, Diasporas and Transnationalism / ed. by S. Vertovec and R. Cohen, Cheltenham, UK & Northampton, MA: An Elgar Reference Collection, 1999.

12. Country Program Action Plan 2006-2010 between the Government of Georgia and UNDP. Tbilisi, 2006.

13. Dershem L., Khoperia T., The Status of Households in Georgia. Final Report, USAID, Save the Children, IPM, Tbilisi 2004.

14. Goza F., Immigrant Social Networks: The Brazilian Case, <http://www.bgsu.edu/downloads/cas/file35391.pdf> (09.01.2011).

15. International Organization for Migration (IOM), Hardship Abroad or Hunger at Home, A Study of Irregular Migration from Georgia, Tbilisi, 2001.

16. International Organization for Migration (IOM), Labor Migration from Georgia, IOM, Tbilisi 2003.

17. Labbate G., Jamburia L., Mirzashvili G., Poverty Mapping in Georgia, UNDP; Tbilisi, 2003.

18. Light I., Bhachu P., Karageorgis S., Migration Networks and Immigrant Entrepreneurship // Institute for Social Science Research, Vol. V. California Immigrants in World Perspective: The Conference Papers, April 1990, Paper 1, <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/50g990sk> (09.01.2011).

19. Massey D. S. et al. Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal // Population and Development Review, 1993, № 19 (3), pp. 431-466.

20. Massey D. S., Why Does Immigration Occur? A Theoretical Synthesis. In: C. Hirschman, P. Kazintz, J. DeWind (eds.), The Handbook of International Migration: The American experience, Russell Sage Foundation, New York 1999.

21. Waldinger R., Lighter M., How the Other Half Works: Immigration and the Social Organization of Labor. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

Authors:

Ruslan Baramidze (1978, Batumi, Georgia) earned his PhD degree in 2009 at the Batumi State University after Shota Rustaveli. The topic of his PhD thesis was: Islam and Muslims in Adjara (Historical-Ethnological and Socio-Cultural Aspects). In 2006-2010, Mr. Baramidze worked as the Deputy Director at the Niko Berdzenishvili Institute in Batumi, Georgia. From June 2011 to present he has been working as the Senior Researcher at the Batumi State University, Batumi, Georgia. In 2004, he had his first scholarship from the Heinrich Boell Foundation South Caucasus Regional Office. In the following years, he received several grants from the Heinrich Boell Foundation South Caucasus Regional Office. Areas of his scientific interests include: Islam and Muslims in Georgia, identity, Georgian diasporas and the methodology of the field research.

Tork Dalalyan (1977, Yerevan, Armenia) studied at the Yerevan State University, lives in Versailles, France. He has been the HBF scholar in 2007.

Giorgi Gotua (1980, Tbilisi, Georgia) is the Visiting Lecturer at the Ilia State University, Tbilisi, Georgia. He also, works as the Project Coordinator at the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development in Tbilisi, Georgia. In addition, he is one of the founders of the Center for Study of Social Practices. He has been the HBF scholar in 2006.

Sevil Huseynova (1976, Baku, Azerbaijan) is currently earning her PhD degree at the Institute for European Ethnology of the Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany. Simultaneously, she is the Research Fellow at the "Novator" Science Social Research Center in Baku, Azerbaijan. In 2005, she received her first scholarship from the Heinrich Boell Foundation South Caucasus Regional Office. In the following years, she had several grants from the Heinrich Boell Foundation South Caucasus Regional Office. In 2007-2010, she worked as the Consultant for the Heinrich Boell Foundation South Caucasus Regional Office in Azerbaijan.

Tatevik Margaryan (1978, Yerevan, Armenia) has an MA in Sociology from the Central European University, Warsaw, Poland. Presently, she is working as the Deputy Director/ Service Coordinator and OD Expert at the Civic Development and Partnership Foundation in Yerevan. Simultaneously, she is the Researcher at the Institute of New Social Studies in Yerevan. She has more than 10 years of progressive working experience with development agencies and businesses operating in Armenia. She has been the HBF scholar in 2004.

