

WHAT CAN THE LOCAL TELL US ABOUT GLOBALIZATION? LAND,
PETROLEUM, AND MORAL TRANSFORMATION IN POST-SOVIET
AZERBAIJAN

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This dissertation asks how rural populations accepted and adjusted to Azerbaijan's neoliberal restructuring under IMF guidance from a mainly agricultural Soviet economy to an urban-based petroleum exporter of the world. The answers draw a history of changing land-use patterns, livelihood strategies, and mind-sets in rural Azerbaijan, illuminating ideological aspects of what Michael Woods called "rural globalization"—of how rural places are remade with globalization.

This work will show how breaking the rural resistance to the IMF-designed restructuring of post-Soviet Azerbaijan has depended on igniting hopes in the bounties of the market system, the individualization and disintegration of rural communities through land reforms, and rural migration.

The spread of hopes in the market system as the just distributor of resources and as a road to prosperity through organized government efforts was a crucial first step and involved a redefinition of prosperity from long-term communal goal to immediate personal goal. Land reforms, held in hopes of self-sufficient prosperity, individualized and disintegrated rural communities, diminishing their ability to stand up against the land manipulations and enclosures that followed. Finally, rural migration was instrumental to the transformation of rural Azerbaijan, not just in easing social tensions but as a key channel through which the ideas and values of the market,

specifically seeking individual material interests, travelled to the countryside and began to be accepted as normal.

Rural areas' acceptance of the neoliberal development of post-Soviet Azerbaijan rested on a profound and massive moral transformation, which furthered a specific model of individual–community relationship, and thus helped marketization succeed.

Globalization has often been presented as a transnationally orchestrated process against which locales have been helpless. Yet, as this dissertation reminds, the expansion and deepening of the global market crucially rests on building wider consent to market values as legitimate guiding principles of life.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sara Rzayeva earned her BA in International Relations from Eastern Mediterranean University in 2003. In 2004 she joined the MS/PhD program in Development Sociology at Cornell University.

While pursuing her degree, Sara Rzayeva has served as a teaching assistant for the Department of Development Sociology, as a research assistant at the Polson Institute for Global Development, and as a Graduate Community Advisor for Cornell's Graduate and Professional Housing. Rzayeva has received funding to support her research travel from the Cornell Graduate School, and from the Polson Institute for Global Development.

Sara Rzayeva's dissertation, *What the Local Can Tell Us About Globalization: Land, Petroleum, and Moral Transformation in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan*, was supervised by Professor Max Pfeffer.

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CHAPTER 1: WHAT AZERBAIJAN CAN TELL US ABOUT GLOBALIZATION

Introduction

Between 1995 and 2005 the post-Soviet republic of Azerbaijan underwent rapid market reforms designed by the IMF that restructured the country as a petroleum exporter of the global economy and earned it praise as the “star performer” of the post-Soviet market transition. The changes were destructive for the countryside of this formerly agricultural Soviet republic and were resisted by the rural populations before 1995. By 1995 the resistance quietly disappeared, and impoverished rural areas were surprisingly smoothly integrated into the global-market-oriented, urban-Baku-based new economy of Azerbaijan.

How did this happen? How did rural communities in Azerbaijan come to accept and adapt to the IMF-led neoliberal marketization? This dissertation grew out of seeking answers to these questions.

These questions are also essentially questions about rural globalization (how rural places are remade with globalization) and about consent to globalization—two areas this dissertation brings together.

Globalization and the global-local antinomy

Globalization—the expanding and deepening global marketization of social organization—has been pointed out as a profound shaper of the world we live in, from national policies through the worlds of production and consumption to local livelihood conditions and culture (McMichael 1996; Sites 2000; Kellner 2002; Coburn, D’Arcy, and Torrance 1998; Stiglitz 2002; Laurell and Arellano 2002; Bakker and Gill 2003; Brodie 2003; Harvey 2003; Sassen 2007; Robinson 2008; Gereffi 2011).

In this age of global capitalism, we are told, governments around the world are under pressure to increase avenues for profitmaking and to assume the costs of capital accumulation. We see states around the world cutting back on corporate taxation and social spending, privatizing previously closed areas of their economy, and liberalizing trade. This combination of measures is referred to as neoliberal restructuring. While neoliberal restructuring is rooted in the belief that unregulated, free market is the optimal mechanism for organizing production and consumption, it is shown to leave states with less control than ever over their national economies, and ordinary people with acute social insecurity (Stiglitz 2002; ; Laurell and Arellano 2002; Bakker and Gill 2003; Fudge and Cossman 2003).

Neoliberal restructuring was pioneered in the developed countries by the Reagan government in the US and the Thatcher government in the UK, characterizing 1980s. Subsequent waves of restructuring in other countries across the globe were, in essence, a reintegration of these countries into the new global circuits as aids of global capital accumulation versus protectors of local social security. The developing countries are said to be pressured into the restructuring by the IMF, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, transnational corporations, and global financial capital through denial of lending, unfavourable investment ratings, sanctions, and capital flight (Stiglitz 2002)¹. Neoliberal restructuring was said to mark the end of the age of development, and the start of the age of globalization (McMichael 2005).

The manifestations that have come to characterize globalization since then—global commodity chains, financial flows, labor migrations—were all crucially dependent on and stemmed from neoliberal restructuring of national economies. It was

¹ Petroleum-rich Azerbaijan discussed here, however, while classified as a developing country, has partnered with the IMF and embraced neoliberal restructuring voluntarily, a choice that has strengthened the country's authoritarian regime.

with and through neoliberalism that an international world economy transformed into a transnational or global economy. Built on the foundation of economic policies committed to capital free from national regulations, globalization has simultaneously and essentially been a deepening of capital accumulation through marketization, and commodification of new areas of social life as arenas for profit-making.

The deepening reach of global capital through neoliberal measures and the retraction of the welfare functions of the states did not equally affect the inhabitants of those states. Instead, these macroeconomic trends directed at recovering productivity moved costs disproportionately to those most marginalized in society—women, racial and ethnic minorities, immigrants (Kingfisher 2002; Lister 2002; Brodie 2003; Condon 2003; Stasiulis and Bakan 2003; Fudge and Cossman 2003; Ewig 2008). The deepening of inequalities and internal divisions within a society along class, gender, race, and ethnic lines during neoliberal restructuring is argued to be crucial to how and why the accumulation by those at the top succeeds (Federici 2004).

The restructuring is also said to redefine the very notions of citizenship: with states' abandonment of the social security role, citizenship is now “premised upon consumers who pay taxes—as opposed to politically active citizens with the potential to struggle for greater rights and security. The new discourse tends to individualize problems and solutions and displaces collective norms of universal entitlement by emphasizing privatized service provision and individual self-reliance (for example, the reliance on non-profit volunteer organizations)” (Di Muzio and Roncallo 2003:45).

These theories of globalization can provide invaluable insights, explaining many individual, community, and national experiences in the context of the neoliberal ‘milieu’, using C.W. Mills’ term. Yet, globalization theories are criticized for conceptually overpowering structures (of globalization).

The caveat, stressed by J. K. Gibson-Graham (1996), is that social reality is never just described: it is imagined, constructed, and constituted at the same time. Moreover, how the reality is responded to depends a great deal on how it is imagined. Talking of globalization as a mega-force sweeping over helpless populations carries normative implications, limiting imaginations of social change.

The problem with the view of globalization as imposed upon helpless populations is not just normative. Such a conceptualization is simply utterly incomplete. The deepening of capital accumulation through marketization is located *in* the “web of social life,” not outside it (Harvey 2006:77–90). David Harvey, a scholar known for his illumination of the regularities—the “law-like character”—of the market-based system of accumulation, himself has criticized the “artificial” separation of these regularities from everyday life, the separation of the abstract strands of theory from the concreted (ibid.). The exercise of such separation, Harvey (2006) argued, is an ultimate discarding of the most valuable legacy Marx left to social theory: namely that the abstract does not exist except in its concrete manifestations. Therefore, concrete manifestations of how the deepening commodification was ascended to are crucial to our understanding of the spread of the global market.

The global–local antinomy is (together with the related structure–agency, macro–micro antinomies), as Immanuel Wallerstein (1997) argued, a reflection of ages-old debate about determinism versus free will. Marx’s adage that “people make their own history, but not under the conditions of their own choosing” suggests itself as a solution to the antinomy (Harvey 2011; McMichael 2008), but leaves a demonstration of what this means to concrete studies (modeled by Marx’s own “The 18th Brumaire of Napoleon Bonaparte”).

Agency—individuals’ capacity to act independently and make free choices within a given social context (Barker 2005:448)—is to be illuminated by the social

theorist of structures/processes like globalization. If the task is not done carefully, mega structures and processes, which only come to life with and through people's actions, will be seen as omnipresent and overpowering forces of their own.

Philip McMichael in "Globalization: Myth and Realities" (1996) shows how neoliberal globalization has indeed been a 'project' pushed forward by a powerful group, a transnational elite comprising proponents from national leaders to corporate powers.² McMichael (2006) also shows how neoliberal globalization is resisted through his case study of collectively organized groups such as the Landless Workers Movement (the MST—*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra*) in Brazil and the *Via Campesina*, a transnational movement of peasant organizations.

But what about the role of the millions and billions, who are neither in the positions of power and influence, nor are organized into anti-systemic struggle organizations, as "people" in the making of "their history"?

One strand of scholarly attempts to come to terms with this has called attention to the "enactment" of globalization. The concept was put forward by the feminist scholar Carla Freeman (2000), who argued against "entering" local individuals, communities, and hierarchies (such as gender relations) as passive recipients of macro-processes of globalization. Freeman's alternative was to build the story from the bottom up, taking space-bound "social and economic processes, and cultural meanings" as the pillars / building blocks of globalizations. In Freeman's study, Afro-Caribbean women incorporated into a Barbados site of a transnational high-tech industry strive to create and maintain "modern professional" identity and to separate

² Many other great works illustrate the personalities and the dispositions of the powerful elite behind neoliberalism, exposing the global market as historical, rather than as an inevitable structure. Thatcher and Reagan, as in Prasad (2006), are obvious examples; but also making history are the group of European bankers who together with Gorbachev were instrumental in bringing down state socialism (Van Der Pijl 2001), and rigid neoliberal directors of the IMF and the World Bank pushing to open up much of Africa and Asia to neoliberal structures (Stiglitz 2002).

themselves from factory workers through dress and lifestyle choices, which involve shopping and recreation trips to the USA. Using this Caribbean case study, Freeman argues that individual actors are “local subjects living across and within a globalized terrain,” but also simultaneously “agents of globalization.” Such individual actors’ participation in global production and consumption networks furthers “translation of tastes and desires,” and business practices. Space-bound local individuals and their practices are thus the very fabric of globalization. They are “enacting new modes of globalization, they are not merely its effects.” But how come people choose to enact globalization? Freeman’s story describes people who embraced opportunities brought by globalization as ways to live “modern professional’s” life. Crucial to Freeman’s interviewees’ enactment of globalization is their values for ‘modern’ identity, ‘modern’ consumption, which gives value to globalization, in their eyes, as opportunities. What Freeman did not ask was the history of development of these values.

Harvey addressed the role of these masses in the making of the global history using the concept “the construction of consent.” In *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2011), Harvey documents how the advent of free marketization–neoliberal policies in the US and the UK were a result of not just a united act of these countries’ capitalist classes, and of Ronald Reagan’s and Margaret Thatcher’s individual commitments to the neoliberal ideology, but also a planned coaxing of the middle and working classes. In the US, this involved building wider support for freer market policies through exploitation of the historical tension within the Left between the individual-freedom and social-justice proponents; a strategic marriage of neoliberal economic ideology with the Christian Right, seizing on and appealing to the cultural prejudices and the sense of moral righteousness of the white working class; and the fiscal disciplining of independent municipalities, such as the City of New York. In the UK, Thatcher’s

tactics included iron assault on labor unions and democratic municipalities (including revoking the latter's right to raise their own taxes, and thus making them vulnerable to financing and fiscal disciplining by the state and the banking sector), think-tanks and research institutes propagating free-market ideas taking advantage of the popular mockery of networked class relations—including union bureaucrats' class privileges—and general scepticism about politics of the UK. Across the spectrum, the “carrot” of flexible employment and greater freedom and liberty of action in the labor market was used. It was through this range of collaborated efforts of appeal and disciplining that free market institutions and ideas sprang up from the US and the UK to take over the world.

Around the world, Harvey (2011) argued with shorter examples, the expanding reach of the market similarly involved a mix of government and business elites' political, military, and financial commitment to establishing a population's dependence on and vulnerability to the global market *with coaxing* of the middle and working classes. This coaxing involved strategies that Harvey identified as consumerism, benefits of flexible employment, and the lure of capitalist culture as an escape from the harsh constraints of patriarchal and family regulations. Thus, in the *Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Harvey painted a picture of the global capitalist in which structures very much depended on the coaxing of free will. From this viewpoint, local negotiations leading to the acceptance of and / popular support for the neoliberal / free-market order are not marginal to the construction of the global market system by the “forces from above,” but instead are the very heart of this construction. With this work Harvey brought Antonio Gramsci's insights into the understanding of neoliberal globalization.

Gramsci (1971) introduced the term “hegemony,” which is, as Gitlin (1980:9) succinctly summarized, domination by the ruling class through ideology and the

shaping of popular consent. Gramsci criticized the notion that ideas and values are secondary to material structures and manifestations of social relations (such as global commodity chains in our time?). Instead he suggested a view of social hierarchy/domination whereby populations' acceptance of leadership's ideas—about rule, economy, and, crucially, culture/life conduct—were at the very heart of systemic power. Gramsci showed how hegemony is reproduced through a nexus of institutions, social relations, and ideas; and he called attention to the “manufacture of consent” through cultural life. ‘Consent’ for Gramsci meant subordinate classes’ acceptance of the basic ideas and worldview central to the functioning of the dominant system, as “common sense”, natural, and in their own interest. Gramsci argued that this cultural hegemony is the first task of a system of domination.

Manufacture of consent and hegemony for Gramsci were not only about ideas but also, essentially, about values and moral steering. He called “ethico-political history” “an arbitrary and mechanical hypostasis³ of the moment of hegemony, of political leadership, of consent in the life and activities of the state and civil society.”⁴ Ethico-political history—the actual, historical play of power struggles, importantly between moral worldviews--was for Gramsci the underlying substance of hegemony, a process by definition never complete. What Gramsci did essentially was to expose the dependency of a dominant system on the coaxing of free will—the agency of populations—to continue its rule.

This dissertation happens to confirm Gramsci's insights while thinking about rural transformation in the age of neoliberal globalization. It will show how rural Azerbaijan's acceptance of neoliberal transformation depended on convincing rural

³ Underlying substance, essence, fundamental reality.

⁴ Prison writings, p. 194 in *The Gramsci Reader*, edited by David Forgacs (1988).

laborers of the superior and beneficent nature of market-based economic organization, and on redefining the purpose of human life in material terms, with profound implications for the cohesion of village communities. This work will show how—through which processes and adaptations—the construction of consent to neoliberal marketization succeeded in rural Azerbaijan. With this, my dissertation will add to the developing understanding of rural globalization.

The term “rural globalization” was introduced by the geographer Michael Woods (2007). Woods pointed out urban bias in globalization studies, and suggested the “global countryside” as a hypothetical space that “represents the outcome of globalizing processes,” although unevenly, in rural locales across the globe (2007:485).

Interestingly, the changes made in the name of neoliberalism produced characteristics of the “global countryside” in rural Azerbaijan: separation of consumption from production, corporate concentration and integration, dependence on migration, rise of rural resorts, counter-urbanization-led property investments, commodification of nature, spread of the symbols of global consumer culture, social polarization, and transformation of political authority.

The connection between consent to neoliberal restructuring and globalization is worth elaborating on here. Globalization is inseparable from and is premised upon neoliberal restructuring. Questions about the establishment and functioning of neoliberal market policies—such as how neoliberal reforms were accepted by and adapted to rural Azerbaijan—are simultaneously questions about the lifeblood of global commodity chains/production, and global consumption. The ‘big’ questions of global transactions, transportations, productions require ‘smaller’ questions of how those developments were negotiated, accepted, and enacted by people—questions of the establishment of neoliberal marketization and consent to it, central to imaginations

of global change.

History of Neoliberalism in the post-Soviet space

Globalization in the post-socialist space, like elsewhere, entailed marketization, but here this meant a fundamental transformation of the social economy based on the state command and redistribution system. Opening up to the global market here was proposed as a way to eliminate inefficiencies, to better allocate resources, and, in the long run, to improve livelihood conditions.

According to advocates of economic liberalism, deregulation of the economy would set free the market forces of demand and supply to bring about the most optimal distribution of resources in a society. Demand from buyers for a particular product in a given context of supply would determine the price. Because buyers would be willing to pay more for a product when it is in short supply, their demand would facilitate increased prices and the entry of new suppliers of the profitable product into the market. The increased competition between suppliers would drive the most cost-effective production and, together with the increased supply of the product, would bring the price down until it reached an equilibrium where demand and supply balanced. Thus, unhindered market interaction between demand and supply would ensure the most efficient distribution of resources in a society, eliminate waste, and move the economic power to the buyers. The disempowerment of buyers and the inefficiency of a state-regulated economy—two characteristic maladies of state socialism—were seen as much in need of this treatment. The economic historian and expert on post-socialist transition Anders Aslund wrote in *How Capitalism Was Built: The Transformation of Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, and Central Asia* (2007):

The essence of a market economy is economic freedom—the freedom of trade, prices and enterprise. Liberalization transformed a shortage of goods and

services to a scarcity of money, which is the predicament of capitalism. The sellers' market became a buyers' market, transforming economic power from producers to consumers. (P. 82)

To function properly, this market mechanism—specifically, its key component, the drive for profit—required private property and the rule of law to protect it. So on the road to the most efficient system of resource distribution, a corollary to deregulation was the replacement of state dictatorships with the rule of law backed by democracy:

Communist dictatorships had to give way to democracy, pluralism, and individual freedom, replacing vertical state commands with horizontal market signals, and public ownership with private property. Communism had rejected the very idea of a rule of law, which now had to be established. (Aslund 2002:2)

Although in theory the political transition to democracy was recognized as the process of “replac[ing] vertical state commands with horizontal market signals,” in practice, structural changes to the economy instituted private property and market pressures well before the establishment of a rule of law. Aslund notes that post-socialist reformers were united on the need for marketization. What divided them was the question of whether the reforms should be rapid or gradual. Yet, hindering the transition to the system of most efficient distribution of resources was not the chosen speed of reforms, but the propensity of reformers to utilize the reforms for maximized rent-seeking (Aslund 2002). In the context of systemic rent-seeking, market deregulation went hand in hand with strict regulation of certain sectors to enrich a privileged few. Rent-seeking proved itself to be the most serious and initially underappreciated obstacle to economic liberalism in the post-Soviet space, which turned into a center of rent-seeking states (Aslund 1996, 2002, 2007).

What this history inadvertently demonstrated is the crucial need of the most efficient system of resource distribution for a concomitant ideology—a firm belief in the superiority of the market mechanism, knowledge of how it works best, a

commitment to maximizing profits *only* through the market mechanism. The establishment of the market system required, apparently, not only deregulation and structural reforms, but a change of mind, institutions of the beliefs in the supremacy of the market as the channel for maximizing profits.

Hopes for the future of free markets in the post-Soviet states did not wither away. Rent-seeking states are still market economies, Aslund contended. Competitive market pressures and intense fighting between oligarchs would crowd out rent-seeking with time (Aslund 2002). But this very crowding-out would itself require a politically substantial commitment to competition over rent-seeking, a change of mind.

Uzbekistan, under the leadership of a former high-ranking Communist Party official, Islam Karimov, for all twenty-three post-Soviet years, has yet to see some signs of the crowding-out of rent-seeking by competitive market pressures. In contrast, Azerbaijan, which itself topped the charts for rent-seeking and corruption in the Commonwealth of Independent States⁵ until 2004, has indeed seen the encouragement of market competition and a channeling of oligarch rivalries to this arena under the nine years of leadership by the younger Ilham Aliyev, who openly committed to Western-style progress together with his wife, Mehriban Aliyeva.

A history of the rise, spread, and institution of ideological commitment to the market in the post-Soviet space is lacking. The change of mind from the Soviet belief in a planned economy to a belief in the superiority of market self-regulation was not a small thing, nor was it natural or automatic. This change of mindset or its lack, not just among the leadership but also among the wider population, powerfully shaped the specificities of post-Soviet countries' integration into the global market.

⁵ The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS; in Russian *Sodruzhestvo Nezavisimykh Gosudarstv*, *SNG*) is a regional organization whose participating countries are former Soviet Republics, with the exception of the Baltic states, Turkmenistan, and, after 2009, Georgia.

One contribution of this dissertation will be showing how marketization in post-Soviet Azerbaijan depended on the invitation of the rural population to this change of mind and the peculiarities of this process. But, fundamentally, such a change of mind was also a change of heart. The market mentality, the profit-maximizing mentality—a socially, historically cultivated trait in the post-Soviet context—entailed a new vision of individual–community relations, one that was both individually and collectively destructive.

What the Globalization Story Can and Cannot Tell Us about Azerbaijan

The history of Azerbaijan’s post-Soviet transition has been told as another story of neoliberal restructuring and globalization. After the consolidation of power by the former Soviet high-ranking official Heydar Aliyev in 1994, Azerbaijan’s transition was characterized by trade liberalization, privatization, a cutback in social services, and a move towards economic reorganization around raw petroleum extraction.

Trade liberalization. The law on Liberalization of External Trade was passed in 1994, and Azerbaijan received its first credit from the IMF under the systemic transformation facility (STF) in 1995 (Bagirov 2003:226; IMF 1995). To qualify for this IMF credit, the government had to eliminate the state order system, liberalize the trade regime, abolish subsidies on bread, and adjust energy prices towards international levels (IMF 1995).

Privatization. The year 1995 was also marked by the ratification of a new constitution of Azerbaijan that guaranteed the right to own private property. The parliament controlled by Aliyev also passed the first legislation on small enterprise privatization in that year (Kaser 1997:163). Privatization of medium and large state enterprises followed right after, and the Land Law was passed on July 16, 1996, which created the legal framework for a land market.

Cutbacks in state expenditures and social services. An important result of the post-1995 reforms was the virtual abandonment of social protection and welfare restructuring. Liberalization measures, and with them the destruction of the former social safety net, topped the priority list of the IMF loan conditions. The nation's pre-existing social safety net was effectively eliminated through the abolition of subsidies and wage compensation and the liberalization of prices. *Mere planning* of an alternative social safety net was to be completed by 1999, so there was no social safety net during the reforms (IMF 1995, 1997). Meanwhile, the government was to speed up the transition to a market economy, prioritize the development of the country's oil resources, liberalize capital account transactions (ensuring the free transfer of savings abroad), and broaden the tax base and improve tax collection rates (IMF 1997). "Highest priority" areas, such as "banking reform, [and the] privatization and termination of the government's heavy involvement in production and trade" (IMF 1996:2), were seen as more urgent than people's ability to satisfy their basic subsistence needs.

From domestic-needs production to oil-exports specialization. The IMF, the partner and funder of Azerbaijan's economic reorganization, insisted on a comparative advantage route—specialization in raw-oil extraction—for Azerbaijan's capitalist transition (IMF 1997). Azerbaijan used to be a predominantly agricultural member of the former USSR (Lerman and Sedik 2010), and a Soviet-era manufacturer of diversified consumer products (Ayyubov 2003; Hasanov 2003). This country was transformed into an exclusive raw-oil exporter within 10 years of the post-Soviet transition (Figure 1.1).

In the last years of the USSR, Soviet Azerbaijan's share of oil extraction, *combined with* the production of intermediate inputs and processed petroleum

products, accounted for 60% of industrial production⁶ (Hasanov 2003:164). In 2003, after 8 years of “comparative-advantage”-based reforms, the ratio of extraction to *all* forms of processing in Azerbaijan had become 80:20 (Hasanov 2003:174). In 2003, with 8 years of the systemic transition in progress, the capital city Baku accounted for 93% of all the taxes collected, while the rest of the country, including big cities like Naxchivan, Gence, and Sumqayit, contributed only 7% (Imanov 2003:147).

The share of the oil industry in the economy increased from 16% of GDP in 1995 to over 50% of GDP in 2006, while agriculture decreased from 25% of GDP in 1995 to less than 10% in 2006 while overall economy was growing (Lerman and Sedik 2010:50). The oil industry currently accounts for 70% to 80% of total foreign investment and 85% of Azerbaijan’s exports. Oil-related revenues make up nearly 50% of budget revenues (Bayulgen 2003).

⁶ This did not include agricultural production.

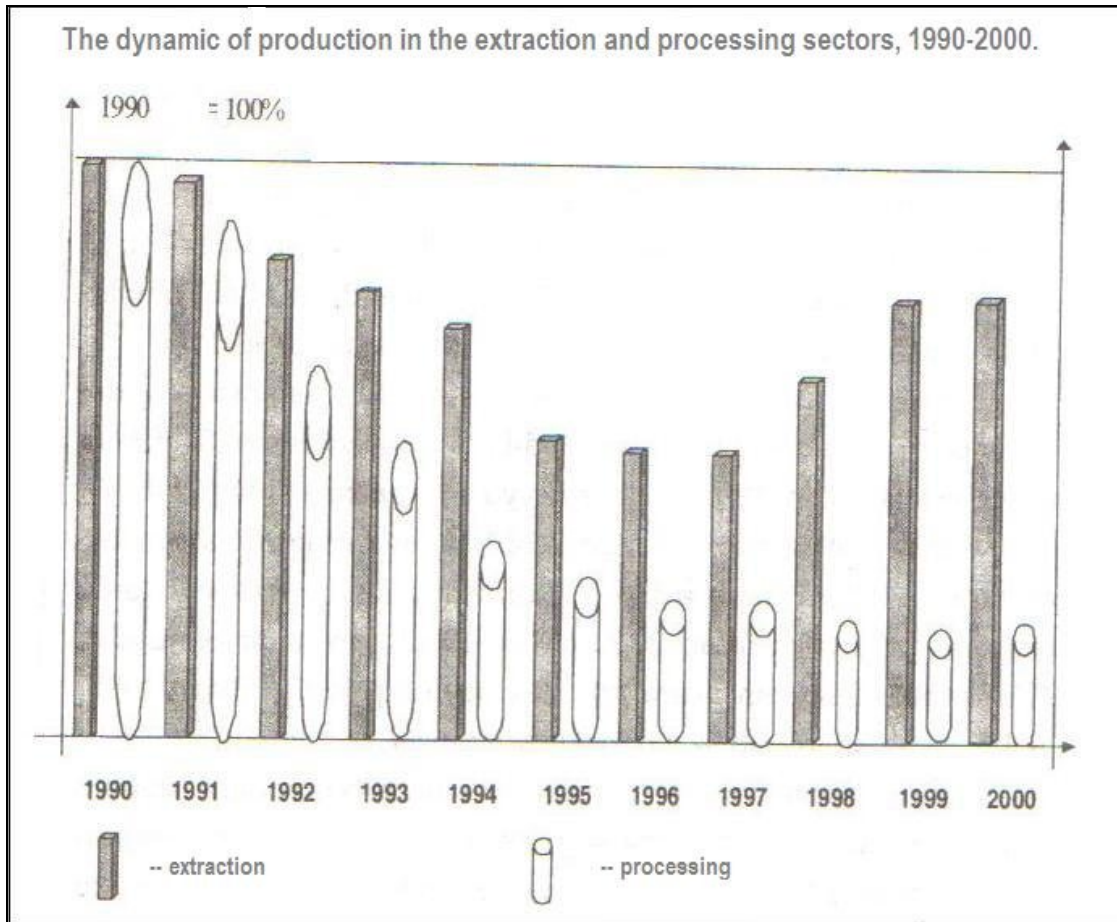


Figure 1.1. The dynamic of production in the extraction and processing sectors, 1990–2000. Reprinted, with permission, from Ayyubov (2003:204).