Leyla Sayfutdinova (1978, Baku, Azerbaijan) is currently earning her PhD degree in Sociology at the Middle East Technical University (METU) in Ankara, Turkey. The title of her PhD thesis is: Transformation of Engineering Profession in Post-Soviet Baku. Simultaneously, she is working as the Assistant (part-time) at the Center for Black Sea and Central Asia Studies at the METU. Her research interests

include: Sociology of professions, post-socialist transformation, stratification in post-socialist societies, urban sociology, ethnic conflict, nationalism and nation building. Ms. Sayfutdinova received the scholarship from the Heinrich Boell Foundation South Caucasus Regional Office in 2005.

Gayane Shagoyan (1972, Yerevan, Armenia) defended her doctoral dissertation in 2010 at the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, National Academy of Science of the Republic of Armenia. The topic of her PhD thesis was: "Invariants and Transformation in Armenian Wedding". She is currently working as the Researcher at the Department of Contemporary Anthropological Studies of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of National Academy of Sciences of Armenia. She is also the Visiting Lecturer at the Yerevan State Linguistic University after V. Brusov. She received the scholarship from the Heinrich Boell Foundation South Caucasus Regional Office in 2006. From 2007, Ms. Shagoyan works as the Consultant for the Regional Scholarship Programme of the Heinrich Boell Foundation South Caucasus Regional Office.

Ia Tsulaia (1980, Tbilisi, Georgia) has 9 years experience in project management, HRM, consultancy, research and development, organization's development and innovations; managerial experience in banking and media sectors. Her professional interests include: organizational development and communication processes, innovation and change management, reorganization strategy in post M&A phases in companies, strategic and operational HRM, managing diversity and cultural differences, cost efficiency measurement methodologies (DEA). She has been the HBF scholar in 2006.

Aysel Vazirova (1970, Baku, Azerbaijan) holds PhD in Philosophy with a special focus on Islamic Studies. She has more than 10 years of research experience in the area of gender, women's rights and civil society in Muslim environment. Currently, she works as the International Consultant on Coordinated Community Response to Domestic Violence, UNFPA Afghanistan. She has been the HBF scholar in 2005.

Tamar Zurabishvili (1975, Tbilisi, Georgia) graduated from the Moscow Lomonosov State University, Department of International Journalism (1997). In 1998-1999, she earned her MA degree in Sociology from the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences, Department of Sociology. In 2003-2005, she did her MA in Media Studies at the New School University, NYC, U.S.A. In 2008, she earned her PhD degree in Sociology from the Ilia State University, Tbilisi, Georgia. Presently, she works as the Visiting Professor at the Tbilisi State University Center for Social Sciences. Also, she is the Visiting Professor at the Ilia State University. Simultaneously, she works as the Media and Innovative Program Manager at the Eurasia Partnership Foundation in Tbilisi. She received the scholarship from the Heinrich Boell Foundation South Caucasus Regional Office in 2006. From 2008, she works as the Consultant for the Regional Scholarship Programme of the Heinrich Boell Foundation South Caucasus Regional Office.

HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG
SOUTH CAUCASUS

The Heinrich Böll Foundation, affiliated with the Green Party of Germany, is a legally independent political foundation. The regional office for the South Caucasus was opened in 2003. Its main objective is to contribute to the forming of free, fair and tolerant societies in the region. The Foundation supports and facilitates co-operation of individuals and organizations throughout the region who, based on the principle values of human rights, search for the change of undemocratic and intolerant attitudes in societies and politics, for the transformation of ethno-political and territorial conflicts into the direction of fair and non-violent solutions and for the sustainable development of people and communities. The Foundation encourages critical public debate to make processes of decision-making democratic and transparent.

www.boell.ge