As Azerbaijan became more deeply integrated into the global economy as a raw-oil supplier, it was hailed by experts as the “showcase,” and “star performer” of the post-socialist transition (Aslund 2007). In terms of its integration into the global capital networks, Azerbaijan had indeed been a star. Azerbaijan’s ability to attract foreign investment into the oil sector had been remarkable. The oil contracts signed by Azerbaijan in September 1994 with 33 companies from 15 countries were valued at 60 billion dollars (Bayulgen 2003). Over 4 billion dollars were actually invested in this period to start oil exploration and extraction (Bayulgen 2003). The speed and scope of Azerbaijan’s attraction of FDI was remarkable in comparison to other resource-rich

post-Soviet countries, specifically Russia, which did not attract comparative amounts of FDI relative to its size and resources (Bayulgen 2003).⁷

Despite the praise from international institutions for Azerbaijan's transition, its integration into the global capital networks did not bring widespread prosperity. Specialization in the capital-intensive oil industry did not create the jobs promised and expected in the IMF–Azerbaijan reform plan (Ayyubov 2003). The period was characterized by aggressive policing of contending political orientations, incarcerations, gross human rights violations, and governmental control over labor unions (Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch reports on Azerbaijan, various years). The only independent labor union in the country, the union of oil workers, was taken over by the government-created Union of Oil and Gas Industry Workers without a vote of union membership in 1997 (Icon Group International 2000:62–63). Unemployment increased, as did regional inequality within Azerbaijan, while health and education indicators declined (IMF 2000:36–37).⁸ In 2000, the IMF officially acknowledged that “existing social safety nets are not effective in keeping people out of poverty”⁹ and declared that “poverty reduction has recently assumed a more important position in the reform agenda in Azerbaijan.” Azerbaijan's authoritarian government was underspending in social services, specifically

⁷ Bayulgen argued, “The ratio of FDI to Azerbaijan's proven oil reserves is 0.57 meaning that for each barrel of its proven reserves, Azerbaijan received 57 cents of FDI during this period. For comparative purposes this number for Russia is 0.08, seven times less than Azerbaijan's” (2003:219).

⁸ These indicators of massive general socio-economic decline provided a curious background for the increasing conspicuous consumption of government elites. The poverty of the country grew in parallel with the increasing number of high-walled palaces with gardens and artificial waterfalls in and around Baku, eye-tickling Versace and Armani stores, and the latest Mercedes models decorating the central streets of the capital city. Although not matching the lifestyle of the governing elites, those involved in the oil sector also enjoyed increasingly luxurious lifestyles.

⁹ An example of social protection measures in 2001 was the “monthly basic child allowance” amounting to 2 USD per child per month for families with income below 4 USD per month.

healthcare, despite sufficient resources and the World Bank's own urging to spend more (World Bank 2005).

Azerbaijan's integration into the global capital networks has also been argued to have come at the expense of long-term political and economic development (Bayulgen 2003). The attractive environment for foreign capital was created through a special Production Sharing Agreements (PSA) regime, at the expense of important political concessions without bringing broad economic benefits.

Azerbaijan's PSAs gave the contractors "sole and exclusive exploration, development and production rights," a predictable tax liability independent of the general tax regime of the state (including protection from future taxes, including import-export taxes), and the ability to hold the state liable for the breach of contract (Bayulgen 2003:212). Bayulgen (2003) pointed out:

. . . Instead of a generic PSA law, each contract after being ratified by the Azerbaijanian parliament assumes the force of law and prevails over *any other existing or future law* whose provisions differ from or are in conflict with the contract. . . .

Overall, then, with this PSA regime, the government of Azerbaijan has provided contractors with numerous guarantees, including but not limited to: exclusivity of rights to the contract area; protection against any infringement by the government in the rights and interests of the contractors; the right to full and prompt compensation of any right, interest and property of contractors expropriated, nationalized or otherwise taken by the Government; enforceability of the PSAs according to the terms thereof; obligations of the government to provide the contractors with licenses, approvals, visas and with any other permissions necessary for the investors to carry out their activities in Azerbaijan; and the right of contractors to access onshore construction and fabrication facilities, supply bases and all necessary transportation and infrastructure facilities. PSAs also stipulate that *all rights to sovereign immunity are waived by the government*. (P. 212, emphasis added)

Azerbaijan was able to offer these terms to the investors, crucially, because its authoritarian regime, headed by Aliyev, controlled the parliament, and the State Oil

Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) crushed any political opposition and precluded the contestation of the terms of the oil contracts (Bayulgen 2003).

Inversely, the inflow of capital enabled by the authoritarian regime reinforced the regime by generating significant oil rents to finance it.¹⁰ “Moreover, positive reinforcements from the investors regarding the investment policy legitimize the importance of the political regime in the eyes of the ruling elite and give them incentives to entrench their power even further” (Bayulgen 2003:216). Analyzing this situation, Bayulgen (2003) argued that the Azerbaijan case demonstrates a dilemma “between short-term goals of integrating into the global networks of capital and the long-term goal of political development” (Pp. 209–10).

The peculiar story of Azerbaijan shares many similarities with other transitional societies in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Supported by international organizations like the IMF and transnational corporations, neoliberal measures—liberalization, privatization, the shift to export production, and the replacement of the state’s regulatory role with market regulation—enable freer movement of capital, goods, and services across national boundaries, deepening the global market. Accompanied by the flexibilization of production and the informalization of work worldwide, the listed processes are seen as parts of an effort to increase/restore profitability while shifting the risks and costs from capital to societies and individuals (Peterson 2003).

¹⁰ “Aliyev designed tax laws that gave the top echelons of government maximum control over the awarding and subsequent distribution of oil rents. Thus the ratification of each PSA allowed the government to increase its own leverage over society” (Bayulgen 2003:217).

The Rural Puzzle

The globalization story describes structural economic and social policy changes in Azerbaijan, but does not tell *how* these changes remaking Azerbaijan as a new member of the global economy actually went forward.

Azerbaijan was predominantly an agricultural country under the Soviet regime, despite its relatively diversified economy: the share of agriculture in net material product (NMP, the equivalent of GDP in socialist national accounts) fluctuated around 30% (Lerman and Sedik 2010:49). Together with its related food-processing industry, agriculture accounted for 40% of NMP (*ibid.*). Food processing was both the largest and fastest-growing industry in Azerbaijan until independence, accounting for 25% of industrial production in 1980 and increasing output by 9.4% per year between 1957 and 1987 (Lerman and Sedik 2010). Agriculture also employed over 40% of Azerbaijan's labor force (World Development Indicators online database).

The dissolution of the USSR disturbed both supply and export channels and affected agriculture together with the other sectors of the economy, but the heaviest hit to agricultural production came with the market reforms and switch to oil extraction after 1995 (Lerman and Sedik 2010:50). Agriculture's role declined despite Azerbaijan's land reforms, which effectively dismantled the collective and state farm system and transferred the land to individual ownership between 1995 and 2006.

While Azerbaijan's economy has reorganized around raw-oil exports as agreed upon with the IMF, agriculture has continued to employ around 40% of Azerbaijan's labor force, whereas the oil industry uses less than 1% of Azerbaijan's labor force (Lerman and Sedik 2010:58). The work of this 40% of Azerbaijan's labor force, the agriculture sector, accounted for 6.1% of the GDP in 2009, less than the contribution of the transportation and communication sector (8.7%) and the construction sector

(7.2%) to the GDP (The State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan¹¹). With the neoliberal policies that integrated Azerbaijan into the global economy (liberalization, privatization, and specialization), the largest economic sector that provided work and livelihoods to nearly half the country's population was obliterated, and no alternative livelihood options were generated by the growing oil sector.

What happened in the countryside? How were changes that nullified agriculture, and left the countryside socioeconomically idle, pushed forward rapidly, with little resistance or explosive crisis, in a largely agricultural country?

How were these changes negotiated with people? Through which adjustments in beliefs and expectations did people who a few short years before protested the Soviet government en masse in response to low living standards go on to accept much harsher poverty and income uncertainty?

These issues are essential aspects of how Azerbaijan reintegrated into the global economy under its IMF partnership terms, as a specialist in oil extraction. These are questions, essentially, about how globalization proceeded in Azerbaijan. They are also necessary for understanding rural globalization.

As geographer Michael Woods pointed out: “compared with urban studies of globalization there is a lack of place-based research that would allow the disparate strands of the literature to be drawn together into a more comprehensive analysis of how rural places are remade under globalization” (2007:486). A theoretical understanding of rural globalization is still being developed (Woods 2007, McCarthy 2008). What is needed is research “that might not only adopt an integrated perspective in examining the impact of different forms and aspects of globalization in a rural locality, but that might also explore precisely *how* rural places are remade under

¹¹ <http://www.stat.gov.az>

globalization, and start to account for the different geographies of globalization across rural space” (Woods 2007:490).

What Azerbaijan’s story can tell us about rural globalization

This dissertation will show that Azerbaijan’s integration into the global economy as an exclusive oil supplier was carried out through a specific set of politico-economic and moral negotiations struck in the countryside: rural outmigration; institutional corruption, individualization of land, and disintegration of village communities; and promises of self-sufficiency and the bounties of the new order.

It will tell us how the free distribution of collective and state farmland and the abolition of Soviet-inherited taxes on household production were channeled to hopes of self-sufficiency with the system and opened the countryside to the market reforms.

It will tell us how the hopes for individual self-sufficiency and the individualization of responsibility for failure came to replace the demands from the state for better livelihood conditions.

It will tell us how the loss of opportunities for sustainable/profitable engagement in agriculture was channeled to massive outmigration in order to release social tension in the country. It will tell us how imaginaries of “modern” life were essential to this process, which supplied rural migrant workers to Azerbaijan’s own capital city in order to staff the booming construction, trades, and services sectors of the new oil economy.

It will tell us how land reforms broke down village communities, individualizing the discontent with the system.

In this way, rural livelihoods in Azerbaijan will tell us a bit about globalization. They will tell not only of how rural space was reconstituted with the

advent of the neoliberal market structures, but how the very establishment of the neoliberal market relations were premised upon the specifics of very local processes, notably a multi-dimensional coaxing into individualism, local reactions to it, and ensuing community disintegration and moral transformation.

I will show how underlying the success of the neoliberal transition in Azerbaijan are deliberations about the purpose and role of a human in relation to society/community. This purpose and role of the individual in relation to society has been redefined from service to community to service of self (interpreted as both individualistic profit maximization and seeking comforts/consumerism) with deliberate discursive change and coaxing by the government, but also with the communally destructive effects of the acts of those who hurried to jump on the “serve-yourself: your-efforts-are-the limit” bandwagon. I will demonstrate how the dissolution of rural communities owing to individualistic self-seeking opened up rural commons to land manipulation by Azerbaijan’s new oligarchs, and rendered these communities unable to address massive private plundering of rural infrastructure. I will also show how rural migration was both a plunging of the masses into the ideals of self-service through fierce labor competition in the city inducing means-to-end rationality and through lures of consumption possibilities, as well as a channel through which market rationality traveled to remote rural areas through the migrants. In sum, consent to globalization in Azerbaijan entailed a massive moral transformation.

This moral transformation was characterized not so much by explicit support of the market institutions as by paralyzing indecisiveness about them induced by large-scale subscription to the idea that the purpose and role of an individual was above all service to one’s own “interest”—comforts—and that one’s worth was defined by the results of striving for this goal. The subscription fundamentally

legitimized the workings of a very fierce form of market-justified appropriation marking post-Soviet Azerbaijan's integration into the global economy.

CHAPTER 2: ON METHODOLOGY AND SITES

Local Livelihoods—Forgotten Explanation Points for Globalization

Livelihoods are the site at which the global, the national, and the local come together. Livelihoods are the birthplace of simultaneously laborers, consumers, and citizens/subjects of the state. In the conditions of livelihoods is the key to both the fuel of the global economy (docile laborers and ardent consumers) and its political pillar—consent to the global economy. Given conditions of local livelihoods must be and are taken into account by both the state and transnational actors. Livelihoods are where the local becomes more of a global, and the global becomes more of a local.

Using livelihoods as a starting point of inquiry into the changes associated with globalization, it is easier not to lose the sight and role of the state. For example, at the level of livelihoods, financial austerity, seen as an IMF imposition in the globalization story, is experienced as the state's cutback, the state's financial policy, no matter how high the popular awareness of the IMF's role. Looking at changing conditions of livelihoods can provide crucial insight into how larger hierarchies, such as globalization, are built and ascended to¹².

¹² The idea of using local livelihoods as a prism into larger hierarchies is not new. For instance, key concepts of what is conventionally viewed today as the formal economy—such as profit and cost of production—were analyzed together with reproduction of labor, with the historical conditions of livelihoods by classical economists David Ricardo and Adam Smith. Picchio (1992), who examined Smith's and Ricardo's work on this matter, reminded us that surplus, a key concept for analyses of profit and wealth (and for Marx, also power), had been defined as the difference between production and the costs necessary for production, mainly laborers' subsistence (P. 133). The cost of laborers' subsistence, in turn, is tied to channels and arrangements for procuring everyday subsistence and biological reproduction, but also what is *viewed* as necessary for its living by the population. Ricardo, for example, viewed "general habits and tastes of the laboring population" as central to determining the price of labor (Picchio 1992:17).

Like Ricardo and Smith, another classical scholar, Karl Marx, did not disdain the conditions of local livelihoods for understanding larger events and hierarchies. The conditions of livelihoods of French peasants, their hopes and aspirations, were a central element of Marx's explanation of the re-establishment of the Second French Empire by Napoleon III ("The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte").

With this said, the organization of labor's reproduction (livelihoods), including what is *considered* necessary for maintaining livelihoods in a particular historical space, how the work of livelihood-making is performed and by whom, are not "just" "local" matters, subordinate to the larger "real" economy of global forces and national management. Instead, these are issues through the negotiation and manipulation of which the hierarchies of surplus appropriation and power are built.¹³

Studying changes in local livelihoods historically and how these changes are negotiated can reveal the building blocks of a larger hierarchy such as the global economy, at the intersection of local, national, and global actors. A study of the negotiations of changes in local livelihoods between the state and local communities can demonstrate how globalization, in essence, proceeds.

Searching for Answers

The field research leading to this dissertation evolved around two questions: (1) how livelihoods, and beliefs and expectations about livelihoods, have changed with Azerbaijan's market reforms and independent reintegration into the global economy; and (2) how these changes were envisioned, negotiated, and conditioned by state bodies and policies.

Livelihoods are best learned about from those who actually live them. The questions motivating this study concerned the changes of the last 20 years, so I had a

¹³ Feminist scholars have built on this line of argument: If power relationships in a society are structured through the mechanisms of surplus extraction, if surplus is the difference between production and the costs of production, mainly the costs of subsistence and reproduction of human labor, then what has been called "the work of maintaining existing life and reproducing the next generation" (Laslett and Brenner 1989), or the "fleshy, messy and indeterminate stuff of everyday life" (Katz 2001:711)—how it is done and by whom—is not a subsidiary attachment to the theories of power and wealth in a society, but an integral component of it.

chance to have access to the generation living the change. Therefore, interviews with rural residents, and with state representatives involved in the rural reorganization, suggested themselves as a unique source of data. I sought to hear about the transformation of rural livelihoods from two viewpoints: that of rural laborers and that of the makers and implementers of rural reforms.

In this chapter, I outline the reasoning behind choosing interviewees and organizing the interviews in order to gather fruitful data. Then I discuss the selection of the sites, as general economic regions from the map of Azerbaijan and as specific villages in each chosen economic region. I describe the specificities of the livelihood and the actual flow of interviews in the chosen villages. I conclude with a description of the post-interview data analysis.

Interviews with Rural Laborers

When it came to interviewing those who had to earn livelihoods in Azerbaijan's countryside in the last 20 years, the question was "Whom to interview?" Rural communities are not homogenous. Soviet rural collectives were composed of collective farm managers and laborers, Communist Party activists and non-activists, men and women, and more, depending how one looks at it. A person's experience of social reality is always from her place in the social hierarchy. So how could I go about acquiring an enhanced understanding through the interviews?

Nancy Hartsock argued in her book *Money, Sex, and Power: Toward Feminist Historical Materialism* that those at the bottom have a more direct experience of how subordination, exploitation, and other forms of power work in their society. Thus, for example, it would be harder for a worker in a capitalist society to see that society only in terms of demand, supply, and competition. These terms (supply, demand, and competition) would suffice to a much greater degree for a middle-level entrepreneur as

a description of the social reality in which his work and life takes place. A woman would add to the mainstream understanding of social reality (say, of demand, supply, competition, inequalities of wage relation) her experience of gender hierarchies. In Hartsock's view, the experience of those at the bottom of the social hierarchy could be looked to for a more complete understanding of the power structures of society. This does not mean that those at the bottom of a social hierarchy have an all-encompassing, clear, comprehensive view of its structures of domination, but that they experience the weight of those structures in their daily lives, and that this experience will imbue their narrative of social reality. Appreciating this insight, I wanted to gather my data on rural transition from those at the bottom of social hierarchy, so that I could hope to not lose sight of the social inequalities as experienced and expressed by the interviewees in my final narrative. I decided to ask about the post-Soviet changes in rural livelihoods first of rural women, who had been ordinary laborers on the Soviet-era collective farms.

The gendered division of labor—both in industry and in households—has been pivotal to Soviet accumulation, with effects stretching well into the post-Soviet period. The Soviet state viewed women as perfect for tedious, manual, and unskilled work, while pushing their mass entry into the labor force. Women were seen as less pretentious, more docile, more disciplined laborers (less likely to have problems with alcoholism) than men. Thus, in using women as cheap and more disciplined labor in the basic consumer goods industry (agriculture, food processing, textiles), the Soviet state extracted surplus from consumer goods production to re-invest in the military-industrial complex (Filtzer 1996; Zhurzhenko 2001a, 2001b). This re-direction of surplus resulted in the continuously labor-intensive nature and low development level of the basic consumer goods industry. The underdevelopment of the consumer goods production translated into the extremely labor-intensive nature of household work—

the sole responsibility of women—requiring 6 to 7 hours a day on average across the USSR (Zhurzhenko 2001a, 2001b). The problem was exacerbated even more in rural Azerbaijan after the USSR’s fall, because the shortage of drinking water and problems with running water in the post-Soviet period added even more hours to daily housework—just to getting the water necessary for household work (Sabi 1999).

The gender ideology supporting the exclusive responsibility of women for household work was tacitly accepted and supported by the state (Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk 2000; Gal and Kligman 2000; Heyat 2002). Special benefits and privileges provided by the Soviet state were not directed to all women rewarding their household work, but were directed specifically to working mothers, explicitly acknowledging, praising, and supporting the biological reproduction role of women through generous maternity and childcare benefits (Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk 2000; Gal and Kligman 2000; Heyat 2002; Zhurzhenko 2004). Women’s place in the Soviet social hierarchy was thus interesting: their “glorious duty” was highly praised in the official Soviet media, while they worked more and were assigned to the unpaid, least-paying, and least prestigious jobs in the USSR.

The breakup of the USSR removed the value-giving “glorious duty” aspect of women’s work while keeping them solely responsible for housekeeping. What women’s work inside and outside the house now meant for post-Soviet Azerbaijan’s rural economies I was to discover. I wanted my data on post-Soviet rural livelihoods to be substantially based on the narratives of women manual laborers of former state and collective farms.

Looking for interviewees

My strategy to enter the field revolved around the season. This research was conducted during the summer months, and it is not unusual in the summer in

Azerbaijan for city dwellers to visit rural regions and to randomly ask in a village for families who are renting out a part of their house—a private room or a floor of the house, depending on the construction specificities. In each of my rural research sites (see “Choosing Sites”), I stayed with a family renting out a room to summer visitors. I located such families and houses not randomly (by just visiting the village and asking the first person I met), however, but through acquaintances in Baku who either had grown up in the area or had relatives and/or close friends who knew the area. I introduced my research to the family that hosted me, or to the neighbors during our first acquaintance. I explained that I study how women’s lives in the rural areas have changed since the collapse of the Soviet Union, and that I sought to interview women who worked for the collective and state farms, specifically in the fields, during the USSR era. Because I had been introduced by someone the hosts had had a relationship with for some, I was treated less as a complete stranger and more as someone who had been “entrusted” to them for help.

The hosts and the neighbors usually turned out to be my first interviewees. They also introduced me to other women they knew (neighbors, relatives, acquaintances) who had also been kolkhoz/sovkhov¹⁴ workers. Sometimes they took me to village gatherings (a baby shower or an all-female evening tea party) where I could meet more interviewees.

Occasionally, a woman interviewee asked me to interview her husband for a more “exact timeline” and for an insider’s view of the village’s stance on certain transition policies. During my research I interviewed two such men.

¹⁴ Kolkhoz—Soviet collective farm; Sovkhoz—Soviet state farm. Plurals are kolkhozy, and sovkhozy, accordingly. Kolkhoz was the shortened version of *kollektivnoe khozaystvo*, meaning collective farm or collective economy in Russian. Sovkhoz was the shortened version of *Sovetskoe khozaystvo*, Soviet farm in Russian. Kolkhozy and sovkhozy were the two components of the socialized farm sector in the USSR.

This sampling method carried some characteristics of a snowball sampling, whereby one person—my host in a given village—connects the interviewer to other interviewees. But the sampling was at the same time targeted, since the profile of the interviewees sought was middle-aged and older women who had worked as lay laborers under the collective farming system and who were mature adults (25 and older) in 1991, at the time of the USSR's fall.

Interviews with State Officials

I sought to interview state officials about how they planned the rural livelihood changes, what they wanted to achieve with their policies. These interviews were planned to illuminate the rural livelihoods as processes and belief systems negotiated at the intersection of the global, the national, and the local. The state is an irreplaceable target for inquiry here, as it tries to manage both the imperatives of participating in the global economy and the pressures of governing the local. During the Soviet period, the local communities were to an important degree shielded from the direct experience of the global. During the post-Soviet period, these communities were “globalized” through the medium of the state. These communities’ participation in and experience of global flows and structures were shaped by the state’s policies molding the post-Soviet period.

Probably the pivotal state organization in the transformation of rural livelihoods in Azerbaijan was the State Committee for Land (SCL), which was overwhelmingly in charge of both planning and implementing the land reforms. The chair of the SCL, Garib Mammadov, who has headed the reforms under President Aliyev since 1995, is also a member of both Azerbaijan’s Parliament and the Academy of Sciences. He was approached for an interview to represent a view of the

rural transformation and land reforms from both policy drafting and implementation vantage points at the top level. He agreed to be interviewed.

I also interviewed a number of researchers and administrators at the SCL.¹⁵ These interviews were very valuable. They illuminated the process of thinking and action characterizing the implementation of the land reforms from SCL's Baku office through SCL's regional/rural offices to the individual officers' demarcation and distribution of the land plots in the villages.

Another key state actor in Azerbaijan's rural reforms are the local executive governments. Local executive offices are representative organs of the state's executive branch sub-centralized at rural centers. For example, SCL officers always had to work in coordination with the local executive offices. Moreover, while the SCL's responsibility was only the division and distribution of formerly collective and state lands, local executive offices have been in charge of governing the rural areas in the broader sense. The latter's concerns encompassed the general social situation in the rural areas, including employment and available livelihood options, and local security, that is, the police. Local executives are direct representatives of the state's executive apparatus, and are directly accountable to the president. As mentioned above, I sought to interview the head of the local executive government and officers at different levels of the local executive government in each of the sites. In the section "Choosing Sites" I explain in more detail the results of my search for the narratives of rural local executives on the rural transformation.

Interviews with the state officials promised to show how changes in rural livelihoods in the midst of economic reforms were imagined and negotiated at the intersection of the global economy and local control considerations. Interviews in the

¹⁵ Some of these interviewees requested anonymity. For this reason, the number and names of SCL interviewees are not disclosed here.

rural communities can show the other side of how these negotiations and changes proceeded.

Open-Ended Questions

I attempted to gather narrative histories of the last 20 years from villagers and the state officials to compare and contrast.

The interviews with rural women were organized around three open-ended questions. I asked them (a) about themselves, their families, and how they earned a living; (b) how they earned a living during the Soviet period; and (c) how they came from their Soviet occupation to their current situation. This structure was intended to build the history of the passage from the Soviet period to the current.

I found myself using two prompt questions in interview after interview within the above structure.

The first was the question of land. These interviews were taking place after the completion of what is regarded as the most successful land decollectivization process in the former USSR. The lands of the former collective and state farms had been divided among the rural population, and all of the interviewees should have received their land shares. (They indeed had.) Yet not one interviewee mentioned this land when talking about how they make a living. I had to ask about the land shares: I asked if they had received their share, and what they did with it. At this point they remembered that they had this land and then shared how they did or did not use their land shares. These land shares were not regarded as central to their livelihoods, but talking about how this had become so provided some of the most valuable insights into this dissertation's subject area.

The second prompt question I found myself asking was about the relationship with the state. When interviewees described the difficulties of the early transition

period (which was a universal experience), I asked them whether they addressed their grievances to the government. When interviewees described the outmigration of their close male family members, I asked whether the government had done anything to prevent their migrating. These prompts solicited invaluable information on the beliefs about the nature of the state, community organization and the role of women in it, and the perceived location of responsibility for difficulties in making ends meet.

The interviews with state officials were organized around open-ended questions as well. I began the interviews by saying that I was trying to understand the agrarian change in Azerbaijan after the breakup of the Soviet Union, and how rural populations', specifically women's, lives have changed since the dismantling of the collective farm system. I asked the interviewees to tell me about their experiences with the transition tasks, what they intended to accomplish, and how these goals were reached.

This opening invariably solicited a lengthy description of the state of the country and economy, after the breakup of the Soviet Union and the failure of the early independent governments (when the Heydar Aliyev regime had just come to power), and a listing of the tasks accomplished. The opening also seemed to relax the interviewees, who, with just one exception, had met me with a noticeable reserve, uneasiness, and distrust. My interpretation of this initial distrust is that they were expecting an inquiry into the corruption and the authoritarian methods that Azerbaijan's government is infamous for.¹⁶ They were prepared for a confrontation until the tone of the discussion was set by the open-ended question about "livelihood changes," "dismantling of collective farms," "agriculture," and "women." It is important to note here that Azerbaijan's government officials, like most women with

¹⁶ Rasizade (2002) has even called corruption an institutional feature of the Aliyev government in Azerbaijan.

whom I talked, viewed “livelihood changes,” “dismantling of collective farms,” “agriculture,” and, especially, “women issues” as non-political, safe matters, and hurried to share their experiences, memories, and opinions. Yet for me, there was a wealth to be learned from these “non-political” discussions.

The second question I asked the government officials was “What were the difficulties that you faced in the implementation of the reforms in your duty as . . . regarding agrarian change/etc.?” and “How did you overcome these obstacles and successfully complete the reforms?” These probably were the most useful questions in the government interviews. This brought up a wealth of information without pressure, including information pertaining to corruption and political control, for example, when a lower-level officer recalled villagers’ negative reactions to him because of their misgivings towards the person holding his position before him, or when an interviewee complained of the behaviour of another state organization’s official during the reform process. Officials talked of villages where residents resisted reforms with rakes; of predecessors who changed positions because of the inability to deal with the villagers’ claims; of the need to be simultaneously diplomatic, soft, and firm to push the reforms forward; of the importance of having good communication with the top leadership and knowing that one’s actions are backed up by the top, and more.

Side by Side with the Interviews

I supplemented interviews with materials from statistical and secondary reports, trying to see individual stories in the larger picture. I collected statistical reports from the State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan, and also used the multitude of tables they have made available online. I consulted journalistic accounts, research, articles, and non-profit reports pertinent to Azerbaijan’s post-Soviet rural transformation, accessing the materials in Azeri through the central M. F. Axundov library in Baku city.

Choosing Sites

To seek answers to the posed questions I chose two areas of Azerbaijan, the Lenkeran-Lerik and Shamakhy regions, with quite different geographies and types of agricultural activity. This was for comparative reasons.

Lenkeran is the most densely populated rural area in the country, and the land shares distributed per person during the reforms are the smallest in the country here. Bordering Iran in the south, Lenkeran has a humid, subtropical climate conducive to the growth of citrus fruits, tea, and warmth-loving garden vegetables like tomatoes and cucumbers. Indeed, it was supplying the USSR with these crops prior to independence. Since independence, trade with Iran and Russia also figures large in the region's economy.

In the Shamakhy region, the amount of land distributed per person was the national average. Shamakhy is also located in the central, Shirvan area of the republic. It has been the capital of historical states in Azerbaijan (Shirvanshah, Agqoyunlu, Qaraqoyunlu dynasties) for 1,007 years, and figured widely in the works of Azeri poets and writers from the Middle Ages to the 20th century.

Why Lenkeran and Shamakhy? I wondered how differently my questions would be answered in the most densely populated rural area of Azerbaijan (Lenkeran) and in the region representing the center, median, average of rural Azerbaijan (Shamakhy) in terms of both its land-share size per person and its geography. I hoped that the commonalities observed in such different locations would be more likely to be found elsewhere. For the same reason, within each of these rural administrative and socio-geographic districts (Lenkeran-Lerik and Shamakhy), I sought to visit villages organized around different livelihood strategies.

Local Governments in Lenkeran and Shamakhy

In Shamakhy, the head of the local executive office himself agreed to be interviewed. The interview with him lasted over one hour, and he also instructed the lower-level officials in Shamakhy's executive government to assist me with any questions I might have. I interviewed two of these officials, and one was the guide through whom I learned about and visited a large private grape plantation in Shamakhy. I also interviewed the general manager of a large grape field in Village 1, as well as the field's three male workers. I interviewed one man, a former schoolteacher in Village 2.

Because of the local government's open approach to my research, I could stay and research in more villages in Shamakhy than in Lenkeran. In Lenkeran, I was not able to get an interview from the local executive government or to receive an official "go-ahead" for my research. Because of the common knowledge of tight government watch over "idea-transfers" in rural Azerbaijan and the rural local governments' mistrust of "outside visitors asking questions and stirring rural populations," I did not risk traveling to more than two villages in Lenkeran.

Villages in Lenkeran. In July 2009 I lived in and interviewed women in two villages in the south Lenkeran and Lerik regions of Azerbaijan. The villages where I conducted my study were very different. Village 1 had about 7,000 inhabitants, was about 15 kilometers from the central town of the region, and was very close to a state highway. Trade—within the region, with the capital city, and with Iran—was important to the livelihoods of this village's inhabitants. Village 2 was high in the mountains and had about 40 households and about 180 inhabitants. The roads leading to it were mountain roads of small stones, more passable on foot or on animals than by car. The roads rendered the village almost completely isolated from outside contact in the winter months. Correspondingly, the surrounding forests, gathering nuts, and fruits

and cultivating for subsistence were especially important to the livelihoods in this village.

I interviewed 22 persons in Village 1 (7,000 inhabitants) and 3 persons in Village 2 (about 60 inhabitants) in Lenkeran-Lerik. All of these informants were women, except for one man in Village 2. He was referred to me by one of the women respondents (he was her husband), to clarify dates and provide more details on responses to the reforms. The discussions with women took place in the absence of men.

Villages in Shamakhy. Shamakhy's territory can be divided into two parts: the dry plains that one enters when driving from Baku, and the mountains that follow the plains. The mountains are very scenic, and the air is not humid. According to local narratives, in the Soviet period some pediatricians brought children with certain respiratory diseases for a stay in the mountainous part of Shamakhy as part of their treatment. In the post-Soviet period, with the accumulation and concentration of wealth in Baku, these mountains of Shamakhy posed an attractive recreation area for the new wealthy. The construction of villas followed. As narrated by the locals residing in the mountainous areas, and confirmed by the representatives of Shamakhy's executive government, "all of the high level officials have villas in [the mountainous area of] Shamakhy." This includes the current president, Ilham Aliyev, whose residence erected at the top of one of the higher mountains is visible from miles away and is pointed out by local residents.

The "discovery" of upper Shamakhy as a recreation area was not confined to the ministers and the president but also encompassed the new upper-middle class from Baku—department heads at government ministries, university rectors, hospital heads, restaurant and mall owners, and so on. Those who could afford to, purchased land in upper Shamakhy to build their own villas. Others a bit lower on the income scale

frequented the region in the summer months, renting houses, often from the locals themselves, who moved to their basements for the summer. The flow and interest from moneyed Baku drove the land prices sky-high in the upper Shamakhy region, especially in contrast to the region's very own roadside dry plains. One "sot"¹⁷ of land was valued between 10,000 and 12,000 USD in the upper Shamakhy and cost just 200 USD in the lower Shamakhy's villages.

In Soviet times, prior to Gorbachev, the lower Shamakhy region specialized in grape production and boasted of the large State Farm Number 6, which oversaw the collection of grapes from the region, and a wine factory. However, as a part of Gorbachev's anti-alcoholism crusade, hundreds of hectares of grape fields were cut down completely. This brought the entire region, but especially lower Shamakhy and its population, face-to-face with a radical change in their work and livelihoods. After the early 2000s, when recreational tourism and summer residences hugged upper Shamakhy, nothing much in terms of a new economic niche had happened in lower Shamakhy. In 2007, three grape fields were started from scratch in lower Shamakhy, "facilitated by the central government's interest in rejuvenating the region" and "funded and owned by individuals," according to the local manager of one of the enterprises. This did not mean a comprehensive change in lower Shamakhy's economy, though, but it provided the populations of a few lower villages with seasonal local employment.

I asked my research questions in four villages, moving from lower Shamakhy to upper Shamakhy.

¹⁷ "Sot" or "sotka" is a name for are, a metric area measure, used in common language throughout the post-Soviet space. One "sot," or 1 are, is equal to 100 square meters. "Sotka" derives from "hundred" in Russian. One sot is 1/100th of 1 hectare. 1 hectare = 10,000 square meters.

Village 1 was in lower Shamakhy, Village 2 fell somewhere in between, Village 3 was in the lush and well-connected part of upper Shamakhy, and Village 4 was high in the mountains in upper Shamakhy, and had a very bad, washed-up road connection.

Village 1 comprised about 50 households, was one of the most active collectives of the former State Farm Number 6, and was near one of the new grape fields. Grapes were the life work of this village's residents in Soviet times. About their life and work in the post-Soviet period you will learn more below.

Village 2 comprised 42 households, and the residents here also remembered State Farm Number 6 with a yearning for the past. What distinguishes this village is its history as a rural social services center. This small village has a kindergarten, a health clinic, and elementary, middle, and high schools. The kindergarten, school, and clinic continue to function as state entities, although serving a much smaller clientele than in the Soviet period. These organizations are an important part of the livelihood strategies in this village. Over half the households have members who are either employed at one of these social service centers or receiving pensions for past work there.

Village 3 is in the heart of upper Shamakhy. Boasting all the beauty of mountain scenes, it is also conveniently located close to the regional roads. A rare occurrence in the region, the village has natural gas and electricity. In this village, where 1,000 to 1,500 people reside in the summer, only about 180 people are native residents. The rest are "Dachniki," or summer residents, as locals name seasonal residents (of both owning and renting varieties). Rents as well as groceries are more expensive than in the capital city of Baku, and the local store carries foodstuffs and delicatessen items that are hard to find even in the regional center—Shamakhy town itself.

Village 4 is high in the mountains with washed-up roads. It is only five miles from Village 3, but it takes a 20-minute drive in an SUV to get from Village 3 to Village 4. The village comprises around 40 households. It was famous in the Soviet period for its blacksmiths and carpet weavers. The road leading to the village is covered by water in the rainy season, and the village badly needs a bridge. Rain and snow effectively isolate the village, and, as its residents say, “there are no comers and goers for 8 months a year.”

I interviewed seven women in Village 1, five in Village 2, five in Village 3, and five in Village 4. All women represented different households.

Table 2.1. The Proportion of Interviewed Households to the Total Number of Households in Each Village

Village	Total no. of households	No. of women interviewed	Percentage of total no. of households represented among interviewed
S1	50	7	14
S2	42	5	12
S3	55	5	9
S4r*	18	5	28
L1	1,000	22	2.2
L2r*	12	2	17

Note. S = Shamakhy village; L = Lenkeran-Lerik village; r* = remote mountain village.

In summary, I conducted in-depth interviews with 22 women from four villages in Shamakhy and with 26 women from two villages in Lenkeran-Lerik.

Although the number of interviews is not large, these numbers should be put in the context of the purpose and nature of the research project. While “the aesthetic thrust of sampling in qualitative research is that small is beautiful,” sampling in qualitative research, like in quantitative research, should be commensurate with the purpose of the study and with the nature of the information sought (Sandelowski 1995:180). The purpose of the interviews was not to produce a statistical generalization of rural Azerbaijan, but to capture description-rich accounts of transition livelihood strategies and adaptations from socioeconomically distinct rural locales that could provide pointers for historical commonalities and guide a historical analysis of post-Soviet rural transformation. Open-coding interviews the same day I conducted them, I would decide to move on to a different village when I judged the information collected to be rich and sufficient enough to sustain a comparative analysis with that from other villagers.

The chronological order of my interviews in these different villages will explicate the number of interviewees further: The very first rural site where I commenced data collection was the large Lenkeran village, L1 in Table 2.1. Here I started my coding for the first time, trying to identify in general concerns, issues, and themes in the descriptions of particular life events and situations. As Table 2.1 shows, this village was where I conducted by far the greatest number of interviews. Here my ability to draw connections between the specific parts of the specific stories and the general concerns and themes was just beginning to be practiced, and my belief in having collected valuable, transferable information took time to develop. After the fifteenth in-depth interview here, however, I was more and more confident in that I was discerning certain commonalities, and after the twenty-second interview I decided to move on to the next locale with a feeling that the last two interviews added little valuable newness to the list of themes already identified. After this experience, in each

of the following sites I acquired twin feelings of (1) having obtained valuable information and description to be used comparatively in the next stages of research, and (2) hearing repetitions with much fewer in-depth interviews. The exception was the remote mountain village in Lenkeran, L2r* in Table 2.1, which I had to leave after interviewing two women because rumors spread in the village that I was collecting the information to submit to the government, and I did not want to conduct interviews in an atmosphere of perceived fear and role-playing.

Fieldnotes, Coding, and Data Analysis

I took shorthand fieldnotes during each of the interviews. Later the same day, while comparing these notes with the voice-recorded interviews, I produced extended fieldnote summaries of each interview. These extended fieldnotes were used for coding. Coding is the analytic processing of fieldnotes whereby the fieldworker attempts to capture general theoretical issues, aspects of particular events or situations (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). I analyzed interview findings in three stages: open coding, theme selection, and focused coding. In the first stage I read the interview record, trying not to see it through the lens of my existing theoretical baggage, but instead using it to identify as many issues that could serve as a basis for categorization on their own. With each interview I tried to, first, code it with an open mind, and then compare it with the coding of the previous interview(s) for commonalities—this was how I identified themes for further analysis. Gradually, the following themes solidified in the women’s descriptions of post-Soviet livelihoods: “outmigration,” “resentment for lost community unity/ ‘people have become selfish,’” and “land shares don’t mean much for the household income.” These themes formed the basis both for the focused coding, where I went through the interviews again specifically trying to understand these themes better, and for my secondary data search, with which I tried to locate the

interview findings in the bigger picture in relation to historical statistics and journalistic, economic, or social reports of the phenomena. As a result of this sequence, the changing relationship to land shares, community disintegration, and outmigration came to form the topics of the three substantive chapters in this dissertation.

CHAPTER 3: HOPES

In this chapter I will show how hopes in the bounties of the market system were crucial to the introduction and consolidation of the new order's structures. In Azerbaijan, hopes that the new regulations would bring greater economic freedom and prosperity, supported by the official statements that the old system was bankrupt, that the new system is the only workable system, have prompted lay villagers to try the new structures of the market economy. Alas, instead of self-sufficiency has come the instability of dependency on the market. But crucially, the responsibility for lost dreams was individualized in this process, while the new relations solidified as the building blocks of the new economy.

Selling Hopes

Igniting hopes in the bounties of the new order, and presenting the restructuring as a step into the abundance of unseen opportunities, was a strategic tactic of Heydar Aliyev's reform government. These efforts and their eventual success were crucial in opening up the countryside to the reforms.

Before even attempting to announce the rural reforms, President H. Aliyev abolished Soviet-era taxation on individual household production for rural residents. The sparking of the hopes can be traced back to the effects of this decree, one of the first President H. Aliyev signed after taking office. The tax abolition came as an immediate relief and symbolically strategic announcement after decades of the burden of Soviet taxation on household production. In the Soviet period, a peasant's "private production"—backyard produce, products of household dairy animals such as chicken and goats—had been kept under close check so as not to exceed a certain quota. Excesses were confiscated. An interviewee tried to explain how much this tax

exemption meant at the time by describing the yoke of the Soviet taxation system that preceded it:

They would come and demand money. One time I was so angry I said to the collector, “Why should I pay you?” The year had been good and these grape wines (*showing the grape wine canopy over the small front yard bench and table*) were heavy with fruit. He [the collector—S.R.] showed me the wines and said, “Don’t you see how much you have here?” Out of frustration I took the axe and cut the green, not-yet-ripe grape clusters down. I stomped on the fruit, destroyed it with the axe right in front of his eyes. “Here it is,” I said. “I don’t have anymore. If I don’t have it, you can’t have it.”

The ceiling and close watch on the “private” household production of rural residents was one of the key, unspoken, often unrealized grievances of the rural population against the Soviet regime in general, irrespective of a given locale’s relationship with a specific kolkhoz/sovkhos manager or local government head. The exemption of the rural population from *all* taxes¹⁸ in this historical context was very significant. By freeing the rural population of all taxes soon after he took office, Heydar Aliyev had significantly softened rural laborers towards the upcoming land reforms, had created goodwill towards the role and intentions of the government regarding the countryside, and was probably pivotal in igniting hopes in the possibilities of unfettered private land use. Hostility was turned into curiosity about what was to come.

As a next step, soon after the exemption, President Aliyev ordered the organizing of nationwide conferences to discuss market reforms in general, and agrarian and land reforms in particular. These consultation conferences (*mushavire*) were the signature mark of Aliyev’s navigation through the difficult early 1990s: Aliyev had been invited to take the leading position in the government by the then-president Elchibey in May–June of 1993 to stabilize the political volatility shaking the

¹⁸ Except the land tax, which is minimal, and which was not immediate at that time anyways. It was not going to be implemented until after the land had been distributed.

state. Before the end of 1993, H. Aliyev had already held three nationwide consultation conferences dedicated to finance and trade, the socio-economic challenges facing the country, and the wheat supply problem and banking, respectively.¹⁹ In 1994 President Aliyev had held 12 nationwide consultation conferences: one devoted to the discussion of establishing private property, two on the social protection of the population, three on questions of the economy and government operations in general, and six on agrarian issues and reforms. By 1995 President Aliyev had established a functioning National Assembly and Cabinet, yet he continued holding nationwide discussion/consultation conferences. In 1995 President Aliyev had held four nationwide consultation conferences, two of them devoted to the issues of agrarian change, and two to customs regulations and privatization, respectively. Of the four consultation conferences held in 1996, three were devoted to agrarian change specifically, and one to privatization.

In his opening speeches for these discussions, President Aliyev stressed that the collective and state farming system was bankrupt, that it had been built on violence and the bloody dispossession of peasants in the 1930s. As a former Communist leader, he emphasized that he was not a part of the building of that system, but was a leader of his nation more than 40 years after the collectivization, who understood the shortcomings and the bankruptcy of the system even while being a member of the Communist Party.

Invited to these conferences were, together with the rural executive government heads and officers, outstanding farmers, with Soviet-era rewards for hard work, collective farm brigade managers, and agricultural scientists and specialists.

¹⁹ The chronological listing of these conferences (1993–2003) and the full texts of president H. Aliyev's speeches during them are available online at <http://library.aliyev-heritage.org/az/2400331.html> (accessed January 9, 2013).

President Aliyev listened to the farmers' and specialists' opinions attentively, and shared his opinions on the different reform models suggested. Stressing that the discussion was open to anyone wishing to participate, President Aliyev added his belief that with hard work the system would bring prosperity (Aliyev 1994a, 1994b, 1995, 1996). He gave credit for any and all good in the countryside to the "hardworking peasant/villager" and blamed mismanagement by local executives and bureaucrats for the problems of the countryside and stunted reforms (Aliyev 1994b, 1995, 1996). He also placed all the hopes for any good of the rural change on the "hard work of the lay villagers," warning that change would not be easy or fast.

Wrapped in these statements was the message to rural laborers that the new system of organizing the rural economy was to be a system of liberation. The personal oppression by mismanaging bureaucrats was to be replaced by the avenues of freedom, where only a peasant's own industriousness would limit his or her success. Importantly, "success" in this message was defined as material prosperity, very different from the Soviet definition of personal "success" as one's contribution to the community. This invitation for cooperation extended to rural laborers was seductive.

Soon the outlines of the land reforms were solidified: the land was to be distributed to individuals free of charge, in equal portions. The dream of landownership, the ideas about what could be done with one's own land and labor, took over the countryside. For people used to toiling for collective farms and collective returns, taking *all* the fruits of their hard labor for themselves was a sweet promise. As they viewed it, with free land and no taxes on production, only the extent of one's own work set the limits to the future—and these people were not lazy. As one woman, a former field worker on a collective farm vegetable in Lenkeran, said, "Cultivating my own land was a cherished dream. It was the pinnacle of my dreams."

The desire for self-sufficiency is a powerful human emotion. From a child's desire to do things on her own to an adult's dream of economic independence, in its various imaginations and forms, self-sufficiency symbolizes freedom and happiness. Aliyev's strategic policy turned the uncertainty of change into a promise of self-sufficiency.

What happened was, in essence, a negotiation of livelihood conditions. Future benefits of individual landownership were promised in exchange for the "temporary" economic difficulties of the structural adjustment period. As the prices were liberalized, taxes on peasants were abolished. Diminished social protection "was necessary" for the diminished personal control of the local state bureaucrats. Abolished collectives meant the opening up of new opportunities for individual entrepreneurship. In the process, the government was relinquishing the responsibility for making agriculture a source of livelihoods for the 50 percent of the population still employed in agriculture. The government would divert its attention to the opening up of the markets, and to specializing in petroleum extraction for exports—the globalization policies. The responsibility for transforming agriculture into a source of livelihoods would be turned over to individual owners of the formerly collective farmland. The individual would-be owners of the land were grateful and hopeful. The hopes in self-sufficiency stemming from ownership of the land made this deal possible.

The hopes in the possibilities of self-reliance called upon the rural laborers to give it a try. Of course, not everyone was convinced, yet many were now giving marketization under the steering of Aliyev the benefit of the doubt: Maybe it would indeed prove to be a way to self-reliant, independent existence? This benefit of the doubt, fed by hopes in the bounties of the new system to come, was central in the countryside's opening up to the reforms. Even partial support of the reforms in a local

community was enough to make a communal, collective stance on the matter indecisive. And this indecisiveness, this division, gave the government just enough ground to proceed with land privatization.

Buying into the hopes. It is important to talk about the socio-historical context in which the hopes in the market as a road to self-sufficiency took place. The difference between the interests of kolkhoz managers and kolkhoz workers, the latent tension in the relationship between the collective farm managers and rural laborers, the authoritarianism of the managers was a covered-up reality of the Soviet rural life (Abramov 1963, Bradley 1971, Wilson 2002). But the inequality of this relationship stood bare, and the tensions were uncovered when the Soviet idea of “everyone-toils-for-the-same-common-good-from-their-different-position” dissolved. This uncovering happened in the interim period when the Soviet production system had broken down, and state ideology had been dismissed, but the new structures had not yet been implemented.

During the breakup of the Soviet Union, as Soviet-wide supply networks collapsed, some collective farm managers, or brigade heads, leased land (*podrat*) from their kolkhoz to continue agricultural production and ensure jobs for the workers, and as some say, in search of some gain. The *podrat* entrepreneurs hired the employees of the former kolkhoz to be paid from the profits of the *podrat*. The *podrat* manager took on to find buyers for the produce and organize the delivery, mostly to Russia, but also to Baku.

The arrangements however, did not work out smoothly most of the times. The early 1990s were a very fragile and chaotic period in the transitioning Soviet/post-Soviet space. Business transactions were very risky even within any given former USSR republic. Trans-border shipments were vulnerable to lawlessness and seizure, especially so in the Northern Caucasus, where Azerbaijan-Russia border lay.

Shipments of vegetables could be kept at the border in open trucks for days, leading to high spoilage. The women workers of a *podrat* brigade were to be paid after the produce was sold, and very often they went without pay with the *podrat* manager claiming that there had been no gain.

The women interviewed for this research in Lenkeran were passionate and articulate about their experience of the *podrat* experiment²⁰. They viewed their pay from the *podrat* system as the product of their labor doled out to them, or often denied on the grounds of “unsuccessful sales.” They believed that the *podrat* managers made profits from sales in Baku, even after all the losses: “Otherwise they would have no interest in doing this again year after year.” With the privatization of land the women could be their own managers, or so they hoped.

After the privatization of land, the *podrat* managers offered to lease the land plots now owned by the female brigade workers. But as one interviewee, a former *podrat* worker, said, “Cultivating my own land was a cherished dream.” As soon as they had legal control of the land, these female laborers mobilized their households to do what their *podrat* managers had done—they wanted to produce vegetables to sell in the Lenkeran city and in Baku.

The work was hard. The women described plowing and sowing the land share completely manually, “fuelled only by motivation,” in the first two years after its receipt. “Our dreams kept us going,” said one interviewee. She narrated how her son, who was of military-service age in the first year of their land-share receipt, begged the officers at the regional military-service center for a few months of delay in order to be

²⁰ To give a short background, Lenkeran’s climate is subtropical. Here, the soil has traditionally been used for citrus, tea, and vegetable growing under the Soviet Union. Garden vegetables, specifically tomatoes and cucumbers, grown here are indispensable to the Azerbaijanian table. Tomatoes and cucumbers require a lot of manual labor, and have traditionally been cultivated by the women workers of the Soviet collective and state farms. Unlike tea, they do not need costly processing and can be directly marketed to the buyers straight after/from harvest.

able to help his family sow and harvest the land. Another narrated how they borrowed money with their very meager incomes, and “cut from their half-empty stomachs”²¹ to rent a truck to take the first harvest of tomatoes and cucumbers to the city. Economic self-sufficiency, depending on nobody but one’s own land and labor—this was the dream and hope driving their sacrifices and motivation.

However, the dream was not easy to realize. The female laborers, unlike *podrat* brigade heads, lacked access to the retailer networks that would guarantee the purchase of their produce. Their household land shares were too small to justify the renting of technology. Their shares were also too small to satisfy the demands of a city purchaser (even a small one like a mini-market) with a variegated flow of vegetables like a larger *podrat* could. Cucumbers and tomatoes spoiled fast, and the women could not arrange storage of their produce, unlike a brigade manager. Brigade managers had both relevant retail connections and economies of scale, when they organized the same produce trade. The women’s inability to do what the brigade manager did was a bitter realization. For some it took more than one year of trying. Alas, the unprofitability of the endeavour was clear.

Eventually, the land ended up as lease back in the hands of the original brigade managers, and the owners were hired as *seasonal laborers on their own land*. The prices of the land leased out were not high either. In 2009 a land share in Lenkeran—once so hopefully anticipated—was being leased for a yearly fee between 50 and 60 USD, for less than 6 USD per month. The managers were now confirmed in their potency over landowners-laborers as the ones who could make the land pay.

The women, who once cherished hopes of cultivating their own land but now worked as seasonal hired laborers on that land, no longer saw land shares as worth

²¹ That is, decreased food spending with already poor diets.

investing their labor in. As land cultivation was tested and shown to be unsustainable in the countryside, the trickling down of the oil money from the capital created new opportunities for growth of the construction, trades, and services sectors (this will be looked at in more detail in chapter 5). The male labor devoted to the manual care of land for uncertain returns could be spent for more immediate and less risky returns as wage labor in these newly growing sectors. “There are no free males in my household to work the land share,” said one interviewee.

In contrast to land shares, household plots continued to be cultivated, and were mentioned with pride as a “significant help” to household budgets. Land shares represented unfulfilled hopes and were mentioned dismissively. Crucially, the reason for the unfulfillment was often viewed as emanating from individual circumstances (no connections in Baku to sell to, no storage area to keep the vegetables, no sons wanting to stay and work the land). No one blamed the government for the failure of cherished dreams of an independent farmer’s life. The government’s policy of concentrating on oil was not seen as related to produce prices, the produce market, and land. “What was the government to do?” I repeatedly heard in answer to my question about whether the government could help. “It divided the collective lands, and it was then up to individual families to make it work.”

From Hopes to Landowning Wage-Laborers: More Stories

In lowland Shamakhy, rural laborers’ realization of their inability to use land shares to attain market-based self-sufficiency provided labor for Baku oligarchs’ large-scale grape plantations in the area. The country’s oligarchs began investing in export-oriented large-scale agricultural projects in Azerbaijan’s countryside in 2004. The choice of grapes for the Shamakhy area was related to the region’s history.

The head of the executive government in Shamakhy attributed the creation of new grape plantations there to Baku officials' realization that grapes were a product in which Azerbaijan had a comparative advantage internationally. Shamakhy had agricultural labor that was experienced and skilled in grape production since the Soviet period, specifically women with rapid manual grape-tree-tending and grape-harvesting skills.

Shamakhy had been one of the centers of grape-growing in Soviet Azerbaijan. The grapes had mostly been used for wine-making, and started being cut down under Gorbachev's anti-alcoholism crusade in the late 1980s. During the post-Soviet transition, the grape fields were categorized as property that every collective farm employee could get a share of. The fields were difficult to sell, impossible to irrigate individually, and too expensive to cultivate collectively for impoverished rural communities. Much of the fields had been cut and used as wood fuel. In 2004, of the 284 thousand hectares of Soviet-era grape fields, only 7.7 thousand remained (Table 3.1). That same year, the government declared its support for grapes and wineries. Rural executive governments were instructed by the central government to support any investment in grape production. The investment in grape production here, in the Shamakhy executive's words, would not just tap into the skills of the local laborers, but would "provide some livelihoods" to the population as well.

In 2006, into lower Shamakhy, famous for its Soviet-era grape producers, came a person, "a middle level bureaucrat working in one of the ministries in Baku," who chose an area to establish his grape field. He partially bought and partially leased from local villagers 106 hectares of land, to be cultivated as grape fields from scratch. Before leaving, he hired a former collective farm manager to organize and oversee the work in the region.

The brigade manager, experienced in overseeing grape production, hired laborers for the field. Men were hired as technicians and irrigation specialists, and women were hired for the seasonal manual labor of tedious care for the plants. To the hired, this came as a fresh breath of air after years of joblessness and destitution. The initial seeds of the enterprise were sown, and an expensive irrigation system was put in place.

Table 3.1. Grape Production: Total Area of Fields, Harvest, and Productivity, 1984–2008

Years	Total area (1000 hectares)	Total area of harvestable age (1000 hectares)	Total harvested (1000 tonnes)	Productivity per 1hectares (100 kg)
1984	284.1	210.0	2126.1	99.2
1985	267.8	218.0	1789.6	81.0
1986	214.2	207.6	1538.9	73.9
1987	197.0	175.2	1448.6	82.6
1988	195.4	169.2	1254.3	73.7
1989	188.9	163.1	1057.1	65.1
1990	181.4	156.1	1196.4	76.5
1991	171.0	148.6	1125.6	75.3
1992	146.3	132.3	607.0	45.8
1993	140.1	133.1	411.3	30.1
1994	110.3	105.1	313.8	29.8
1995	97.7	94.7	308.7	32.6
1996	83.3	79.1	275.0	34.7
1997	66.3	65.4	145.3	22.2
1998	35.1	34.4	144.2	31.4
1999	20.5	20.3	112.5	35.6
2000	14.2	13.9	76.9	35.8
2001	11.5	11.4	68.1	39.9
2002	8.9	8.9	62.1	43.8
2003	7.7	7.4	65.0	50.9
2004	8.0	7.3	54.9	38.9
2005	9.6	7.2	79.7	61.8
2006	10.0	7.5	94.1	76.7
2007	12.4	7.8	103.4	70.1
2008	13.3	8.9	115.8	74.0

Note. Source: The State Statistical Committee,
<http://www.azstat.org/statinfo/agriculture/az/049.shtml#s4>

I was told that the grapes required an initial investment of 12,000 to 15,000 USD per hectare for initial plantings, and 3 years to mature. This excluded land

purchase or lease costs. Grapes also required economies of scale to justify initial costs and a costly irrigation system. It was not rural capital that could invest in this high-cost endeavour and afford to wait for 3 years for the first (uncertain) yield in post-Soviet Azerbaijan.

The “middle-level bureaucrat from Baku” spent over 1.2 million USD in initial setup costs. In a country where pensions are around 70 USD, and upper-middle-level bureaucratic salaries are 700 to 1,000 USD, how a “middle level” bureaucrat had accumulated 1.2 million USD plus to invest in a grape field was a question not asked. The bureaucrat was said to be acting on behalf of a top government minister. He was responsible for the investment and came to the region once every few months to check its progress.

In 2009 the field was close to maturation. The work was organized under the management of a hired male brigade manager who oversaw his male technical experts and female manual laborers. The workers were paid quite a bit more than at a medium-size vegetable enterprise in Lenkeran. The new grape field provided the majority of women in the village with work paying 200, 230, or 350 USD a month, depending on the intensity of required work that month. This was 30 to 60 times more than the monthly payment for a leased-out land share, and 20 to 35 times more than the yearly income made by using one’s land shares to subsidize wheat farming (more on this later in this chapter). The women were aware of this, and were deeply grateful to have their jobs. Here as well, instead of the self-sufficiency emanating from land ownership, there was gratitude for the availability of seasonal work as manual laborers.

On Proletarianization in the Countryside

The grape plantation in Shamakhy was not the only commercial large-scale agricultural project in post-Soviet Azerbaijan. As mentioned above, projects like these funded by the oil elite's money mushroomed in the countryside with the progress of the land reforms. According to Lerman and Sedik (2010:93), about 25% of Azerbaijan's agricultural land was in use by large-scale private corporate farms in 2005. These large-scale agricultural endeavours found both land *and* labor to make them possible. Moreover, parts of the land used for these projects belonged to the laborers themselves, who had leased it out and had come to work as wage-laborers on it. The process by which Azerbaijan's landowning peasants went to work as wage-laborers—were proletarianized—on their own leased-out land requires a dialogue with Marx and his followers.

In volume 1, chapter 26 of *Capital*, “The Secrets of Primitive Accumulation,” Marx (1883/1994) argued that a producer's separation from the means of production, specifically land, is a necessary precondition to that producer's transformation into a wage laborer. He wrote:

The process, therefore, which creates the capital-relation can be nothing other than the process which divorces the worker from the ownership of the conditions of his own labour; it is a process which operates two transformations, whereby the social means of subsistence and production are turned into capital, and the immediate producers are turned into wage-labourers. So-called primitive accumulation, therefore, is nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production. It appears as “primitive” because it forms the pre-history of capital, and of the mode of production corresponding to capital.

. . . Hence the historical movement which changes the producers into wage-labourers appears, on the one hand, as their emancipation from serfdom which alone exists for our bourgeois historians. But, on the other hand, these newly freed men became sellers of themselves only after they had been robbed of all their own means of production, and all the guarantees of existence afforded by the old feudal arrangements.

The expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil is the basis of the whole process. (Pp. 296–97)

A person would only go to work for someone else if she or he lacked the means of procuring subsistence—most important, the land. What Marx did here was to extrapolate a general theory of human behaviour with regard to wage labor based on the specific historical experience of the European peasants' transition from feudalism to capitalism. The peasants, whose experience Marx observed, had been producing primarily for subsistence, for generations. Their labor for and dues to a feudal lord were ensured through extra-economic coercion, precisely because they had the means and determination to procure their subsistence needs from the land. This had been the only form of livelihood-making they had known, and their transformation into voluntary laborers for someone else would indeed be hard to imagine as long as they had access to the land that had sustained them for generations.

In an apparent contrast to this model, villagers in post-Soviet Azerbaijan went to work as seasonal wage-laborers while fully owning their individual land plots. Two factors need to be pointed out here: (1) they did not come from the experience of subsistence production, and (2) their consideration of production for subsistence on their land did not take place because of the hopes placed on the returns of the market system.

The grandparents of Azerbaijan's peasants had been separated from producing for subsistence on their land plots during Stalin's collectivization. For generations, Azerbaijan's rural laborers produced what was assigned externally (by USSR plans), collected from them (by state officials), and sent away (for state re-allocation). They then received what they needed for reproduction from the state allocation system, the same one to which the harvests of their labor were sent. The landowning wage-laborers of post-Soviet Azerbaijan, met in the ethnographies above, had not known

how to procure their subsistence from land for generations. They were already wage-laborers for the Soviet production system, and their post-Soviet turn to wage labor was, more accurately, a re-proletarianization. Yet, this re-proletarianization was in **no** way prescribed by their experience. When the laborers became individual landowners with de-collectivization, the use of land for subsistence could be considered. (It was in fact considered by a few people whom we will meet in a little while.) But hopes in the bounties of production for market and in the justice of market allocation took the place of serious consideration of producing for subsistence. These chosen beliefs critically conditioned the re-proletarianization of Azerbaijan's rural laborers: choosing to produce as individual families what they knew best for the market, they lost the competition with the producers, who utilized knowledge of markets, access to facilities, and larger economies of scale. The land, unable to provide for their livelihood—when used to produce for the market—was devalued in their eyes, and came to bear negligible significance. Insofar as land ownership means a source of subsistence income, these rural laborers were in effect landless when they took up the opportunities for wage labor. Yet, their landlessness—the devaluation of land in their eyes as a non-provider of livelihood income—was critically due to their choice of production for the market, bred by the hopes in the bounties of the market system and the justice of its allocation. A person's separation from the means of his or her subsistence, from land—Marx's primitive accumulation—could be as much an effect of mind as of forceful dispossession. David Harvey (2003) understood this void in Marx's conceptualization when he wrote the following:

Critical engagement over the years with Marx's account of primitive accumulation—which in any case had the quality of a sketch rather than a systematic exploration—suggests some lacunae that need to be remedied. The process of proletarianization, for example entails a mix of coercions and of appropriations of pre-capitalist skills, social relations, knowledges, habits of mind and beliefs on part of those being proletarianized. Kinship structures,

familial and household arrangements, gender and authority relations (including those exercised through religion and its institutions) all have their part to play. In some instances the pre-existing structures have to be violently repressed as inconsistent with labour under capitalism, but multiple accounts now exist to suggest that they just as likely to be co-opted in an attempt to forge some consensual as opposed to coercive basis for working-class formation. Primitive accumulation, in short, entails appropriation and co-optation of pre-existing cultural and social achievements as well as confrontation and supersession. (P. 146)

Trying to address this incompleteness in the thinking about primitive accumulation, Harvey (2003) expanded the meaning of dispossession to include “coercions and appropriations of pre-capitalist skills, social relations, knowledges, habits of mind, and beliefs on the part of those being proletarianized.” The problem here is that “habits of mind, and beliefs” cannot really be coerced and appropriated.²² (E. P. Thompson’s “Moral Economies of the English Crowd” [1971] had intended to sensitize us precisely to “habits of mind, and beliefs.”) A crucial aspect of history-making—human choice and complex negotiations of popular stance—is made invisible and irrelevant if the beliefs and habits of mind are coerced.

On Choice

People’s acceptance of the market as the just and best allocator of economic resources and mediator of livelihood-earning activities may be an essential part of the expanding reach of neoliberal appropriation structures in our age. The lure of the market as an impersonal allocator rewarding the shrewd and the hardworking can be especially strong in small communities where resource allocation had been tied to the subjective, personal decision-making, in the Soviet case, of kolkhoz/sovkhos managers and local Communist Party chiefs. Yes, in Azerbaijan’s case, the Heydar Aliyev government

²² Moreover, the view that the new (market-based) social structures of producing and livelihood-making take root by adjusting some of the pre-existing language and cultural forms ascribes a degree of local cultural determinism to individual behaviour that is neither justified nor satisfactory.

tried wisely and diligently to invite the rural population to become part of a market-based livelihood-making. Yet, ultimately, it was the choice of individuals and individual communities to accept the invitation, as the examples to come will demonstrate more fully. But nature-given acumen and hard work are not enough to win the good graces of the demand-and-supply mechanism, and market competition can dispossess as quickly as force and coercion. Crucially, though, the choice to give market structures a try meant the individualization of responsibility for making it or not.

Appreciation of the aspect of choice here cannot be underestimated. The choice of post-Soviet Azerbaijan's landowning rural laborer to produce for the market was not determined by their experience as former collective/state farm wage-laborers. Hopes and beliefs in the bounties of the market really cannot be coerced, only suggested. Multiple variations could come from this experience, as examples provided later in this chapter will demonstrate. But the hopes placed on the bounties of the market production/allocation replaced consideration of production for subsistence in many locales. The key word here is "many," not all.

Occasional villages on the map of rural Azerbaijan stand together in not buying in to the hopes in the bounties of individual production for market. References to such villages started coming during my interviews with local state officials, who tried to grapple with/explain the incompleteness of the rural market reforms. The head of the executive government in Shamakhy said that some villages had devised their own, alternative ways and systems of production, but such were very few. Ivanovka village in the Ismayilli district, he said, chose to continue tending land collectively, to produce for their needs and to sell the excesses. Another village in northern Azerbaijan had chosen a similar path.

At one of my research sites—the remote mountainous Shamakhy village—some residents chose to put their land shares to use in subsistence farming. Many of my interviewees in this village expressed proudly that their land shares, although rocky and hard to plow, generously provided them with a yearly supply of potatoes—a staple of the Azeri diet—and all other vegetables. Potatoes and vegetables harvested from land shares, berries and nuts from mountain forests, and goats and sheep fed on the grazing fields of the commons contributed to fairly self-sufficient livelihoods. An elderly lady talking about her use of the privatized land share for subsistence stressed her independence from others: she was the one supporting her migrant children in Baku with produce, not receiving their remittances as a helpless villager.

Interestingly, other, unrelated parts of her interview came together to demonstrate her independence. She was a skilled carpet-weaver. Her handmade carpets had been taken to and won exhibitions in Moscow during the USSR era. At the time of our interview, she told me about recently turning down offers to make carpets for the wealthy from Baku. The latest offer before our interview was two thousand dollars for a red carpet (she died the yarns herself with a juice made from certain mountain berries, and “the colors never faded, not like today’s machine-made carpets,” she said). She had turned the offer down and explained to me that she was busy and that the money was not worth her labor. The amount she had turned down was very significant by rural Azerbaijan’s standards, worth 24 months of the woman’s own pension payments. Moreover, opportunities to earn cash do not come easy in rural areas. This lady’s self-valuation of her non-cash-bringing labor was in striking contrast to other self-valuations of personal labor that I heard during my interviews. For many, many others, bringing in cash—engaging in market-oriented activities—was the key measure of the labor’s value. This reflected the establishment of what J.

K. Gibson-Graham called the “capitalocentric discourse” (1996, 2006) in the hearts and minds of Azerbaijan’s villagers. Gibson-Graham (2006) wrote:

Capitalocentrism is a dominant economic discourse that distributes positive value to those activities associated with capitalist economic activity, however defined, and assigns lesser value to all other processes of producing and distributing goods and services. (P. 56)

To Gibson-Graham, capitalocentrism was a key to the power of a capitalist system organized around market production and allocation. To understand this power required answering “How is it that waged labor, the commodity market, and capitalist enterprise have come to be seen as the only ‘normal’ forms of work, exchange and business organization?” (Gibson-Graham 2006:53). A part of the answer may be that presentation *and* acceptance of the market system as an impersonal, just adjudicator of human industriousness, and therefore a fair allocator of rewards, has an appeal for some people who had suffered in personal allocation systems. A market is a system, not a person; it is objective, and free from bias—these ideas continue to be presented and accepted, despite their exposure as fallacious.²³ But such were the positive conceptions of the market put forward with the careful politics of President Heydar Aliyev to rural residents of Azerbaijan, accepted by many, and dividing those communities where not all subscribed. As livelihoods reorganized to depend on market activity and cash, it is not surprising that market and cash obtained positive values in human minds. The first aspect both required preliminary forms of the second and simultaneously perpetuated them.

In obvious contrast to the capitalocentric discourse, the Shamakhy highlander woman’s non-cash-bringing labor spent on procuring her own subsistence was valuable to her. The aim of this example is not to argue for the superiority of

²³ Probably most systematically in Polanyi’s *The Great Transformation*.

subsistence production over production for market as the true road to independence and prosperity. (However, much as I would have loved to argue this, the material required for this argument is beyond the scope of this work.) Rather, the above example is intended to demonstrate that *choices* of alternative relationships to land, production, and surrounding people were a very real possibility in post-Soviet Azerbaijan.

Wheat Example

Wheat farming is another example of unfulfilled hopes for self-sufficiency coming from land ownership. Wheat is an important example, because it occupies about 60% of the total sown crop area in Azerbaijan (Figure 3.1). Wheat flour is the basis for the national staple, bread. Wheat can be stored in large quantities in the conditions of a peasant home relatively longer, even before processing (unlike, for example, tomatoes, cucumbers, and most other garden vegetables). Wheat does not require much (male) manual labor: preparing the land, sowing, and harvesting all are done with tractors, if it is sown on flat (not mountainous) land.

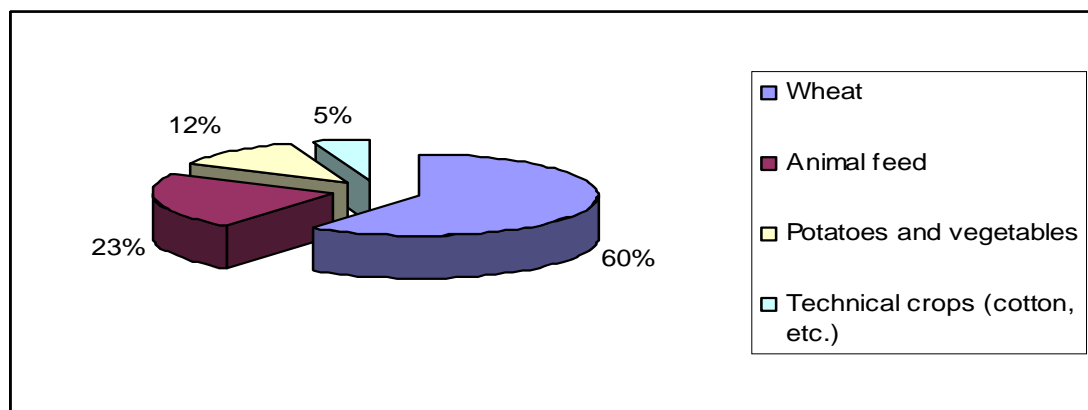


Figure 3.1. Total sown crop area in Azerbaijan, 2008. Source: Azerbaijan State Statistical Committee, data available online at: <http://www.azstat.org/statinfo/agriculture/az/023.shtml>

Much wheat is cultivated on individual land shares, by individual land share owners. In fact, wheat “farmers” are the essence of the “small farmers” category to which the Azerbaijan government and media often refer. However, this reference is not accurate. As I will show, wheat cultivation provides only a tiny fraction of a farmer’s income, about \$12 a month, and it is only cultivated on land shares because of the government subsidies. Low market prices for wheat due to competition with imported wheat, comparatively high technology rental costs, and the natural uncertainty of yield would make wheat a completely unprofitable endeavour for a household and the “small farmer,” if not for the government subsidies.

Shamakhy’s lower plains and weather happen to be well-suited to growing wheat. Here, however, the wheat “farmers” cultivating their land shares were as dismissive of the significance of their land shares as were their counterparts in Lenkeran. During the interviews I was presented with a simple, locally made cost-benefit analysis of wheat cultivation as an explanation for the dismissiveness, as shown in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2. Yearly Costs of Cultivating Wheat on a 1-Hectare Individual Land Share as Laid Out by the Farmers in Shamakhy, 2009

Period	Item	Cost (Azeri manats)
Sowing	Technology (tractor) rental	40
	Technology user (tractor driver) hire	12
Harvesting	Technology (tractor) rental	40
	Technology user (tractor driver) hire	12
Annual cost		104

Note. 1 manat is roughly equal to 1 USD.

So, to rent the technology to plow the land and sow the seeds on one hectare of land costs about 40 dollars. Paying the person who knows how to use the technology is another 12 dollars per hectare. Similarly, a 52-dollar per-hectare cost for technology use is incurred during the harvest. So the cost of getting wheat from one hectare of land in a year is around 104 dollars, excluding the cost of the farmer's labor. (The laborers did not count their labor as a cost when describing the value of wheat.)

One tonne of wheat costs 120 dollars on the market. The value of wheat cultivation on one's land share depends on the yield. If one hectare yielded a tonne, the endeavour would give the "farmers" just 20 dollars to cover the costs of the several months of labor and seeds. But even a one-tonne yield is not guaranteed; it depends on weather. For example, in the Shamakhy area, in 2008, one hectare yielded only 0.7 tonnes (700 kilograms) of wheat, 0.3 (300 kilograms) short of the one tonne in the previous year, meaning a clear loss for the cultivators. Like in Lenkeran, people here had tried and given up on the idea of obtaining their livelihood from the land. Before the government subsidies, including free seeds, were introduced in 2008, the stories of wheat farming in Shamakhy were painfully similar to those from Lenkeran: people had started to cultivate with enthusiasm only to find that their efforts did not bring self-sufficiency. One interviewee remembered the following:

The first year we sowed wheat [on their own land share after the reforms were completed—S.R.], the year was good. We took almost 2 tonnes from a hectare. The next year everybody in the village sowed wheat but the year was not good, pests attacked. The next year also was not good, it was dry. So people gave up sowing wheat. Nobody would be sowing wheat today, if the government did not start paying for the technology.

In 2008, as a part of its rural development and food security program, the government started offering rural residents about 50 USD at the beginning and at the end of the season for wheat cultivation on their land shares, plus free seeds. This was seen by the

villagers as paying for the technology costs. Moreover, one local villager, a male, mentioned about the subsidies: “It is like getting your wheat [bread] for free, thanks to our women.” It turned out that seeing the wheat harvest as a “free” addition to a household’s budget fundamentally relied on the unpaid, counted-on-as-given work by the household’s women.

Being a technology-requiring crop, wheat is referred to as “male work” (“kishi ishi”) in rural areas because tractors, and agricultural technology in general, are operated by men. Interestingly, to be an addition to a household’s welfare, this male crop wheat needs to be processed through traditionally female work. Collecting the stems left in the field by the tractor after harvest to use as animal feed, and processing collected wheat—separating grain from the stems, drying the grain for the mill—are all done manually by women. Women’s unpaid work of baking bread every day turns the flour into a consumable form of bread in the household. The actual work in the wheat field with the use of technology takes a few days, whereas women’s work of processing the wheat harvest, and then turning the flour into bread and meals to be consumed in the household, continues throughout the year. The very idea of the government’s food security program to get the wheat “free” to the rural population is premised on the unpaid, invisible work of women, which turns the crop in the fields into food.

Azerbaijani government officials and the Azerbaijani media like to refer to wheat cultivators as small farmers. However, the role of wheat cultivation in an individual household’s budget is marginal even after government subsidies. If the yearly gain of 120 dollars from a woman’s wheat cultivation on her land share is divided by 12 months, the “small farmers” get about 10 dollars per month from their “farming” *after* government subsidies. This fact does not allow talking about small-scale crop production as a central livelihood strategy. The “small farmers” are in

essence procuring their livings through very different livelihood strategies: one man may be a retired school teacher, another a seasonal bus driver, a third the owner of the village's cigarette shop . . . The wife of the first "farmer" may sell dairy products and eggs, taking them one day a week to the village or regional market. The wife of the second "farmer" may be a cleaning and cooking helper in a local executive officer's home. A third may be just working on her household plot. As long as wheat cultivation is a job that requires involvement with rented technology and substantial subsidies a few days each season, villagers have incentives to add wheat to their arsenal of livelihood strategies based on flexible schedules. But cultivating wheat does not make them self-sufficient farmers—far from it. Like in Lenkeran, people have given up on land as a source of independence. Just like in Lenkeran, here the shares are remembered only if asked about, and mentioned in a dismissive tone. Moreover, nearly half of my interviewees in Shamakhy neither cultivated nor leased out their land shares.

- **Box 3.1. A Side Story of Cultivation Technology in Rural Azerbaijan**

As Soviet collective farm workers, Azerbaijan's villagers were used to having tractors to plow the land, and, in the case of crops such as wheat, to also sow and harvest. The head of the executive government of Shamakhy narrated that the collective farms used to have technician teams dedicated to the upkeep of agricultural technology. These technicians in high season would travel to the fields to fix any problems with the technology on the spot, to avoid time and crop loss, and were responsible for the maintenance of the technology off-season as well.

Collective and state farm tractors have been privatized as part of the property distribution program, and have been outdated with the collapse of institutional technical upkeep. Within the property distribution program, the price of the tractors of a collective/state farm were divided by the number of employees, and each employee received his or her "property share" in monetary form. The shares were insignificant and evaporated quickly in the struggle to make ends meet in the countryside. Left behind was a mass of landowners with no cultivation technology. The Soviet-era technology depreciated very rapidly, especially now that there were none of the technical maintenance teams previously available at each collective/state farm.

The number of tractors in Azerbaijan has decreased more than twice since the late Soviet period. The same amount of agricultural land as in the Soviet period was now serviced with less than half the cultivation technology (see Table 3.3).

Table 3.3. Tractors and combine mower-thrashers in Azerbaijan, 1985–2005

Year	Tractors		
	Number (thousands)	Total engine power (thousands of horsepower)	No. of combines (thousands)
1985	38.8	2631	4.5
1990	40.9	2988	4.5
1992	37.3	2853	4.3
1993	34.8	2607	4.4
1994	33.5	2047	4.5
1995	33.2	2177	4.3
1996	32.9	2147	4.3
1999	29.5	2180	3.6
2005	14.9	1016	1.3

Note. Source: The State Statistical Committee, <http://www.azstat.org/statinfo/agriculture/az/013.shtml>.

Conclusion

The post-Soviet changes in the social structure of Azerbaijan's countryside that have led people to be wage-laborers on their *own* land would not be possible without the hopes in the bounties of the new order.

Sweeping transformation was introduced with good doses of hopes: As the government liberalized the prices per IMF requirements, it also freed the rural population from all taxes. As the government restructured the economy around oil extraction, it distributed collective and state farmland free of charge, in equal share sizes to the rural population. With land and hopes, but no control over market prices or irrigation, storage, or technology, the new individual landowners tried hard to make a living from the land. They failed. In the process, the government had relinquished responsibility for ensuring that agriculture was a source of livelihood under the new

landownership conditions. The responsibility for livelihood-making was individualized.

The negotiation of livelihoods under the new conditions, in this chapter explored through hope, was also a process by which new class relations characterizing the countryside shaped and reproduced themselves. As villagers were disempowered in their individual scrambles for self-sufficient livelihoods from the land, the new rich of Baku's oil economy combining political and economic power rose to prominence in the countryside, with many former kolkhoz and sovkhos leaders as their middlemen. Similarly, the gendered division of labor reminiscent of the Soviet farm work organization, where men managed and women did the manual work, was reintroduced and reproduced in the new mid- and large-scale private farms after the women had failed in their efforts to make an independent living from the land. These changes characterizing post-Soviet Azerbaijan's countryside were not forced on women and men laborers; they were entered into voluntarily, with hopes, and then with the conviction of individual responsibility for unrealized hopes.

The distribution of former collective and state farmland in equal share sizes, free of charge to rural populations, facilitated hopes in the bounties of the impersonal market-based system. These hopes led to massive small-scale production for the market in the countryside that failed to be sustainable but individualized the responsibility for livelihood-making.

CHAPTER 4: COMMUNITY, INDIVIDUAL, AND LAND

Land Reforms: An Overview

Land reforms were a crucial aspect of the negotiation of rural livelihoods in Azerbaijan as the country transformed into the petroleum exporter of the global economy. The manifested adoption of self-interest-oriented behaviour in rural communities individualized discontent and fragmented grievances against the reform, undermined trust in the potential leaders of rural communities, and served to disintegrate rural communities.

All land belonged to the state under the Soviet regime. Even the plots on which people's houses stood, including their backyards, were by law state property used by the citizens. Gardening in one's own backyard was subject to the government set ceiling on private production. The "excesses" of household production were taxed.

The right of the citizens to legally own land was introduced in Azerbaijan in November 1991, after the breakup of the USSR, with passage of the law on property. The law setting the ground for private peasant/farmer enterprises was ratified in 1992. The State Committee for Land (SCL) was established the same year. However, it took 4 years from this legal and institutional ground to the beginning of the actual distribution of the land. The reasons for this delay according to Sabit Bagirov (2003), a leading executive cabinet member between 1992 and 1994, were "the difficulty of the tasks, *the fear to implement the key steps of dissolving collective and state farms by many state officials in any way related to agriculture*, the political events [coup d'état] of summer 1993, and the ongoing war in Karabakh" (P. 254, my translation and emphasis).

The actual reforms were put in motion after President Aliyev suppressed the coup attempts against him and consolidated his power in 1994. On February 18, 1995,

Azerbaijan's parliament ratified the laws "About the Basic Principles of Agrarian Reforms" and "About the Reforms of the Collective and State Farms." Two weeks later, on March 2, 1995, a presidential decree created the State Commission of Agrarian Reforms and required the following from the Commission: (a) within 30 days to prepare the reforms program, recommendations, instructions, and other necessary documents for the reforms and submit these to the president; and (b) within 60 days to prepare a list of the yet-unprivatized state property and submit this to the president.

Finally, in July 1996, the law "On Land Reforms" was ratified. It clarified the methods and mechanisms of enforcing the land reforms. As described in the previous chapter, President Aliyev had already softened the countryside towards the reforms by exempting rural residents from all taxes.

The law "On Land Reforms" established three forms of ownership: private, state, and municipal (Box 4.1).

The land reforms started in 1996. By December 1, 2006, of the 3,438,625 persons entitled to land shares, 3,420,778 (99.5%) had received their shares in actuality and in documentation (interview with Garib Mammadov, Chairman of the State Land and Mapping Committee, 2009). This involved the liquidation of 2,032 collective and state farms in the country (ibid.)

The State Committee for Land and Mapping was the central institution in the land distribution process. The SCLM examined the land area, determined its soil content and suitability for cultivation, categorized it (e.g., as pasture, land reserves, or

²⁴ Referring to Soviet-era collective and communal housing complexes. The individual apartment flats in some of these complexes could later be privatized, but the land area under the building remained municipality property.

cultivation land), issued ownership registration, and demarcated the borders between the entitlements of the different stakeholders.

- **Box 4.1. Forms of Land Ownership in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan**

Retained under *state property* were lands of (1) the government buildings, (2) state industries (e.g., mining, approved mineral deposit sites, power plants, pipes, transport, communication, defence, etc.), (3) summer and winter pastures, cattle camps and roads, (4) forests, (5) water reserves (including Caspian Sea's Azerbaijan sector), (6) reserves under state protection for natural, and historic-cultural significance, (7) research and education facilities, their pilot bases, testing stations, seed-growing and breeding farms, and (8) lands in permanent use of state organizations or demarcated for the construction of state facilities;

Municiple lands comprised (1) lands in common use (e.g., land area of city, town, or village dwelling units, local roads, squares, parks, stadiums, common pastures for locals' livestock, forest strips planted to protect agricultural land, local water reserves, local hydro and utility infrastructure), (2) municipality reserve fund (lands for prospective development/expansion of dwelling areas), (3) additional lands not belonging to state or private owners, and municiple lands in use by physical and legal persons.

Lands transferred to private ownership would include (1) lands in legal private use of citizens as private houses, backyards, private, communal and cooperative gardens, garden lands of the state gardening industry; and (2) privatized shares from collective and state farms' lands.

Source: Articles 6–8, Azerbaijan Republic's Law "On Land Reforms"

Local executive governments had control over the lists of the people registered in local kolkhozs and sovkhozs and entitled to land. In the process of delineating individual land shares and their division among rural residents, the SCLM officers (dispatched to the rural areas from the capital city Baku) had to work closely with the local executive offices.

As detailed in Box 4.1, the land of the former Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan was divided into state-, municipality-, and privately owned land in post-Soviet Azerbaijan.

Private ownership encompassed (1) privatization of the land areas of houses, yards, and household plots; and (2) distributed shares from the former collective and state farm—kolkhoz and sovkhoz—lands. These two forms of privately owned land are referred to as (1) the household plot (*heyetyani torpaq*) and (2) the land share (*torpaq payi* or *pay torpagi*).

The first type of private land, the household plot, in the rural areas includes one's house and adjacent land (front and backyard). A household plot is at one's door, literally. Since Soviet times, household plots have been used to grow garden vegetables and/or fruit trees and to keep a few chickens and/or dairy animals. Under Soviet law, the household plot was legally owned by the state, and hence the excesses of household production were taxed. The land reforms privatized these household plots, passing their ownership from the state to the users without any payment.

The second type of private land, the land share, is a share of former kolkhozs' and sovkhozs' cultivation area. The land share of an individual is not in the village; it is often several miles away. Land shares can only be used for agricultural purposes as decreed by the law. Land shares were also distributed free of charge under Azerbaijan's Law on Land Reforms, and were designed as an equalizing element of the land reforms. The privatization of household plots had carried over the owners' Soviet-era social status: households with larger plots got to keep them, and households with smaller plots did not get any more at the expense of their neighbors. In contrast, land shares were equalized: land share sizes were the same for everyone in a given kolkhoz/sovkhoz area and were determined by dividing the kolkhoz's or sovkhoz's land area by the number of people working there at the time of the collapse.

New Property Relations: Individual Farming?

According to Azerbaijan's official narrative, continuously upheld in the state TV news, and to some international experts (Lerman and Sedik 2010), the key significance of the country's land reforms has been the individualization of agriculture—a mass transition to individual farming in rural Azerbaijan. According to this view, livelihoods in Azerbaijan's countryside are made by small farmers working on their individual plots producing for the market. The believers in this narrative may view as counterintuitive the narratives presented in the previous chapter: of people giving up to expect livelihoods from individual farming, of going to work as seasonal wage-laborers on their own land leased out to middle-size to large-scale farm enterprises, of actual individual farming of wheat providing a fraction of livelihood expenses after government subsidies. Yet these qualitative research findings are supported by the data of the same experts (Lerman and Sedik 2010), while their claims of success for individual farming in post-land-reform Azerbaijan stem from the failure to differentiate between household plots and land shares.

According to Lerman and Sedik (2010:93), of the 4.3 million hectares of agricultural land in Azerbaijan, 25% is used by private corporate farms (similar to the grape plantation described in chapter 3), about 40% are municipal lands (mostly pastures), and 35% are “individual farms.” These “individual farms” comprise “household plots and peasant farms” (Lerman and Sedik 2010:94).

What are peasant farms? According to Lerman and Sedik (2010):

Peasant farms, the second component of the individual farm sector, are substantially larger than household plots (151 hectares on average, with 11 hectares of owned land) and accordingly they make much greater use of leased land. Virtually all peasant farms lease in land (95% of peasant farms compared with only 6% of households). Leased land accounts for 93% of the average peasant farm in the survey. (P. 108)

An example of a land-leasing peasant farm is the garden vegetable enterprise organized by a former collective farm manager in the Lenkeran village described in chapter 3. These peasant farms, too large to be individually farmed, significantly rely on seasonal wage-labor, sometimes of the leasing individuals themselves.

Further, Lerman and Sedik (2010) explain that the bigger peasant farms rely more on agricultural income—on income made from the land—in contrast to small peasant farms, which rely primarily on non-agricultural income, such as wages, social transfers, and other non-farm income (P. 109). An example of such a small peasant farm is the individually cultivated wheat farm in Shamakhy described in chapter 3. While in fact engaged in small farming, these “farmers” earn the bulk of their incomes from other activities, including the sale of their services on the market.

Finally, Lerman and Sedik (2010) say:

In households that lease land, total land used exceeds land owned by a large factor (16 hectares compared with 3 hectares owned). On the other hand, households that do not resort to leasing use on average less land than they own (1.8 hectares compared to 2.2 hectares). (P. 108)

The fact that those who do not organize agricultural enterprises are likely to use less land than they own supports the observations in the previous chapter about the devaluation and cheap leasing-out of land shares by rural residents.

With this said about the nature of peasant farms, it is not surprising that Lerman and Sedik’s (2009) argument about the mass transition to small farming rests on the categorizing of household plots as small farms. But a household plot (*heyetyani sahe* in Azeri) is a backyard, literally. In fact, the State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan uses the English word “backyard” for “*heyetyani sahe*” in the official translation of its survey tables (www.state.gov.az). There are serious problems with assuming that Azerbaijan’s rural population has switched to small farming because

they engage in household production in their backyards. First, if growing vegetables or keeping a few chickens in the backyard is what makes Azerbaijan's rural population individual farmers, then Azerbaijan's rural population were individual/small farmers even while they were collective farm laborers under the Soviet government. They were just heavily taxed because the backyards that they "individually farmed" were legally state property.²⁵

Second, if, after nearly 3 million hectares of farmland have been decollectivized and passed to individual ownership, household plots are where individual farming takes place, then the land reforms have failed to bring about small-scale farming on formerly collective and state farmland.

Household plots, or backyard farming, are indeed central to rural livelihoods. Table 4.1 shows that a majority of rural residents (97% in some regions) indicate their backyards as their main type of land. But this happens after millions of hectares of kolkhoz and sovkhoz land have been individualized, giving each family a land share 10 to 30 times larger than an average backyard! Chapter 3 demonstrated precisely how land shares, of 1 hectare on average and distributed free of charge, came to mean less than much smaller backyards to the majority of rural people.

The true significance of the land reforms in Azerbaijan's transformation into a global oil supplier was missed in the attempts to construct Azerbaijan's countryside as a land of small farmers. The real significance of the land reforms lay in how they weakened local communities by individualizing.

²⁵ In fact, if growing vegetables in one's backyard makes one a small farmer, then a majority of the residents of North York, in the heart of Toronto, where I live while writing this, should be classified as small farmers, too, despite their full-time day jobs in various professions.

Table 4.1. Azerbaijan's Households and Land Use, 2009

Item	Administrative region								
	Nakhchivan	Ganja-Gazakh	Sheki-Zagatala	Lenkeran	Guba-Khachmaz	Aran	Yukhary-Garabagh	Daghlyg-Shirvan	Kalbajar-Lachyn
Households with plot of land (%)	90.2	84.2	96.2	93.7	98.7	80.6	84.5	99	16.5
Average size of main plot of land (1ha =100)	18.3	54.9	78.4	32.4	90.3	127.3	61.8	12.5	8.6
Type of main plot of land									
Peasant	1.9	47.7	55.8	33.3	44.6	38.5	41.8	1.5	16.9
Farming	0.1	1.0	0.3	0.7	0.4	2.3	2.0	1.2	-
Backyard	97.6	51.3	43.9	65.9	55.0	57.8	37.5	97.3	53.5
Garden in summer house	-	-	-	0.2	-	1.3	0.3	-	29.5
Other	0.3	-	-	-	-	0.2	18.5	-	-
Ownership of land plot									
Own	99.7	97.5	97.8	99.4	99.1	96.4	38.6	98.1	56.7
Rent	-	2.3	1.6	0.2	0.2	0.6	-	0.7	-
Use temporarily	-	0.1	0.6	0.4	0.7	1.3	25.8	1.2	41.0
Other	0.3	0.1	-	-	-	1.7	35.6	-	2.4
What is primary use									
Used just for rest, nothing grows	-	0.2	0.9	0.2	-	2.7	0.2	0.9	-
For consumption but not marketing purposes	86.1	32.7	9.2	39.8	32.7	33.0	39.4	75.8	51.2
For consumption & marketing purposes	13.9	64.8	87.3	59.6	65.4	63.5	43.5	22.4	8.4
Only for marketing purposes	-	-	0.4	-	-	0.1	3.6	-	-
Just started exploitation	-	0.4	-	-	-	-	-	-	40.4
Other	-	1.8	2.2	0.4	1.9	0.7	13.3	0.9	-

Note. Source: Azerbaijan State Statistical Committee Household Survey, Table 145.

Land Reforms, Individualization, and the Disintegration of Village Communities

As mentioned, land shares were distributed to people free of charge. The size of the land shares per person in a given locale was equal. However, not all of a collective/state farm's land was of the same quality. For example, some parts were closer to water sources, or were just more moist. In other parts, the land could be more rocky, dry, or salty. These differences mattered less when all the land was tended collectively, and the common harvest divided. However, with the division of the massive fields of formerly collective land into 0.6 to 1.8 hectare²⁶ land shares, the question of who got which part rose to salience. As a local executive officer aptly put it during an interview, "You can't please everybody in such a dilemma." However, how some got pleased and others displeased with the division is worth attention.

Post-Soviet Azerbaijan's state bureaucracy is still a system of "institutionalized corruption" (Rasizade 2002). Imanov (2003) has called the marriage of the political (the state bureaucracy) with the economic (wealth accumulation) the key problem of Azerbaijan's social formation. The de facto sale of most government offices and the centralized demand for a continuous flow of "tributes" (Rasizade 2002) characterize Azerbaijan's public sector, where there are strong incentives to use one's post for private gain. In this context, if a villager with the ability to pay approached a state official with a request for a better section of the formerly collective land, there were all the incentives to "accommodate." Hence the scramble began.

The people entitled to a land share were not asked to pay money to receive the land that was their due. But the members of the Agrarian Reforms Commissions and the local executives had incentives to maximize their individual gains through

²⁶ The size of a land plot per person was based on rural population per given collective farm area. For example, in densely populated Lenkeran, a land share was around 0.6 hectares, and in Shamakhy it was about 1 hectare. One hectare is equal to 2.471 acres.

manipulation of their authority in land categorization and distribution. With the creation of the municipalities in post-Soviet Azerbaijan in 1999, the municipality heads joined the race for their share in this zero-sum game. The interests of the bureaucrats from the State Committee for Land and Mapping, of the local executives, and of municipality heads did not always coincide. In fact, conflicts over proportions of different “stakeholders” “tribute shares” were endemic. For example, a local municipality head or an executive officer might have been paid to manipulate the lists of the people entitled to land shares in a given area. The list could include people who had left the area years or decades before and who thus were not formally entitled to land. The SCLM officer responsible for the area might not be told this fact to avoid paying him an appropriate sum as well. In one instance, an SCLM officer on duty in a village was approached by some villagers and told that the list of the people entitled to their collective farm land included persons who had died years ago. In another case, an SCLM officer might be paid to demarcate the land in a particular way. In one such instance, the villagers angry with the demarcation of land shares on their former collective farm went to the local executive head to complain about the SCLM officer responsible for the demarcation. In yet another case, when a majority of the residents in a village sensed grave injustice in the process, they resisted the demarcation of the shares, attacked the visiting land committee representative, and went to the SCLM headquarters in Baku to picket and complain.

As a result of this land reform implementation dynamic, people without connections in the Agrarian Reforms Commissions, without money to pay to the ARC or local executives as bribes, and without the propensity to fight and make trips to the national ARC in the capital city were the ones who got the least desirable pieces of land.

As the land of the collectives was divided into individual pieces, land was redefined from common property (with correspondingly *common* issues of irrigation, infrastructure, and productivity) into a zero-sum pie, for a slice of which former collective members were now competing. When the better parts of the collective farm land were distributed according to connections and the ability to pay, the discontent with the process was not just with the government officials responsible for the distribution but was even more so with the fellow villagers who utilized the process to their individual advantage. The discontent with the reforms, therefore, was set as the discontent of *individual* recipients, not as an indicator of any collective injustice. The individuals disadvantaged by the reforms were systematically in the same social group: those without connections and money to navigate the reforms. Women household heads without connected male relatives²⁷ were especially disadvantaged. A female household head's ability to travel to Baku was more limited by her sole responsibility for the household, her lack of resources, and by social disapproval of a woman traveling and frequenting predominantly male government agencies alone.

The interplay of differing and overlapping authorities of separate government bodies (the SCLM, the local executives) fragmented the grievances against the system. In fact, there was no "system" experienced as such and causing discontent with the reforms. There were those interested in better pieces of land, those wanting to get more land (by registering long-relocated or deceased relatives as family members entitled to shares), and individual bureaucrats who had been "connected with" and "contacted." The state was not experienced as a uniform entity with its representatives pitched against each other. For example, an SCLM officer was told by the local executive office to not personally appear in one village where, he was told, the

²⁷ Who had a desire to help, and did not seek, for example, to further increase his land share at the expense of the woman's rights.

villagers vowed to beat him up. It turned out that a local executive officer, who arranged a deal regarding that village's land area, had placed the blame and responsibility on the SCLM officer.²⁸

In many instances, the desire and ability of the contenders to travel to the capital could set things straight. The SCLM's duty was to make sure that the reforms were completed, and the local executive governments were instructed by President Aliyev to assist with this process. "No local government head would like to stand out as the person stunting the reforms" (interview, SCLM officer, 2009). Moreover, a list of those entitled to land, including officially deceased people, would be a pretty grave violation if publicized. In some instances, an SCLM officer dispatched to an area who had tried to make "deals" with some local villagers was reported by the local executive government to the SCLM headquarters in Baku and removed from duty. In other instances, an SCLM officer could "get along" with the local executive government, and the two would act as a team. So who got pleased and displeased with the land division was shaped by this interplay of forces. But almost uniformly, the land reforms left behind villages transformed from collectively farm communities to communities of individuals pitched against each other.

Lost leaders

Those who could take advantage of the reforms were not just better connected but also often the more active, communicative, and outspoken (not shy) members of the community—those with some leadership qualities. The way they used their skills to harness the land reforms prevented the trust of the lay villagers in these "leaders"

²⁸ Lack of clarity with regard to the relative autonomy and overlapping responsibility of government officials was observed by Joma Nazpary (2002) in post-Soviet Kazakhstan as well; Nazpary argued that subjects' experience of the state as "chaos" was actually a tool of governance.

desire to serve everybody. The trust between those who could organize the communities and the communities themselves disintegrated with the potential organizers' exploitation of the land division to their own benefit, even if the benefit was small, such as the plot's proximity to water.

The discontent of individual villagers with each other over the manipulation of land reforms disintegrated the community and its ability to stand together on common issues. For example, if a former collective-farm manager who had been able to harness the land reforms to his benefit suggested petitioning the government for irrigation assistance, many villagers viewed this as using the community to push a personal goal. They therefore did not want to devote much effort to such communal projects.

The divide that paralyzed the rural communities of Azerbaijan can accurately be named the divide between the economic ideology of self and the ideology of community or consideration for others. Those who had tried hard to utilize the land reforms to their own benefit viewed (and often voiced) their action as legitimate. The fact that this was at the expense of others was irrelevant to them, because the others could try to do what they did as well. "*Bacarana bash qurban*"—a saying very hard to translate literally, but meaning "The one able to get it deserves more"²⁹—summed up this worldview. According to this mindset, it was the duty of each individual to strive for and protect his or her own economic self-interest; looking out for others was not. Others were seen as responsible for doing what they saw as necessary for their own well-being. Others could be expected to sacrifice your well-being to theirs. It was your job to protect yourself to avoid being victimized. "*Her kes ozunedir bu zemanede*"—

²⁹ This folk-saying in the Azeri language is actually older than the Soviet government in the country. In the Soviet Azerbaijan literature for youth, this saying and the mindset it represented were explicitly criticized.

“Everybody is to himself/herself³⁰ in this age”—was another popular saying reflecting this worldview. Wealth and well-being, in this framework, were seen as results of one’s own efforts. Looking out for others—which could be a road to communal respect and even Party advancement in the Soviet period—would leave you “with nothing” in the new “age” (*zemanə*). The land reforms were a lucid manifestation of the changing notion of self *in* community.

The new mindset was repeatedly brought up during my interviews without my prompting. This was a line of measurement, which some validated and sided with and others disassociated themselves from. But even those who disassociated themselves and disproved acknowledged this mindset as a road to wealth in the current period. In the words of a woman in Lenkeran:

To get ahead in this period you have to have a thick face [*uzdu olmaq*—i.e., have no shame—S.R.]. You have to think only about yourself. My husband is not that type of a person. Therefore, we are experiencing a lot of financial difficulties. (Interview, Lenkeran, 2009)

It is important to remember, however, that a mindset is not an omnipotent force taking over spaces. It is an idea, or a set of ideas, materialized when accepted and acted upon. The “new” mindset of “serve-your-self-interest” acquired power in the countryside because it was quite widely practiced. Moreover, as it was seen “working” (bringing results), it acquired more adherents, further breaking down the fabric of communal obligations and consideration. The personal greed of those who harnessed the land reforms had lethally damaged the coherence of Azerbaijan’s rural communities and these communities’ potential to counter the changes brought upon them by the strengthening oligarchs of the new petroleum-export economy plunged into the global transaction circuits.

³⁰ The third-person pronoun has no gender in the Azeri language.

Community and Enclosures

Enclosures of rural Azerbaijan's commons started after the completion of the land reforms. They were both a result and independent manifestation of the communal divisions started with the land reforms, a playground of the ideology of self versus the ideology of community/consideration.

The enclosures connected individual contemplations about prioritizing self-interest, communal divisions from the experience of land reforms, and new oligarchs' adoption of a global trend with the progressive idea of turning the scenic natural beauty into cash-bringing ventures, namely private resorts. The non-agricultural land suitable for this purpose in rural Azerbaijan—forests and mountain meadows—was the property of either the state or municipalities. By law, either of these owners could lease the land out with a 99-year contract for legal use by a private party for officially nominal, very low prices (requiring unofficial befriending with much larger sums). The problem was that these gifts of nature—scenic mountain slopes, forests, and meadows—in need of “being put to productive use” were already in use and vitally important to local communities as additional sources of food (wild berries and nuts), and, crucially, as pastures.

As the hopes of self-sufficiency from land shares failed, the ability to keep a dairy animal in one's own backyard without restrictions or taxes on household production offered a degree of self-reliance. Ownership of a dairy animal has been very important to rural livelihoods in the post-Soviet period. In Lenkeran, visiting outmigrants from this region joked that families do not sit down to dinner until the cow is back from the pasture and has been milked. Locals did not consider this funny, but a plain fact of life. In Shamakhy, sheep and goats are kept alongside cows. An important concern for the women I interviewed in both Lenkeran and Shamakhy was

the procurement of feed for these animals. The ability to procure feed for household animals depended on the availability of municipality land in a given village.

The size and quality of pasture land in a municipality defined the affordability of keeping a dairy animal for that municipality's households. In densely populated Lenkeran, where municipal pastures were scarce, some interviewees reported taking their cow to their land share that they were not cultivating but using as pasture for the cow. In mountainous Shamakhy, the lands traditionally used as pastures were located in very scenic areas. These areas were targeted by some Baku oligarchs as resort sites. Therein arose conflicts between municipality heads' desire to make money (and contacts with Baku officials) and villagers' pasture needs. The lands were being leased for the official price of 15 dollars per year per hectare with 99-year contracts. I personally observed mushrooming white fences with "Private Property" signs closing off formerly collective pastures and forests, the same land that had been used for wild berry and nut gathering, and dairy grazing, giving food to both villagers and their animals since the Soviet period. Figures 4.1 and 4.2 provide a visual explanation.

The enclosures of the commons were especially harsh on mountain villages that were far from roads and that had very limited access to other income sources. The forests and meadows of these secluded areas were both more desirable as resort sites to the Baku investors and doubly important to the livelihoods of local villagers.

Both the municipality officials and the investors' middlemen presented the enclosures as non-negotiable, inevitable. A woman interviewee said:

When the men went to discuss the matter with the municipality head, he said that he is as helpless as we are. It is big people from Baku [meaning top state officials—S.R.] who want these lands, the top.

Key support to the enclosures, however ironically, came from within the communities themselves.



Figure 4.1. These “undeveloped” mountain slopes are used as pastures for the cattle of local villagers. Photo courtesy of www.azerbaijan24.com.



Figure 4.2. This mountain slope has been “developed”: Completed “Ulu dag” (“Glorious/ancient mountain”) hotel, Ilisu region, Azerbaijan.

In the mountainous Shamakhy village, the municipality head in favour of the resort development and the investor's middlemen presented the process of enclosures as serving the interests of the villagers themselves. Future resorts and villas would provide cash-generating jobs for the village's young. This issue divided the village, softening the opposition of families with young adults. This particular village was now populated mostly by elder families who had sent their adult children to jobs in Baku. The families of the elderly, whose adult children had migrated out of the village, would not benefit from the service jobs at the new villas. They needed more the subsistence from dairy animals and from the forest (nuts, berries, wild fruits). The animals and the forest's gifts were crucial for their independent sustenance and allowed them to occasionally support their migrant offspring with fresh food gifts. An elderly woman—the same one who had turned down the cash offers for private carpet-weaving because she was busy with subsistence farming on her land plot—used an expression that communicated the meaning of this process to their livelihoods: “They will slowly starve us to death.”

This fact, however, did not affect the pro-resort—that is, pro-job—stance of the younger adults and their families in the village. This group's choice to support the “development” of common pastures into private resorts, knowing well that this encroached on their neighbors' rights to the commons and meant gradual starvation for them, signified simultaneously: (1) the prioritizing of “self”-interest at the expense of others who were expected to look after themselves (akin to some individuals' utilizing of the land-reforms bureaucracy to get better plots of land), and (2) the adoption of capitalocentrism (the valuation of cash-bringing activities over non-cash-bringing ones). Interestingly, and this is very important, individual choices about economic activity—for example, preferring to work as a cash-wage guard in a would-

be resort erected on common pastures—were inseparable from and had crucial repercussions for social relations, for a community’s well-being.

Capitalocentrism, Economic Self-Interest/Gain Motive, and an Implicit Conditioner of Human Action

The judgement dubbed “capitalocentrism” by J. K. Gibson-Graham—the valuation of cash-bringing activities over non-cash-bringing ones—is closely related to “self-interest” or the “gain motive”—the idea that people seek to further their economic interests—a concept introduced by Adam Smith, and forming the basis of classical and neoclassical economic theory. Both rest on the implicit belief that money is interchangeable with “any object of desire.” This belief, essential to Smith’s theory as explained by historian William Reddy in *Money and Liberty in Modern Europe* (1987), is also the overlooked basis of capitalocentric valuation in all aspects of human life. Reddy (1987) writes:

Smith’s synthesis was the full-blown liberal illusion. Its ingredients were (1) the unlimited and easy substitutability of money for any other object of desire, and therefore (2) the universality of the underlying desire for “advantage” or gain; (3) the political neutrality of money exchanges, and therefore (4) the compatibility of free trade with personal liberty. Each of these ideas so neatly entailed the others, all so plausibly turned on the apparent truth of the first principle, that the theory seemed to sum up what the essence of money is. (P. 87)

Reddy noted that as beliefs, rather than empirical facts, the elements of the liberal illusion were hard to disprove.³¹ On the historical example of different contexts in

³¹ He devoted *Money and Liberty in Modern Europe* to demonstrating the fallacy of these beliefs, specifically, the third—the political neutrality of monetary exchanges. Reddy pointed out that money meant fundamentally different things to the poor, for whom it signified the satisfaction of immediate bodily needs, and to the rich, who were free from these immediate pressures. The monetary exchanges between the two therefore were far from being politically neutral, but by their nature carried disciplining power over the poor.

early modern Europe, Reddy demonstrated how these beliefs—including the belief that people are guided by economic self-interest, “the universality of the underlying desire for ‘advantage’ or gain”—were tied to the use of money as the medium of exchange.

Karl Polanyi also demonstrated the historicity of the phenomenon of individuals seeking “advantage” or “gain,” but with another method. Based on the historical comparison of the guiding principles of human behaviour in different societal formations, in his collection of essays *Primitive, Archaic, and Modern Economies* (1968), he pointed out that the “universal” human desire for gain was specific only to “modern” or, more specifically, market economies. Motives distinctly different from the maximization of self-gain—like reciprocity, give-and-take—ruled the behaviour of the members of pre-modern societies, Polanyi pointed out. Selfish gain-maximization, therefore, was not a universal characteristic of the human race, but a historically specific product of a historically specific system called a market society. Polanyi’s insight allowed us to see, as Hannes Lacher (1999) explained,

that the pursuit of economic gain is itself the product of the way in which people gain access to their livelihood. Wherever profit-maximizing is a dominant form of social behaviour, we have to look at the political institutions which make the members of society market dependent, and which sustain the differentiated realm of the economy which seems to be operating according to an autonomous logic. Only where individuals are ultimately dependent on the market for their livelihood can the market become a social force which compels them to subordinate social values to the pursuit of profit. (P. 345)

This was because,

With the commodification of land, labor, and money, the livelihood of people became dependent on market incomes forcing them to behave according to the rationality of the market. (Lacher 1999:345)

Neither Polanyi nor Reddy would have to work hard to convince female villagers in rural Azerbaijan—my interviewees—that individual self-maximization thinking was only special to a market society. These women had observed themselves change from one set of popular thinking and acting to another. The manifest greed of the manipulators of land reforms for better plots, and the tacit support of enclosures in hopes of cash employment, both justifying self-interest as a legitimate motive for action, were a break from the Soviet popular discourse in which an individual was said to gain value through service to his or her community (defined as the Soviet state). In the Soviet period this service to the community (i.e., the state) was the main criteria for measuring the value of acts, not their contribution to one's own economic advancement. In fact, the latter form—thinking and acting to increase one's financial position—were officially and communally criticized as denigrating, lowering an individual far below his or her potential (of service to the state/Soviet community).

Indeed, the story of the post-Soviet transition and the rise of self-interest in rural Azerbaijan both supports Reddy's and Polanyi's attempts to demonstrate gain-seeking thought and behaviour as historical, a product of social structures, and challenges them to give full credit to the importance of historical individual choices.

The Soviet economy, which my interviewees remembered for kinder and more considerate relations among people, was “modern” (in the sense that it was industrialized), but it was not a market system. Although it traded with the global market economy, its internal organization would be accurately described as based on state/central planning, rather than market regulation. Antonio Sánchez-Andrés and José March-Poquet (2002) evaluated the USSR's economy using Polanyi's own concept of “the commodification of land, labor, and money.” Polanyi had argued in *The Great Transformation* (1944/2001) that the commodification of land, labor, and money—their availability on the market for sale and treatment as commodities—was a

key precondition of a market economy/society.³² Sánchez-Andrés and March-Poquet (2002) explained how, despite the appearance of modern production with wage labor and cash circulation, the USSR's economy operated with decommodified land, labor, and money:

1. Land had been massively collectivized in the 1930s, it was a state property:

The only possibilities for non-state owned property appeared in the form of individually used parcels that the rural population, and less extensively the urban population, were permitted to manage. The production so obtained was intended for self-consumption but, in certain cases, was sold, although not in a regular manner. That is, the exchange relations associated with land during the Soviet period, when they existed, were very marginal. (Sánchez-Andrés and March-Poquet 2002:710)

2. Labor was involved in the productive activity of the society, and was paid monetary incomes—wages. However, a majority of worker compensation was “in kind and not directly linked to their specific productive activity,” such as allocation of housing, social and community services, and so on.

3. Finally, money did not serve the functions of form of payment, standard of value, store of wealth, and means of exchange.³³ In the USSR, and other centrally planned economies,

“the currency has played the part of ratification of previously established administrative decisions. In the first place, production objectives and supply plans were to the firms, and their production was assigned. In the second place,

³² This, according to Polanyi (1944/2001), was the chief cause of the instability of a market society, because land, labor, and money could not be treated as commodities

for any length of time without annihilating the human and natural substance of society; it would have physically destroyed man and transformed his surroundings into a wilderness. Inevitably, society took measures to protect itself, but whatever measures it took impaired the self-regulation of the market, disorganized industrial life, and thus endangered society in yet another way. It was this dilemma which forced the development of the market system into a definite groove. (P. 3)

³³ Categorized by Polanyi (1977:102–9).

in accordance with the production plan, they were allocated some funds whose destination, regarding the supplier and the acquired input, appeared preset, with no changes being possible in this respect. Therefore, the currency served neither as a widespread form of payment nor of exchange. An extreme case of this inconvertibility appeared regarding inter-firm transactions that were carried out with bank transfers (not convertible into cash), while the transactions between firms and workers were carried out using cash. On the other hand, when completing the plan, the benefits (or losses) of the firms were absorbed by the state administration, with money not serving as a mechanism of accumulation . . . of wealth for the firms. It should also be pointed out that in terms of the administrative level of planning, the type of units considered was different, so that the currency did not carry out the function of unified countable unit” (Sánchez-Andrés and March-Poquet 2002:711–12).

The commodity (all-purpose) money that Polanyi discerned as a key characteristic of the market system had to simultaneously carry these functions (Polanyi 1957:264).

So, the Soviet system was devoid of the systemic characteristics of a market economy, which as Polanyi showed pressured a person to act according to “market logic” (Hannes 1999), and “disposed” of “the physical, psychological, and moral entity ‘man’” (Polanyi 1944/2001:76).

Yet, the exhibition of profit-oriented behaviour—especially in the manipulation of land reforms that so profoundly affected many rural communities in Azerbaijan, causing wounds still vividly remembered over 10 years later during my interviews—took place in the absence of the pressures that market dependency inflicts on one’s livelihood-making behaviour: In the mid-1990s significant portions of Azerbaijan’s economy, as in many other post-Soviet countries, were demonetised, forcing people off market exchange into subsistence production and social networks as a source of sustenance. What happened in Azerbaijan and its rural villagers very well fit Simon Clarke’s (1999) description of this phenomenon in Russia:

The demonetisation of the economy refers to the fact that the bulk of inter-enterprise transactions are not settled in monetary form but through bilateral barter and barter chains, unofficial clearing systems and the use of various kinds of bills of exchange. It is important to be clear, however, that the

demonetisation of the economy is very uneven. The problem faced by households is particularly acute because, while demonetisation is reflected in the systemic and ever-increasing non-payment of wages and social benefits, retail trade is not demonetised, nor is the payment for housing, communal services, health, education and welfare: it is not possible for ordinary people to pay for their everyday needs either by offering barter goods or by issuing bills of exchange . . . Thus, while enterprises and organizations are able to live within a demonetised market economy, the only option facing workers who do not have money is withdrawal from the market altogether. (P. 115)

This meant, particularly in the countryside, growing one's own food, calling on the help of family and friends, exchanging labor and produce—in Azerbaijan, just like in Russia. One of my interviewees in Shamakhy described exchanging a goat for a loaf of bread in the 1990s, when wheat and bread in the country were in short supply. Another (also in Shamakhy) described how she exchanged her wedding gifts—gold jewellery—for a sack of flour in the mid-1990s. Everyone interviewed described their household plots as the sustainer of their livelihoods, at the time of the interviews as well as in the difficult 1990s—during which the produce of the plots even helped to support urban relatives. At the time of the land reforms, masses of people in rural Azerbaijan depended on subsistence production and barter much more than on cash-paying wage jobs.

It was the same “drawing in” of the economic activity in Russia that made Michael Burawoy point out the inapplicability of Polanyi's description of the market transformation to the social situation in post-Soviet Russia in “Transition without Transformation: Russia's Involutionary Road to Capitalism” (2001). Burawoy argued that Russia has become a market society *without* the commodification of labor—“the transformation of society”—as well as without the transformation of production, and state. The social context here in the 1990s is, as Burawoy (2001) described,

remarkable not for the rise and fall of the market but for the absence of these three alternative significations of the nineteenth century great transformation—the transformation of production, of society and of the state. The economy

undergoes neither a neoliberal revolution nor an institutional evolution but rather an economic involution, a market that sucks resources out of production, sending it into a spiralling contraction. Instead of a vibrant synergy between civil society and the state we find their mutual repulsion in which society turns in on itself—societal involution—and the federal state turns outwards to the global economy. (P. 8)³⁴

How then, in rural Azerbaijan, in this context of non-marketized, subsistence-farming- and social-network-based livelihood-making through the 1990s, did the gain motive and capitalocentrism take root, and proliferate? The picture of market-dependency producing a market (profit-oriented) mentality simply does not fit the historical realities of the rise of self-interest during the land reforms and communal disintegration in rural Azerbaijan.

Human Choice and Its Social Consequences

The gain-seeking behaviour of outstanding rural villagers during the land reforms that served to transmit self-focus and divided village communities took root in the absence of the Soviet discourse of “an-individual-gains-value-through-service-to-the-Soviet-state-and-community” and its social enforcement mechanism (such as public shaming at school, work, and Party meetings). The public discourse context of these decisions, however, was not a complete value vacuum. In place of the Soviet ideology, an individual’s value was suggested through the Azerbaijanian nationalist discourse in the early years of the breakup from the Soviet Union (1991–93). This was in turn replaced by Heydar Aliyev’s invitation to market-based, individual-ability-led livelihood-making, where one’s worth was subtly suggested as the material results of this livelihood-making—since the material results of one’s livelihood-making were

³⁴ Page number quoted from the PDF version of this article, now available online through the Public Sociology Department at UC Berkeley:
<http://publicsociology.berkeley.edu/publications/producing/burawoy.pdf>.

seen as deriving from one's acumen and industriousness, as discussed in chapter 3. Unlike the Soviet discourse, which, in the later decades of the USSR's existence, was firmly held in place by established indoctrination through all levels of education, heavily censored media, and entertainment including arts production, and enforcement through public shaming, the human valuation ideas that the post-Soviet government put forward in the 1990s were mere suggestions, and their support structures were yet underdeveloped.

The fact that a good number of people chose self-maximizing behaviour with social consequences merely in the context of a subtle governmental suggestion and the absence of negative enforcement is not to be interpreted as the innate, universal selfishness of human beings that only needs to break free from social fetters. Sufficient to counter this interpretation is the example of Azerbaijan's forty villages that did not accept land privatization—the state land offered free by the government—but negotiated with the government and reorganized around distinct forms and degrees of cooperative or communal land use, an example that I will come to later in this chapter. So, rather than endorse the claims of the universal selfishness of human nature, the example of the land-reform-period greed contest and its toll on community strength invites us to give due credit to and conceptual space for the freedom of human choice and its significance for history even if at individual and local levels. The rise of self-interested behaviour in Azerbaijan was significant not only because it divided and paralyzed rural communities, but also because it ultimately legitimized and supported the market mechanisms of social organization with each individual heart that subscribed to it. Just as individual and local beliefs in the justice of the market structures, when acted upon, could serve to open up the locales for dependency on market structures (as shown in chapter 3), an individual's belief in the legitimacy and

benefits of the “everybody-to-herself” mentality,³⁵ when practiced, could promote and establish the structures of market dependence and real pressures for profit-oriented thinking.

This Azerbaijan study is not the only indicator of the need for a conceptual space for how individuals’ practiced beliefs about gain-maximization and the benevolence of the market serve to build, support, and deepen the market structures themselves. Many a detailed ethnography of the spread of the global market to a locale points not to an omnipotent, larger-than-life force of globalization, but to individuals adapting to the new institutions while exhibiting adherence to or a positive acceptance of one or more aspects of market thinking—the belief in complete individual responsibility for making it, the positive value assigned to the increased consumption associated with an urbanized market economy.³⁶

³⁵ A modern name for inconsiderate greed.

³⁶ The following are examples from very different contexts.

Carla Freeman’s *High Tech and High Heels in the Global Economy* (2000) is an ethnography of how Afro-Caribbean female workers of the global informatics industry in Barbados strive to distinguish themselves from factory workers through new modes of consumption (specifically of clothing and entertainment) and conscious imagemaking. Freeman argued that these women’s “enactment” of models of “professionalism,” motherhood, and modernised consumption in their jobs, family lives, appearances—the latter sought with trips that combine shopping and pleasure—essentially shape globalization.

Farideh Heyat’s *Azeri Women in Transition: Women in Soviet and Post-Soviet Azerbaijan* (2002) is based on the author’s interviews with different generations of urban professional women in Baku, and analyzes changing conceptions of femininity as these women enter the job market shaped by the presence of transnational oil corporations in Azerbaijan. Heyat describes how “local cultural expectations and Islamic beliefs were accommodated to different modernisation projects” using examples of individual and family decisions and conceptual adaptations.

Rhacel Parreñas in *Illicit Flirtations: Labor, Migration, and Sex Trafficking in Tokyo* (2011) unveils the realities of choice exercised by the category of workers most victimized in globalization literature and used interchangeably with human trafficking: the sex workers. Working in the bars of Tokyo side-by-side with Filipina hostesses serving drinks and singing karaoke, Parreñas gathered rich data to demonstrate how these women come to occupy their places by choice, in their minds mixing “business, body, and heart in complex ways,” each justifying their own mix in their own way. Common to these very different works are descriptions of acceptance/internalization of one or more aspects of market society’s worldview by choice on the individual level—what some social scientists would call “a micro-level.” The phenomenon that really needs to be explained is the origins and massive proliferation of such choices, that not only “enact” globalization, as Carla Freeman argued, but profoundly legitimize it.

None of these is to say that the subjects in question are not vulnerable in many ways. These works are simply signals, implicit invitations to conceptually free the human facility of choice in studies of markets—local and global. It is crucial for critical social theory to give due consideration to this facility of choice. This facility on the part of the world population has been regarded as free and in need of constantly being won over by such diverse targets of critical social theory as the engines of market expansion, corporations and their leaders,³⁷ and the Soviet state. Attesting to this is the former's continuous use of media messages, advertisements, and ethical image-making strategies, all regularly evaluated and renewed, and the latter's similarly continuous propagating of its worldview through media and education, following a citizen from cradle to grave, despite its uncontested control of national politics.

Ironically, it is often the critics—of both capitalism and the state socialist model of the USSR—devoted to human emancipation who fail to give adequate consideration to the facility of choice on the part of the exploited, which the exploiters always regard as alive and in need of addressing, as noted above. For example, in his account of the English enclosures, which although preceding Azerbaijan's case by several centuries nevertheless had surprising similarities, David McNally in *Another World Is Possible: Globalization and Anti-Capitalism* (2006) mentions how peasants rioted against the fencing-off the common lands, simply by tearing down the fences, and

Yet, through extortion, intrigue, violence, and manipulation, more and more English land was enclosed. (P. 92)

³⁷ See Sklair (2001).

Extortion and violence are more straightforward, but what types of “intrigues” and “manipulation” ensured that the peasants saw their lands enclosed? McNally (2006) notes:

As is so often the case, the privatizers and enclosers tried to present their battle not as the greedy and violent property grab it was, but as a great moral crusade that would lift the poor out of poverty and idleness. (P. 92)

We are given the example of this presentation from the language of a land surveyor of the time, but there the case ends. How—through which decisions, beliefs, acts, and their social repercussions—did the peasants tearing down the fences accept the role of “the poor” to be lifted “out of poverty and idleness”? This process is not addressed, or mentioned as an aspect to be addressed, by McNally.

Human Choice and Its Social Context: The Suggested Purpose of Human Life

Useful to understanding the range of human choice in a social context and to making sense of the effects of multifaceted culture, ideology, and discourse on locales and individuals is the basic question “What is the purpose of life assumed/proposed/suggested by this social context?” This question is paramount, because human choices are not haphazard, but are given meaning by various historical forms of the answer to the question of what gives value to human actions and life. Every social formation proposes and includes, implicitly as in a market society or explicitly as in the USSR, a vision of the purpose of human life with a concomitant model/vision of an individual–community relationship. This meaning/purpose/aim of a human’s life suggested and disciplined by social structures, if accepted by human beings, is an insightful prism into historical choices. A given conception of the purpose of human life cannot and does not answer all the specific moral and practical questions that individuals and communities have to face. But this conception

powerfully defines the boundaries of the space within which (or the direction in which) the answers are sought.

In the Soviet Union, the officially propagated purpose of human life was service to state socialism—presented as the road to communism, allegedly the perfect form of human society. Accepted by Soviet persons, this aim was a powerful engine of the Soviet state’s extraction of surplus from workers. The socially acceptable, suggested, and praised purpose of a Soviet citizen’s life was to serve the state’s efforts of communism with his or her specific skills, talents, and hard work. This was the first and foremost aim instilled in the education system and media that gave meaning to a Soviet human’s life. Understanding this would make it easy to see how so many people having so little in the way of material possessions went on to labor in difficult conditions, and often with cheer and songs, for a state that appropriated their labor for decades.³⁸

The idea of one’s labor and industriousness serving not just one’s material well-being, but simultaneously, and ultimately, the well-being and freedom of the entire society (through communism building) was noble, but also carried a valuation of work very different from the capitalocentric valuation. A woman’s unpaid work in housekeeping and childrearing, for example, was declared an act of service to the state (Rueschemeyer 1981; Lapidus 1978; Buckley 1989; Ashwin 2002; Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk 2000; Gal and Kligman 2000; Heyat 2002).

Popular attitudes towards wealth and “making it” were shaped by this belief in the purpose of human life. If Ivan had worked hard as a carpenter, and did not have a car, a big house, a truck full of savings—he did not have to feel like a failure for this,

³⁸ This Soviet behaviour puzzled Western social scientists, who talked about a state of mind specific to a Soviet citizen, culminating in books such as the Princeton professor Robert Tucker’s *The Soviet Political Mind: Stalinism and Post-Stalin Change* (1972) analyzing “the thought patterns and ideological factors that together constituted the Soviet political mind” (back cover).

as the purpose of life, to him and to the society, was not those material goods per se, but contributing to the socialist development—the building of communism, allegedly with more material goods and freedom for everyone. By this criteria, Ivan could still command high respect and dignity in his own eyes and in the eyes of the community, despite not having put together savings for a rainy day, a car, and a house.

Secret peddlers, propagators of material goals, seekers of luxury were officially disdained as the infesters of mind and culture. Strict censorship of literary works, theatre plays, music—“food for thought”—at all levels of production served to maintain the consistency of the message: that the purpose of human life is the service to building communism and enjoying whatever simple pleasures are available along the way.

This proclaimed goal of meaningful human life as the service to the building of communism under the stewardship of the socialist state was very vulnerable to the displays of luxurious consumption of state officials and enterprise managers. Such displays would invite official interrogation about the sources prior to the Gorbachev era and were either avoided or kept hidden in the circles of close family and friends.

From this prism, Gorbachev’s reforms were more fundamental than they are usually credited for being in altering the state ideology, and ultimately bringing about the fall of the USSR. The Gorbachev era allowed in immediate material comforts / expanded consumption as the goal of the Soviet state, and thus, implicitly, of human life.³⁹ Gorbachev’s was a socialist period with very capitalist aims. With the insertion of immediate expanded consumption as a goal of human activity into the social and

³⁹ Interestingly, the young of this social context—the Soviet generation born in the 1950s and 1960s—had access to more material comforts than the cohorts of the 1940s, 1930s, and 1920, but were more disconcerted about a lack of material comforts.

individual imagination, the debate became about means. And history spoke for the superiority of capitalism / the market mechanism for expanded consumption.

The purpose of human life as a struggle for material improvement was temporarily tamed in the context of nationalist narratives in the early 1990s. In the turbulent period 1991–94 in Azerbaijan torn by the ethnic, Azeri-Armenian conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region, service to the dignity of the nation, to the ethnic community, was the debated, proposed purpose of human life. With Aliyev’s advent, the restoration of political stability and market reforms, nationalism retreated, leaving the arena to “getting ahead” or “staying afloat.”

Yet, after the noble immaterial goal-striving and self-identifying as a builder, creator, innovator for the ultimate benefit of future generations and humankind, the task of heading towards more material consumption in Azerbaijan, as in the rest of the post-socialist space, could not fill the emptiness for many. This effect was massive, giving rise to an entirely new concept, “Soviet nostalgia,” and scholarly discussion around it among Western social scientists (Munro 2006; White 2010; Karbalevich 2002; Nikolayenko 2008; Velikonja 2009). The “Soviet nostalgia” that puzzled outside observers was so widespread that it started to be discussed in business research circles for its applicability in advertising strategies (Holak, Matveev, and Havlena 2007). What is very interesting is that the nostalgia was not for the material security of the socialist period, but for “immaterial” things such as the lost vision of the noble purpose of life in serving others and the future, of a relationship to one’s community and society that produced hope. As Velikonja (2009) noted:

In popular opinion, nostalgia for socialism is something fabricated, invented, and then imposed by different groups of people to achieve some goals: to open a new commercial niche, to attain political credit, to win popular support, to get artistic inspiration, and so on. Thus, many academic studies have examined only this instrumental side of the phenomenon, limiting it to the “industry of nostalgia” only. But research shows that nostalgia is in fact a retrospective

utopia, a wish and a hope for a safe world, a fair society, true friendships, mutual solidarity, and well-being in general, in short, for a perfect world. As such, it is less a subjective, arbitrary, ideological effort to recall the past as it is, an undetermined, undefined, amorphous wish to transcend the present. So nostalgia for socialism in fact does not relate exclusively and precisely to past times, regimes, values, relations, and so on as such, but it embodies a utopian hope that there must be a society that is better than the current one. (P. 535)

Another scholar, the anthropologist Alexei Yurchak (2006), wrote:

An undeniable constitutive part of today's phenomenon of "post-Soviet nostalgia," which is a complex post-Soviet construct, is the longing for the very real humane values, ethics, friendships, and creative possibilities that the reality of socialism afforded—often in spite of the state's proclaimed goals—and that were as irreducibly part of the everyday life of socialism as were the feelings of dullness and alienation. A Russian philosopher wrote in 1995 that, from the vantage point of the first post-Soviet years, he had come to recognize that the grayness and fear of Soviet reality had been indivisibly linked with a very real optimism and warmth, with accompanying forms of "human happiness," "comforts and well-being," and "cordiality, successes and order" in a "well-furnished common space of living." A Russian photographer, echoing the same realization, made a "banal confession" that *for him personally the "crash of Communism" was also, in retrospect, the crash of something very personal, innocent, and full of hope, of the "passionate sincerity and genuineness" that marked childhood and youth.* A critical examination of such retrospections is essential to an understanding of Soviet socialism. Without understanding *the ethical and aesthetic paradoxes that "really existing socialism" acquired in the lives of many of its citizens, and without understanding the creative and positive meanings with which they endowed their socialist lives*—sometimes in line with the announced goals of the state, sometimes in spite of them, and sometimes relating to them in ways that did not fit either-or dichotomies—we would fail to understand what kind of social system socialism was. (Pp. 8–9, emphasis added)

Very crucially, the post-Soviet transition was real humans' efforts to come to terms with the suddenly declared absurdity of what they believed to be the purpose of their lives and with the new vision of the purpose of life that was suggested to them. And with the alternative of the market society, that new vision was certainly suggested. It was one in which the ultimate aim was to strive for one's *own* well-being, for better

material conditions of life, as President Heydar Aliyev's speeches⁴⁰ suggested to the peasants of rural Azerbaijan. It was within *this* vision of the purpose of life that Smith's liberal illusion discerned by Reddy (1987) , including "the unlimited and easy substitutability of money for any other object of desire," could be sustained. (The "unlimited and easy substitutability of money" presupposes a certain type of desire; the communist society with its relationships that the Soviet human believed to be building could not be bought with money). The aspects of the "new mindset" engulfing post-Soviet Azerbaijan that I have looked at so far—belief in the individual responsibility for "making it," belief in the necessity of striving for the self's material well-being even at the expense of others—presupposed, rested on the belief that "making it," one's own "material well-being," were the desired end results, the purpose of life. People's belief in this new purpose of life, suggested in President H. Aliyev's speeches and practiced through the acts of the newly converted subscribers, was essential to globalizing capitalism. As Professor Leslie Sklair wrote in *The Transnational Capitalist Class* (2001) after having interviewed managers and executives from over eighty Fortune Global 500 corporations:

the globalization of the capitalist system reproduces itself through the profit-driven culture-ideology of consumerism. This implies much more than the truism that capitalists want people to buy the goods and services they produce and market. Global capitalism thrives by *persuading us that the meaning and value of our lives are to be found principally in what we possess*, that we can never be totally satisfied with our possessions (the imperative of ever-changing fashion and style), and that the goods and services we consume are best provided by the free market, the generator of private profit that lies at the heart of capitalism. (P. 6, emphasis added)

Acceptance of this new meaning of the purpose of life on a large scale was essential to the expansion of global capitalism, and the post-Soviet space *could* be a rough

⁴⁰ Quoted in the previous chapter.

battleground for the hearts and minds who were essentially free to choose and had the values of the socialist system in them. The historical process of the post-Soviet transition was shaped by people's, families', neighborhoods', and locales' responses to the new, suggested purpose of human life as much as it was shaped by particular politicians, governments, and transnational interests.

Azerbaijan's countryside was at the heart of this struggle, as well as its decisive site for the country. Rural transformation, rural acceptance of the new purpose of life, of "culture-ideology" as Sklair (2001) called it, was critical to the country's integration into the global market structures. Subsisting significantly on their backyards and commons, the rural population were not under the iron pressure to compete, unlike many of their urban fellows. The struggle for the dominant, legitimate view of the purpose of life, the aspect of human agency and communal action, all stood out visibly and clearly in the study of the post-Soviet rural history here. Some have accepted the pursuit of material gain as the goal of life within the limits of neighborly dues and care for others. These were at a disadvantage and in perpetual moral pain from having to choose; some turned inward, not able to live what they believed in, nor ready to switch, paralyzed by indecisiveness. Others have accepted gain-seeking wholeheartedly. They were the historical driving force of the establishment of the market, materially and ideologically, in remote rural Azerbaijan. This is how very local, even individual, decisions were relevant to the expansion of global capitalism in Azerbaijan.

Ivanovka and Others

Ivanovka is the most famous of example of continuing collective land use in post-Soviet Azerbaijan. This village is located in the Ismayilli region of Azerbaijan, in the north of the republic. The village is inhabited overwhelmingly by "molokans,"

descendants of ethnically Russian dissident Christians who broke away from the Russian Orthodox church and settled in Azerbaijan in the early 19th century as a part of Tsarist Russia's policy of exiling the "heretics" to Caucasus. In the Soviet period the village was home to a collective farm—kolkhoz, which was so impoverished in 1953 that "the cows were fed with straw from roofs and in the spring time they were taken out to pasture on the wagons because they could not walk by themselves" (Kashin 2007). This was the year that Nikolay Vasilyevich Nikitin, in his twenties, was chosen to be the chairman of the collective farm. Nikitin devoted himself to lifting up the farm and the village, and was described posthumously as a "thoughtful leader, understanding the needs of the villagers" (Mursalova 2005; Kashin 2007). Ivanovka's kolkhoz—named after M. I. Kalinin—rose to be one of the model enterprises of the Republic and the USSR, yielding higher than average returns in all areas of its production—meat, milk, and produce alike. In the 1970s Nikitin managed to arrange a barter with Finland and Bulgaria: "in exchange for garlic the villagers received high-quality imported furniture" (Mursalova 2005). Nikitin opened the grocery store "Ivanovka" in the center of the capital, Baku, supplied with the dairy products of the village collective: a place where Baku dwellers still line up to buy milk, butter, sour cream, and yogurt before it is gone until the next delivery. The community applied a concept of "collective" that extended beyond farm work: weddings and funerals alike have been the work of the entire community; and members who could not work on the collective, old and young alike, were given special care (Mursalova 2005). In the mid-1980s the collective had 12 million dollars in its account in "Vneshekonombank" (Foreign Economic Bank) of the USSR (Kashin 2007). Nikitin himself has been awarded the title "Hero of Socialist Labor," and elected to the Supreme Council of the USSR. After the fall of the USSR, Nikitin continued to manage the kolkhoz. When privatization of land in Azerbaijan was debated in President Heydar Aliyev's early

years of government, the village collective headed by Nikitin petitioned the president asking for its land not to be privatized, to be left to work as a collective farm and to organize their lives around it. The request was granted. The collective farm, named after N. Nikitin upon his death in 1994, continues today. Although not all leaders following Nikitin proved worthy of the legacy, the collective persevered and stands today—more than twenty years after the breakup of the Soviet system—as a close-knit and satisfied, predominantly molokan Russian community in Azerbaijan. In a 2011 joint CNN–ANS TV video about Ivanovka, community members attributed their resilience to standing together through the difficulties of the 1990s. These statements of the Ivanovka members are from the transcription of the video:

Grigoriy Minnikov, kolkhoz dairy worker: During those times of hardships and war, it was difficult everywhere in Azerbaijan. Many villages, including those with Russian populations, decreased. We survived because we were together as one kolkhoz.

Oalina Sergeyeva: I worked in the kolhoz for 34 years. Thank God the kolkhoz gives everything free to its employees—bread, meat and dairy products.

Valeriy Krupskiy, kolhoz swine worker: I think the kolkhoz form of management has proven to be the right way. I have known other farmers whose businesses eventually disappeared. We have a mixed economy here. When there are problems with grain and vineyards, or swine or poultry or cattle, someone comes to our rescue. Of course when you are part of the kolkhoz, everyone enjoys the profit. (CNN World View, 2011)

The aim of this example here is not to argue the supremacy of the collective farm form of organizing agriculture. It is simply to show that worldviews and economies alternative to the “everyone is to himself/herself” framework could be and were chosen in the transition through historic individual and communal decisions. The example of Ivanovka is important because it demonstrates that individuals in and with communities could make choices: regarding the market as the best form of social

organization, regarding individual production as the best form of production, and, probably most importantly, regarding self-service as the purpose of a person's life, with respect to the individual's place in the community, social life, and the world.

Ivanovka is only the most famous, most publicized example demonstrating the facility of choice and the historical results of its exercise on the part of local communities and individual villagers in post-Soviet rural Azerbaijan. Some villages resisted the delineation of municipal lands: according to the Head of the SCLM, Qarib Mammadov, of the 2,607 village municipalities in Azerbaijan, 40 did not have the borders of municipal lands delineated and marked "for objective reasons" (Mammadov 2002:12). The "objective reasons"—according to the echoing explanations coming from different sources such as lower-level SCLM officers, Shamakhy executive government officials, and a former municipality mayor in a Lenkeran village—were the villages' resistance to the delineation and demarcation of their "common" municipal lands, for fear that this will result in land speculation of the commons by the municipality heads to come.

Others designed different forms and degrees of cooperative land use. In fact, I learned about Ivanovka from the head of the executive government of Shamakhy, who shared during the interview that a tiny minority of villages scattered around Azerbaijan collectively chose to pass on the individual use of the privatized land of their former collectives. Not all of these retained the kolkhoz structure. He gave examples of two alternatives, one in Shamakhy, that included collective care for the land, and collective use of and care for technology—that villagers agreed to keep rather than privatize—on privatized land.

All these attempts at alternatives rested on the mistrust in the idea that individual striving for material well-being is the right way to organize livelihood-making and communal relations. Ultimately, the privatization of collective lands in

Azerbaijan and the transformation of the relationship to land was a struggle over the above idea, and the suggested new purpose of life. A story from the head of the executive government in Shamakhy will demonstrate this point.

This executive government official—the same one who first told me about Ivanovka and other villages experimenting with alternative organizations of land use—described breaking resistance to the land reforms in a village particularly hostile to them, in lower Shamakhy. This community had resisted privatization and individualization of their collective farmland, viewing this as an end to their community. Armed with garden tools, they drove away different government officials who continued to attempt to implement the reforms in the village. The executive head's predecessors regarded this village as a “hopeless” case, best left alone, “some saying that its land will never be privatized” (interviewee's words), until he—my interviewee—was appointed to this position. He—who had also served as a kolkhoz manager in a different region under the Soviet Union—brought the village in with simple discussions, “found their language” (*dilini tapmaq*), and explained to them the benefits of the reforms. “You have to know how to talk to them, to reason with them [i.e., the peasants],” he said.

Common to the examples of continuing collective involvement in land and eventual succumbing to privatized, individual land use was the initial belief in the potential damage to the community, communal relations, and unity that would come from individual privatization. Such reservations on the part of the village communities must have been widespread—they were noted by all but one of the interviewees from the State Committee for Land and Mapping, the key implementers of the reforms. What the words of the interviewed head of the executive government in Shamakhy brilliantly demonstrated is that these reservations were broken not by a harsh stance and threats, but by appealing to the villagers' own interests in the benefits to come

from the land reforms. These benefits could only be explained by conceptually adopting material well-being as the key value/goal of life (versus community cohesion and community well-being) and giving historical examples of how privatization and market organization have proved to be superior roads to the new goal—just as President Heydar Aliyev did in his speeches directed to the peasants.

Ultimately, it was this adoption of material well-being as the key value and goal of life, and of an individualized and marketized path to it as the most successful one, that paved the way for Azerbaijan’s transformation into a market economy—through the disintegration of rural communities—and for the eventual speculation in municipality (i.e., common) land-leasing in the name of more efficient, “profitable” use of land.

Community and Energy

Nowhere was the disintegration of Azerbaijan’s village communities more visible than in the rural utility provisioning problem. Although Azerbaijan became a net exporter of gas in 2007 with the startup of the Shahdeniz natural gas field (IFAD 2010), as a EurasiaNet journalist ironically observed, “people in most Azerbaijani villages live without gas and water, and enjoy only a few hours of electricity each day” (Effendi 2011).

The provision of utilities to Azerbaijan’s rural areas deteriorated sharply after the breakup of the Soviet Union, with the utilities still a public sector. The World Bank’s “Poverty and Social Impact Analysis for Energy Sector Reform in Azerbaijan” (2003) pointed out:

In 1991, natural gas was delivered to 85% of households, but by 2000 was only supplied to the Absheron region [i.e., to the capital city Baku and its surrounding villages—S.R.].

. . . [The] pipeline system suffered from under-investment and insufficient maintenance and its condition deteriorated significantly . . . Low collection rate and theft are other serious problems. (Pp. 9–10)

To paraphrase this in the language of my interviewees in all six villages, gas and water pipes and electricity delivery wires have been disassembled, cut, and sold on the black market by the local representatives of the same utility companies. The “theft” pointed out in the report above was very identifiable, easily investigate-able and stoppable, if there was a will. Yet the pillage of the public utility system had taken on a massive scale, well beyond the six villages I visited, and was documented as a national phenomenon in the World Bank report above. The reaction of the villages whose energy provisioning was pillaged is worth scrutiny. The very rich in the bigger villages acquired generators, the poor went without electricity, and all switched to movable natural gas tanks/cylinders while collectively yearning for the comforts of the Soviet-era electricity, natural gas, and water supply. Despite the commonality of need and interest, there was no communal resolve and action to address a very local problem.

In the remote mountain villages, the villagers turned to the surrounding forests for winter fuel. Dependent as their livelihoods are on these forests for sustenance, cutting down the trees for these villages meant cutting their own lifeline. In the mountain village of Lerik, an interviewee called on me with evident pain: “Look at these forests surrounding us.” We were sitting at a wood table in a small backyard in this village high on the slopes of Lerik mountains; wherever you turned your head from here you saw mountains covered in green with trees. “These forests are not what they used to be,” the pain in the voice continued. “There used to be no patches in the green, so thick the forests were. We have cut and used them for fuel, year after year. Nothing much is left. People do not understand that they are cutting the tree branch on which they are sitting.” What could people do instead? What should they have done?

A hand movement brushed away the subject. Too complex. “There is no unity” was the short answer.

“There is no unity” (“*Birlik yoxdur*”) is the answer that is given interview after interview, village after village to the question about the utility problem. The same brushing-off hand movement is encountered too: too complex, no one to be blamed specifically, yet everyone is responsible at once. Some deny responsibility: “I am just a woman, what can I do?” or “It is men’s job to step up and act.” Then, realizing without a prompt that men’s inactivity needs to be accounted for, they add, “There is no unity.”

A little more information comes through during one interview in the large Lenkeran village, located near a busy highway. It is evening; we are sitting on the interviewee’s balcony, having tea and talking. Sounds of music and people talking into a microphone come through the air—there is a wedding in the village. The village has several thousand people, and my interviewee does not know whose wedding this is. She turns our open-ended conversation to the importance of people supporting each other during “*xeyir-she*” (literally, “the good and the bad”)—the milestones of life, such as weddings, engagements, funerals. Suddenly the lights go off. The village is covered in darkness. The voices through the microphone and the music sounds have ceased. “They will send somebody to the electric station responsible to fix this,” my interviewee says, lighting a candle and referring to the wedding party. She continues to speak of the importance of relatives supporting each other through good and bad. As she had said, the lights come back, but go off again after about 15 minutes. The interviewee shakes her head: “They have not paid the man [i.e., the electric office responsible].” She is referring to the wedding organizers. “They should have settled this with him before starting the wedding. He is making them sorry for this on purpose.” I quietly think that the wedding organizers probably reasoned like me: why

should they pay for something that is their—and the entire village’s—due right: evening-time electricity? Yet, they and I seem to be wrong. Why is one person allowed to play in such a way with the electricity of an entire village? I have to ask. “Because we have no leaders,” says the 60-year-old interviewee. “We used to have leaders, our elderly (*agsaqqallar*), war⁴¹ veterans. Nobody dared to do such things to the village as long as they were alive. They would go right to the city center, demanding justice. Even after the new system came,⁴² nobody dared to play with us while they were alive. But they passed away, and the village was left without leaders after them (*kend bashsiz qaldi*). Nobody could take their place, everyone is thinking about filling their pocket nowadays.” Then she adds, “And so anybody can do anything they want to us now. There is no unity.”

What happens when there is unity? Chukhuryurd utilities battle

Chukhuryurd is a highland Shamakhy village with about 1,500 inhabitants. It is located on the shores of a small mountain lake, and is surrounded by beautiful mountain scenery. The majority of its inhabitants used to be ethnic Russians who had migrated to this area during the reign of Tsar Peter I. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, many Russian inhabitants of the village migrated to the Russian Federation. Their properties were bought by ethnic Azeris, and the village’s ethno-social composition shifted to comprise nearly equal numbers of ethnic Azeri and ethnic Russian families. About a third of the village’s Azerbaijan-speaking population are seasonal residents: they move to the scenic village in spring, some for homesteading. These seasonal homesteaders buy a cow and a few chickens, tend to their land, and

⁴¹ Referring to World War II.

⁴² Referring to the post-Socialist reform.

after the autumn harvest, selling their dairy animals and excess harvest (if any), they move back to a big city—Baku or Sumgayit—to winter and to take cash-bringing jobs. One thing is clear: their move does not stem from a wintertime lack of heat and electricity, which has come to symbolize rural winters in Azerbaijan: “You should see this place in winter!” exclaims a seasonal resident during an interview. “There is probably no jollier place in rural Azerbaijan!” “This village has no problem with electricity, water, or heat supply,” I hear during an interview with another resident. “My house is old *malakan*⁴³ house with Soviet-time hot water pipes in it. You come here in winter, and the house will be warm and snug. The supply and flow is better than in my Baku apartment. You sit inside in winter, from your cosy place look at the street [all houses in historic Chukhuryurd have a window facing a pebbled street—S.R.], and you see adults and kids sledding and laughing, red from fresh air and joy. It is beautiful.”

Chukhuryurd’s winter comforts—the unceasing gas, hot water, and electricity—are not accidental gifts of providence. There have been attempts to pillage this village’s utility infrastructure as well, as was accomplished in most neighboring villages. But some men in the village—in a story that is now rarely remembered—just did not want to accept that this should be allowed to happen.

“The ethnic Russian community has really been at the forefront of this,” says an Azeri resident. “Some of them had migrated to Russia in the 1990s, but ended up returning. Others looked at their sisters and brothers who had taken the lead in migrating and had stayed in Russia, but missed Chukhuryurd and were never truly happy there. So they realized that they are going to stay here for the rest of their lives and they were not going to let anyone take their due rights just because he so wished.”

⁴³ Rural ethnic Russians—descendants of the migrants settled here in Peter the Great’s time—are called *malakan* by themselves and by Azeris.

When utility officials tried to play with the village's residents, promising to fix a problem but repeating supply cuts soon after, a group of men went straight to Baku. Some went directly to complain to the Ministry of Industry and Energy, others picketed in front of the Russian embassy (although they were not Russian passport holders). This—taking a trip to Baku—became their main strategy. Every single time the utility supply was cut without an obvious physical reason, a village group boarded the bus to Baku, bypassing local utility officials (whom they had by now established as dishonest and unreliable).

“Once, twice, thrice, soon local utility officials learned their lesson,” shared a seasonal resident, who did not participate in the trips personally. “They learned that trying to trick this village will result in a fist on your head (*bashindan yumruq*) from Baku.” Now when there are breaks in the utility supply for valid physical reasons, local utility officials try their best to fix them quickly.

Ethnic Russian residents of Chukhuryurd do not view the village's post-Soviet history as a victory. An ethnic Russian female interviewee recalls how the men got together to go to Baku, but this does not erase all the issues that the villagers face in post-Soviet Azerbaijan. She is concerned about a number of issues: The quality of education in the village school is low. Almost all the teachers in the local school have second jobs/professions—beekeeper, carpenter, tailor—to ensure sufficient incomes. In busy periods for their second profession, they may not show up at school or may dismiss classes very early. There are also a lack of entertainment opportunities in the village, according to the interviewee, and life is quite boring, especially for teenagers and young adults.

Conclusion

The land reforms were nearly completed by 2006. The appropriation of municipal lands by the oligarchs, described in an earlier chapter, as well as the interest and investments in the rural land by oligarchs in general, also started at about the same time, after the completion of the land reforms. Would the appropriation of municipal lands be as easy if the rural communities had felt and acted as a united group regarding their interests in land? I do not know the answer.

Interestingly, Azerbaijan's oil-based reintegration into the global economy that created the new rich and all-powerful officials in the first place was not seen as the source of the villagers' troubles. The villagers experienced these as stemming from local specificities: the greed of local state officials and municipality heads, their villages' geographic (isolated) and demographic (mostly elderly) position. In the individual scrambles for better pieces of formerly collective land within the framework of Azerbaijan's land reforms, the discontent with the division was individualized, and rural communities fragmented. Those better able to navigate the reforms allied with government representatives within new rural social relations. Gendered disadvantages of navigating the reforms shaped and reproduced.

CHAPTER 5: RURAL MIGRATION AND THE BUILDING OF A MARKET SOCIETY

Post-Soviet Azerbaijan's integration into the global market as a crude-oil supplier cannot be understood without considering the country's massive rural outmigration. Rural migration was a negotiation of the new social order in globalizing Azerbaijan, not just because it eased the social tensions in the destitute countryside and supplied labor to the oil-capital Baku's booming construction and service sectors. Crucially, rural migration in Azerbaijan both represented and perpetuated the spread of the new kind of "imaginaries" and values that underpinned the establishment and deepening of market institutions and relations in Azerbaijan.

In this chapter, I demonstrate how rural outmigration in post-Soviet Azerbaijan, while leaning on the legacy of the Soviet rural–urban migration, was nevertheless distinct, and how it entailed a moral transformation of migrants and of natal communities—through their relationships with the migrants—signifying new valuations of human work, life, and a new model for individual–community relationships, all indispensable to the spread of a market society.

Azerbaijan's Rural Outmigration: Scale and Overview

Outmigration from rural Azerbaijan,⁴⁴ after the breakup of the Soviet Union, and after the advent of the Aliyev regime specifically, is an elusive subject numerically. Expert estimations and official statistics go completely separate ways. Thus, for example, a well-known social scientist and the vice president of the Economic and Political Research Center in Azerbaijan, Hikmet Hajizade, argued that one million Azerbaijanians—about 25% of the labor force—left Azerbaijan in search of

⁴⁴ And from Azerbaijan in general.

livelihoods with the implementation of Heydar Aliyev's austerity policies after 1993 (Hajizade 2003:359). Another analyst, Alec Rasizade (2002), himself an Azeri émigré to the US, argued that Azerbaijan "suffered proportionally the largest decline in population of all former Soviet Republics" (P. 359). Joining the Russian researcher Arsenyev, Rasizade (2002) argued that the current population of Azerbaijan "cannot possibly exceed 4 million"—half the official 8 million count—and that the official census of Azerbaijan was being fabricated to cover the population "exodus" (P. 359).

The official records of population movements walk a different way from experts' statements and the common wisdom among Azeris. In fact, the Azerbaijan government did not officially acknowledge the existence of rural outmigration until 2003. The official stance on migration from rural areas was that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict of the early 1990s had left the state with a disrupted economic geography and almost one million internally displaced persons (migration.gov.az). Thus, Nagorno-Karabakh refugees were presented as the entirety of Azerbaijan's internal migration problem.

Only in 2003, when President Heydar Aliyev's son Ilham became president, was the existence of rural outmigration officially acknowledged. President Ilham Aliyev talked about "the prevention of the urbanization processes as a main priority for the development of economic policy," and in his November 17, 2003, speech stressed "balanced and durable development of the regions" (i.e., rural areas) as one of the necessary components of economic policy (migration.gov.az). Shortly after, on February 11, 2004, the president approved the State Program on "Social-Economic Development of the Regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan (2004–2008)." This marked the period of acknowledgment of socio-economic distress in rural areas, and the period of official support to agricultural investment. The state introduced certain subsidies to encourage the cultivation of the now privatized land shares from former

collective farms. Private capital from Baku started flowing into the countryside for large-scale agricultural undertakings. By this time, outmigration was firmly established as a part of rural livelihoods.

During my field research, the presence and language of outmigration was one very pervasive and common issue that came through in almost all the interviews (the other such issue was the silence about land shares, the insignificance of land shares as a livelihood source). *Everyone* I talked to either had an immediate family member who had outmigrated or lamented the inability of her family members to emigrate. Residents of the large village in Lenkeran had connections to the Lenkerani networks established in Russia in the 1970s. So an overwhelming majority of migrants from this village were in Russia. Everywhere else Baku was equal to, if not ahead of Russia, as the destination of the outmigrants.

Differing reports of their outmigrant family members filled interviewee narratives during my research. Reported stories of migrated family members were different, but the fact that each and every interviewed person had a migrant family member seemed unifying to me.

In Shamakhy, one local woman narrated how relatives pitched in to buy a minibus for her husband, who took it to operate in Baku. Another narrated how her son working in Baku helped to pay the costs of his sister's wedding. The third had her son, working in Baku, and his wife visiting and staying with her during the week of this interview. The fourth told how, of her three daughters, the one who had left for Baku was most in need of her mother's help. The fifth complained that the absence of a joyful social life (youth gatherings, "dance parties as we used to have at the collective farm") in the village makes her daughter look to her seasonal job in Baku as a way into a more stable and long-term migration to the capital. The sixth said that she is content with completing the wedding of her elder son, "who is now in Baku," and is

worried now about “building a nest” (finding a bride, paying for the wedding and initial housing expenses) for her younger son. The seventh mentioned sending “a sack of wheat the other day to the kids in Baku.” The eighth, ninth, and tenth also talked about helping their (young adult) children, who had migrated to Baku, with occasional sacks of potatoes, forest nuts and fruits, containers of milk, or fresh-cut meat. The eleventh, a retired schoolteacher, narrated how their village school had 400 students when he was still working but has only 100 students now. In a different village, a concerned parent shared how entire grades in their village school have just one student or no students at all—“there are simply no kids of that age in the village anymore; the young are all now moving out because of the unemployment.” Local executive government officers’ narratives were also interwoven with the presence of outmigrants: a high-level local executive officer boasted of Shamakhy’s skilled carpenters, stone carvers, and architects, some of whom now “made a fortune building villas for ‘the very top’ in Baku and are highly sought after.” Another official talked about how some shops in Shamakhy town are funded by outmigrants to Russia and employ the migrants’ own relatives.

Shamakhy interviewees’ family members who had migrated to Baku were said to be working predominantly as construction workers, drivers, night guards, cleaners, and bread-factory workers. One woman’s son was a university instructor in Baku, and another’s daughter was a seasonal administrative assistant with a Chinese company. But it seemed that, overwhelmingly, the outflow of young labor from the villages of Shamakhy went right into the lines of the lower working class of the growing Baku. Massive construction projects in Baku seem to have created a demand for both unskilled and related skilled labor.

Rural migrants to Baku seem to maintain a double relationship with their family, essentially parents, in their home village. The migrants may or may not be able

to send money back home regularly. This depends on the type of work that they get in Baku. The parents in the village may be sending vegetables, forest fruits and nuts, milk and cheese. It is hard to say which way financial support works between rural migrants to Baku and those left behind in the countryside. Does it flow from Baku to the rural areas supporting lives there? Or does it flow from the remnants of the village to Baku, subsidizing the capital city's new working class? The relationship is complex. For example, even if a migrant son and his wife living in Baku cannot send money to their parents in a mountain village, they provide a bridge through which the aging parents can access healthcare in Baku. The parents will get beds, a place to stay, and help around the city to find doctors. In case of emergencies such as surgeries and long-term therapy, the construction worker in Baku is more likely than the parent in the village to find money to borrow. It is more accurate to say that the family acts as a pooling and distribution unit than to assert a degree of urban-to-rural flow of cash from Baku.

The family as a pooling and distribution unit has been officially given the task of the social protection of its members by the state in the course of the market reforms. Azerbaijan's constitution, prepared under Heydar Aliyev in 1995, the first year of market reforms, states:

I. Everyone has the right for social protection. II. *Most vulnerable persons must get support, in the first place, from members of their families.* (Sections I and II of Article 38 "Right for social protection," emphasis added⁴⁵)

Thus, an important moral responsibility of society—social protection of the vulnerable and needy—is officially assigned to the institution of the family. In the wake of fundamental social transformation, this societal moral responsibility is not denied

⁴⁵ Available online at http://www.azerbaijan.az/portal/General/Constitution/doc/constitution_e.pdf.

(because human beings are profoundly moral), but is redirected, its carrier redefined, in a very thoughtful way.⁴⁶

Interestingly, outmigration helps acceptance of this redefinition. In the discussions of rural migrants, so different in their uniting move out, the making of rural livelihoods is treated as a family matter. Many interviewees explain their current livelihoods by their family specificities, their family members' ability or inability to migrate.

Mrs. A has six sons who could support her even after tending to their own wives and children. Mrs. B, on the other hand, has three daughters and just one son, who is just trying to get on his own in Russia, so he can't help much. Mrs. C's husband was not entrepreneurial enough to leave the village, and had no relatives in Baku or Russia to "draw him out." The social conditions behind the family's difficulties, such as why a family cannot make a living from their land share despite hard work, and who is responsible for them, are absent altogether from the interviewees' analyses of their livelihoods.

If the mass protests in Soviet Azerbaijan of the 1980s and early 1990s were directed explicitly against the Soviet state's inability to improve the social conditions of livelihoods as expected, the rural outmigration of the late 1990s marks the relinquishing of these expectations and an acknowledgment of livelihoods as an individual family matter. The state's responsibility for the conditions of rural livelihoods is diminished, importantly in the minds, although the state remains in charge of policies on trade, pricing, land, agriculture, and money in the context of which rural livelihoods have to be made.

⁴⁶ In Azerbaijan with its strong family belonging / family culture, few would argue that family does not have a responsibility towards its vulnerable members. With family officially assigned this task, it is the willingness and ability of extended family to provide sustained support that becomes the source of resentment, not the state.

Rural Migration as a Negotiation of the New Social Order

The ability of rural residents to migrate in masses in a watchdog state is interesting. Azerbaijan's government happens to be vigilant. Since Heydar Aliyev consolidated power in 1994, and started preparing for and implementing market reforms, local authorities have diligently watched the political leanings of rural residents, the delivery of opposition newspapers to rural areas, and any visitors to rural areas who might bring any ideological influence.⁴⁷ Interestingly, the state, which has relentlessly controlled people coming *to* rural areas, has not shown the same interest in people *leaving* rural areas in massive numbers.

In Lenkeran, when I asked if the local government did anything about the outmigration, tried to prevent it, respondents answered, "That [preventing a man from leaving for Russia] would be ruling to the death of a family," and "They themselves have relatives in Russia." Several women said, "There would have been a revolution in this region long ago, if not for outmigration." In Shamakhy, the responses were similar. "Why should they [the government] do anything about outmigration?" "They [the migrants] go to earn money and help their families, they are not doing anything bad. These regions would be dead without them."

A local government officer in Shamakhy, in an attempt to underline the rapid development of the region, noted that some who had migrated to Russia "during massive outmigration in the 1990s" now have returned with some capital and opened stores in Shamakhy town, employing their "brothers, fathers, fathers-in-law." The local executive official acknowledged that "outmigration was the only way out" for

⁴⁷ It is common knowledge among the non-profits in Azerbaijan that one cannot just have a charity or, worse yet, a civic education training event in the rural areas without the permission of local governments. Failure to do so has resulted in incarceration of more than one non-profit worker.

some time, “as there were no jobs.” The government’s tacit agreement to “let” people migrate eased the political control of the countryside.

When males migrate in search of livelihoods, left behind are women, children, and the elderly. These are weaker members of society, less likely to stand up against any policy and the government.

The family left behind has less incentive to be politically active against the state and risk “catching its eye.” Moreover, having income from outside weakens the dependence on village resources, as well as the discontent with those resources. Crucially, having income from outside also lowers the stakes in the local economy. Outmigrants are viewed as an exit strategy, and the messy business of politics is left to those with more stakes in the local economy, those cultivating larger plots of lands, the local businessmen, and the local government.

Ironically, the migrants to Baku are only second-class dwellers, and hardly citizens in the participatory sense of the term. They both belong to the city and are foreigners. They don’t view themselves as having stakes in the city politics. They are in the capital to work in manual jobs, to earn a “piece of bread,” not to “stir the pot.” As long as their jobs are paying for their needs in Baku, they have no incentives to risk whatever little they are earning and may send their families. Their very ability to work at these jobs in the city is kept insecure through the policing of residence registration.

To legally work in Baku, one must be registered to an address in one of the administrative districts of the city. The same requirement exists in Russian cities, and most other post-Soviet republics as well, as a preserved leftover of the Soviet-era urbanization control policy. In Baku, as well as in Russia, there are two options for registration: temporary registration and permanent registration to a physical address. Temporary registration can be given upon providing documentation of a lease, and is granted only for a few months (usually three months). It must be continuously

renewed. Permanent registration requires ownership of, or strong entitlement⁴⁸ to, residential property in the city. It is beyond the reach of most rural migrants.

The government body in charge of issuing residential registration is . . . the local police department. The police also issue all permits for and control any forms of demonstration and protest in the city. In this framework, the ability of rural outmigrants to earn their livelihoods—their “work permits,” so to speak—depends on their record/relationship with the city’s police departments. This record must be continuously earned, with checkpoints every three months for temporary residence registration, which thus keeps rural migrants in check, and insecure. If temporary registration is denied, rural outmigrants in Baku may work illegally—without contracts or any slim protection of the Labor Code. If registration is denied to Azerbaijan’s migrants in Russia, they may also face deportation if found working. Migrants in such conditions hide from the Russian police, who are notorious for randomly demanding to check registrations from people on the streets who look darker than Russians.⁴⁹

Migrant workers from rural Azerbaijan earn their livelihoods in Baku and Russia in the shadow of their precarious position. Their insecurity in renewing their registration (“work permit”) and maintaining their ability to work and earn their bread dwarfs the fact that they lack rights to the social and unemployment benefits of their host locale as non-residents.

This mindset conditioned in this context is not numb to political realities; they just search for solutions to their own enveloped concerns. The migrants’ concerns, and political goals—dreamed or organized for—are those addressing their own limited

⁴⁸ As the husband, wife, or child of the residential property owner.

⁴⁹ With episodes devoted to its activity by Azerbaijan’s popular televised youth humor club, *Komanda KVN “Parni iz Baku.”*

rights and registration conditions, not the development policies (oil specialization) behind the stagnation of the countryside, and certainly not communal worries like the environment or, say, the condition of public health facilities in the city.

A senior scientist at the State Committee for Land and Mapping shared the following story during an interview. During small talk, the scientist complained of the environmental issues surrounding construction in Baku. Observing an oil spill in the park during Baku's boulevard construction, he commented about this to the brigade working on the construction. The workers responded to him thus: "What can we do, *ami* [uncle], we are just workers here. We are just trying to get bread to our families." The scientist complained to me with anguish: "These are just youth who have flown from the villages! How can they understand the significance of the pollution caused by these mega construction projects? What can they do about it even if they dislike it?" Indeed, by virtue of their circumstances these workers are voiceless and cannot act as concerned citizens. Rural Azerbaijan's supply of workers to the city industries, insofar as the salaries are sufficient, makes both the workers and the countryside docile. Yet what is said is still a very incomplete picture of rural outmigration in Azerbaijan. The socio-economic context and history of this process demands closer attention.

Historical Context of Azerbaijan's Rural Outmigration

Better-paying construction, transport, and storage jobs concentrated in and around the oil industry center Baku were the context for the narratives I heard of peasants turned drivers, construction workers, and night guards in Baku. These employment opportunities manifested the changing social economy of the city, which itself reflected a peculiar feature of the global economy into which Azerbaijan was re-integrating, now free from the structures of the USSR. After Azerbaijan opened its oil exploration and extraction to global companies in 1994 with what is officially referred

to as the “Contract of the Century,”⁵⁰ signed by President Aliyev, Baku became home to not only the branches of the transnational signatories of the contract⁵¹ but also to a number of transnational finance and consultancy firms including Ernst and Young, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, Grant Thornton, Deloitte Consulting, Manpower, KPMG Consulting, Booz Allen Hamilton, Computer Sciences Corporation, Aon Consulting, and Computer Associates. A number of local innovative business solutions and service subcontracting companies—providing a range of services from hiring and housing to transportation and catering support—flourished, as well as luxury boutiques such as Versace and Armani, and various upscale entertainment facilities. The concentration of businesses created both well-paying jobs for educated Baku youth (Heyat 2002), integrating them effectively as white-collar workers into the global industry, and for the uneducated and unskilled of Baku and the countryside. Baku was reshaped into a cosmopolitan city connected directly to global work and entertainment, yet rooted in the labor of the local semi-skilled and unskilled.

Baku’s transformation reflected a process characterizing the global economy as a whole. On the one hand, with the globalization of production networks, cities worldwide have been shown to grow into place-based centers concentrating now-outsourced functions of control, management, and servicing of the global firm (Sassen 2007). Joining global production and finance activities directly, such global cities, together with export processing zones, have been argued to form a global network

⁵⁰ Formal name: Azeri, Chirag, and Deep-Water Gunashli International Contract No. 1.

⁵¹ A few months after the “Contract of the Century,” in 1995, a consortium known as the Azerbaijan International Operating Company (AIOC) was organized. Originally AIOC comprised BP (UK), Amoco (U.S.), LUKoil (Russia), Pennzoil (now Devon of U.S.), UNOCAL (U.S.), Statoil (Norway), McDermott (U.S.), Ramco (Scotland), TPAO (Turkey), Delta Nimir (now Amerada Hess of U.S.), and SOCAR (Azerbaijan). Since then Exxon, now ExxonMobil (U.S.), ITOCHU (Japan), and INPEX (Japan) have joined the consortium. McDermott, Ramco, and LUKoil have since sold their shares. AIOC’s first president was Terry Adams (UK) of British Petroleum (BP), the company that operates the offshore oil platforms and the onshore Sangachal Terminal.

through which the control, maintenance, and servicing of the world economy was reproduced, both depending on and shaping the new labor and migration flows (Sassen 2007). Baku's rise as a global city and a destination for rural migrants⁵² through its provision of jobs related to new construction projects reflected the city's integration into the global production, consumption, and labor networks as the center of the country's oil extraction transnationalized with Heydar Aliyev's "Contract of the Century."

On the other hand, the urbanization process that has reshaped Baku with Azerbaijan's reorganization as a market economy and a global oil supplier has been a twin brother to the system of production for the market—capitalism, as David Harvey pointed out (2012:5–25). The rise of cities—which have always been a "class phenomenon," according to Harvey, based on the appropriation of surplus from some for others—in capitalism has demonstrated a systemic scale and role. Capitalism is a system characterized by a perpetual search for profit: surplus value. To produce that surplus value, Harvey reminded us, capitalists have to produce surplus product *and* find markets and ways for its absorption. Capitalist development is destabilized not only by obstacles to profitable production but also by impediments to *surplus absorption*. Thus, if "there is not enough purchasing power in an existing market, then new markets must be found by expanding foreign trade, promoting new products and lifestyles, creating new credit instruments and debt-financed state expenditures" (Harvey 2012:6).⁵³ Restructuring of cities, Harvey (2006, 2012) demonstrates with

⁵² Predominantly from Azerbaijan's own countryside. The flow of transnational migrants, importantly from Iran, Turkey, Georgia, Russian Federation's Chechnya, Dagestan, and even as far as India and China, to Baku is a matter outside of the scope of the argument here.

⁵³ Harvey (2012) pointed out that if

Capital cannot be profitably reinvested, accumulation stagnates or ceases, and capital is devalued (lost) and in some instances even physically destroyed. Devaluation can take a

historical examples of Paris in the mid-19th century and New York City at the beginning of the 20th, is at the heart of this process and transforms the cities as centers of surplus absorption. The process of the city restructuring itself serves surplus absorption through government's investment in infrastructural development. Massive construction projects signifying the remaking of Baku and providing jobs to massive numbers of people from the city itself and the countryside were thus not a peculiarity but reflected choices made in Azerbaijan similar to those made about cities around the world, from China to the United Arab Emirates, which Harvey (2012) noted.

“The construction projects of Baku” (*Bakinin tikintileri*) was already an expression in common use after 2005, and was used by many interviewees of this study, from rural workers to the state officials in Baku itself, presupposing their listener's familiarity with what was regarded as common knowledge: construction has defined the face of Baku in the last decade. It was also evident to a lesser degree throughout the country in the building of highways, and of new entertainment/resort facilities in rural town centers. Between 1995 and 2004, while the share of agriculture in GDP fell from 25.3% to 6.4%, the share of construction rose from 3.7% to 7.4%, surpassing agriculture (Table 5.1).

number of forms. Surplus commodities can be devalued or destroyed, productive capacity and assets can be written down in value and left unemployed, or money itself can be devalued through inflation. And in a crisis, of course, labor stands to be devalued through massive unemployment. (P. 6)

Table 5.1. Gross Domestic Product by Sector of the Economy (%)

Year	Industry	Agriculture and forestry	Construction	Transportation and communication	Net taxes	All other sectors
1995	27.3	25.3	3.7	17.4	7.7	18.6
1996	25.8	24.9	9.3	10.2	10.1	19.7
1997	25.3	20.0	11.7	10.5	7.4	25.1
1998	21.9	18.0	13.0	12.0	4.1	31.0
1999	28.2	18.2	10.9	10.7	4.0	28.0
2000	36.1	15.9	6.5	12.0	6.2	23.3
2001	37.6	14.7	5.8	10.1	7.8	24.0
2002	37.4	13.8	8.7	9.8	8.0	22.3
2003	37.2	12.3	11.2	10.0	7.6	21.7
2004	38.3	10.8	12.5	9.5	7.2	21.7
2005	49.4	8.6	9.4	7.4	7.6	17.6
2006	57.3	6.7	7.7	6.6	5.5	16.2
2007	59.5	6.4	6.7	7.3	6.6	13.5
2008	58.5	5.3	7.0	6.7	6.7	15.8
2009	50.0	6.4	7.4	8.5	7.6	20.1

Note. Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Between 2004 and 2009, agriculture, hunting, and forestry's combined share in the investment directed to fixed capital increased from 0.7 percent to 3.5 percent, from a little over 35 million to over 2 billion (State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan, azstat.org/statinfo/construction/en/oo9.shtml). In comparison, the share of real estate activities in the investment to fixed capital had increased from 7.5 percent in 2004 to 11 percent in 2009. The share of transport and communication in investment directed to fixed capital had risen from 8.7 percent in 2004 to 22.2 percent in 2009 (*ibid.*). While more money started flowing into agriculture, it was still dwarfed by the funds flowing into transport and real estate. The wages in agriculture, despite steady increase, were also the lowest in the country (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2. Average Monthly Wages and Salaries of Employees by Sector of Economy (in Azeri Manats)

Year	Industry	Agriculture, hunting and forestry	Construction	Transport, storage and communication
1995	19.1	6.7	19.8	19.6
1996	29.2	7.6	33.4	30.1
1997	46.3	9.9	60.0	45.4
1998	55.4	8.8	88.3	58.2
1999	57.1	10.6	85.7	45.1
2000	87.2	13.8	83.3	58.5
2001	100.0	15.8	87.4	66.1
2002	113.6	18.0	109.0	73.7
2003	137.3	23.1	154.4	88.0
2004	187.0	29.8	218.2	113.2
2005	213.2	41.5	237.6	137.7
2006	260.9	52.5	298.7	175.4
2007	344.8	86.8	381.4	250.4
2008	424.5	114.7	406.1	329.4
2009	432.4	134.5	450.1	381.0

Note. Source: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

These construction projects generated employment not just in construction itself but also in related sectors, for example in the production of building materials.

Interestingly, as job opportunities in construction and related sectors lured the jobless from rural areas, the émigrés to Russia supported the boom with their private property purchases in Azerbaijan.

This description of the changing weight of agriculture and construction and services centered in the capital, Baku, is not to present the outmigration from Azerbaijan's villages as the result of push-pull factors, whereby the lack of jobs and poverty in the rural areas pushed people out, and the opportunities in Baku lured them

in. As it has been argued (Sassen 2007; Cohen and Sirkeci 2011), the push–pull framework conceals more than it reveals when explaining massive migrations. While push–pull factors may explain why some people move, they cannot explain why many others do not. As Sassen (2007) pointed out, the question should be: “When does poverty *become* a push factor? . . . It takes a number of other conditions to turn poverty into a push factor, and even then only a small minority of poor and middle-class people will likely attempt emigration. Emigration is not an undifferentiated escape from poverty and unemployment to prosperity” (P. 131). Important factors and history are concealed by using the push–pull framework as the conclusive explanation of migration:

First, the existence of social networks of migrants from the same destinations has been shown to be a potent trigger of migration around the world for centuries preceding our era (Sassen 2007; Cohen and Sirkeci 2011). The role of both Baku and various Russian cities as post-Soviet rural migrant destinations leans on the history of Soviet-era urbanization, with interlinked education policies. As a result of the Soviet “open to all” higher education policies in the context of the higher education institutions concentrated in city centers, infrastructure was created for a “lay rural student’s” access to this education (Zajda 1979). A student wishing to apply for colleges and universities could arrive in the city of the desired institution and would be directed from that institution to a relevant placement committee. The committee would place the student in a free student dormitory and provide entrance-exam details. Students would also be assisted with finding part-time jobs—which in the context of the USSR’s labor shortage were in good supply—subsidized food service, and in case of proven academic excellence, additional stipends. Despite its own set of problems and the slightly changing priorities with each Soviet ruler (Matthews 1982/2012), this higher education placement-support system was the pride of and showcased by USSR

authorities as a manifestation of the universal accessibility of higher education. Accessing higher education, in this context, was seen as a matter of only the will and intellect of students; it was not (and still is not) uncommon for rural government officials to boast of the numbers of “akademiks”—professors—that have “come out” of that locale, people who have herded sheep and harvested cotton in their youth. Numerous Soviet films glorified the higher education placement system for the public, including the Azerbaijan Soviet Republic’s own, widely popular, romantic comedy *Ahmad Hardadir?* (Where Is Ahmad?) (1963).⁵⁴

The system eased and supported the migration of rural youth to the USSR’s cities, simultaneously educating skilled labor and immediately supplying manual labor, both of which were needed by the state’s growing urban centers.⁵⁵ This flow supported Soviet urbanization and created the social networks on which post-Soviet migrants would rely during their own rural–urban moves. For example, the post-Soviet flow of Lenkeran’s rural males to Russia, versus Baku, was linked to the fact that Russia was a strived-for, ambitious destination of many students from Lenkeran in the 1980s, who settled there after receiving their diplomas,⁵⁶ and after the breakup of the USSR provided “hold-on points” and initial placement support for the new post-Soviet wave of young males from Lenkeran.

Second, the Azeri migrant social networks in Russia are also demonstrative of what has been called “colonial history” (Sassen 2007). Besides education, a key

⁵⁴ The movie depicts how two rural youth—a young man and woman—leave their families in protest of an arranged marriage proposal by their parents and head to the capital, Baku, to pursue their education. The movie demonstrates the ease of these persons’ access to the higher education facilities and placement, the conditions of life in these facilities, “cheerful” manual work in the jobs that they take on—all romanticized as conditions under which the heroes of the movie fall in love with each other.

⁵⁵ Urbanization was regarded as both a necessary and a positive result of the Soviet industrialization by the USSR strand of Marxism (Morton and Stuart 1984).

⁵⁶ And postgraduate degrees, as Lenkeran’s people narrate with pride.

process establishing rural migrant networks from Azerbaijan, and the rest of the Soviet periphery, specifically in Moscow, was the USSR's policy to establish the capital as a consumer goods haven of the state, to display the bounty of Soviet life as comparable to that of the West (Sahadeo 2011). As Sahadeo (2011) demonstrated, Moscow's strategic need to be presented as a capital of bounty, offering fresh flowers and fruits during the Russian winters, encouraged the formation of informal trade networks delivering and selling the produce of the sunny peripheral states in the Caucasus (including Azerbaijan) and Central Asia in Moscow. These late-Soviet-period trade networks flourished in the post-Soviet era, acting as migrant social networks for mostly uneducated rural labor from the post-Soviet periphery, with Azerbaijan in a leading position among them, supplying Moscow's produce markets and contributing the popular Moscowite derogatory view of Azerbaijanians (as well as Georgians, Turkmens, Tajiks, and other ethnic non-Russians of the former USSR) as "blacks," and as backward, uneducated bazaar people.

This derogatory classification and treatment, with the exception of the ethnic division and the "black" label, is a fact faced by rural labor migrants in Baku as well, and probably the key distinction between the Soviet and post-Soviet rural-urban migrations. Whereas the Soviet rural-urban migration embodied a verbalized welcome (to the fresh labor), prospects of increased education and social status, alongside the possibilities of more modernized consumption in the host city, the post-Soviet rural labor migration means derogatory, openly disrespectful, and harsh treatment by the host city officials and natives, in return for the possibilities of modernized consumption and uncertain prospects of (material, not educational) upward social mobility. Saskia Sassen (2007) observed this need to come to terms with pride and its results imbuing international migration:

Critical is that many people have shown themselves willing to take undesirable jobs, including jobs below their educational and social stratum in their home country, and to live in extreme discomfort and under conditions they might not accept in their home country . . . [T]he bridging effects of globalization produce both material conditions and novel types of imaginaries that make emigration an option where not too long ago it was not. (P. 132)

The “imaginary” in Sassen’s usage is not a particular worldview, a historical framework of mind, but is simply interchangeable with “aspirations,” “desires deemed possible” (Sassen 2002, 2004, 2005). Then what type of imaginaries, what type of aspirations, take side with economic difficulties and imbue migration from rural Azerbaijan?

New Imaginaries and Rural Outmigration

Quality of life—defined by access to new forms of consumption, for instance, for the young to bars, entertainment centers, and the Internet—symbolizes the lifestyle that a rural home cannot offer and is one expressed aspiration. A EurasiaNet economic journalist observes:

Baku is packed with bars, nightclubs and discothèques, bowling clubs and entertainment centers attended equally by men and women. By contrast, not a single nightclub or discotheque exists outside of Azerbaijan’s capital.

“It is boring to live in the village,” complained 17-year-old Mobil Mammadov, a resident of the village of Asrik near the Armenian border. “There’s no Internet, newspapers are not delivered. We can only watch the state television channel, which is not interesting at all . . .”

Mammadov’s dream is for an Internet café to come to his village—the closest one is 25 kilometers away in the regional center of Tovuz. “I heard about the Internet from friends who use it in Baku,” he said. “It seems exciting.” (Ismayilov 2007)

An interview with a migrant male in Baku that I conducted in the pre-testing stage revealed similar comments: “There is no *life* in the village. People go to bed with dusk” (emphasis added).

Entertainment is just one of the components of the desired “life” not offered in a rural village nor affordable with rural lifestyles. It represents a range of individual coveted experiences, from attending a modern cinema through dressing in modern ways among similarly dressed, that is, fashion-appreciating, people to eating out (Sahadeo 2011). What unifies various components of the desired life is their availability for consumption. “Quality of life” seems to be defined as being able to consume the latest offerings on the market.

By contrast—to underline the historicity of this new “quality of life”—in the USSR discourse (prior to Gorbachev) “quality of life” was officially presented and widely accepted as one’s use of his or her specific abilities to serve society, humankind, community—presented, of course, as service to the Soviet state. Living in the prescribed way, repeated the media and establishment including labor collective leaders, meant living with a clean conscience, a peaceful mind, and developing one’s potential as a human—a true quality of life.

In another historical contrast, the coveted elements in the post-Soviet vision of “quality of life” in Azerbaijan—the urban, modern consumption style, and immersion in the latest offerings of the entertainment industry—have been regarded as exactly the killer of quality of life by an increasing number of people in the US. Here, home to all the modern comforts yearned for by the Azeri youth interviewed by Ismayilov (2007), these very comforts—the entertainment industry, the urban consumption style—are scrutinized not just by critical scientists. This home to modern comforts, accessible with indebtedness (i.e., credit) to a wider range of people, is also peculiarly home to a growing number of diverse people leaving their modern, urban lifestyles for rural homesteads—called the Back-to-the-Land movement (Brown 2011; Jacob 1997)—in a quest for a very differently defined quality of life, decades after the failure of the 1970s hippie communes, which was said to prove the impossibility of alternative

livelihoods in the modern world. “Quality of life” in the new Back-to-the-Land movement’s redefinition is found in slow, mindful living, the feeling of union with nature, and the peace of mind that comes from the knowledge of living sustainable livelihoods that do not jeopardize the planet’s ecology and future generations’ livelihoods (Jacob 1997).

The aim of these contrasting examples is to show that “quality of life”—increasingly believed to be the expanded consumption of what the market has to offer in whatever area one fancies—is a historical construct tied to convictions of what life is about. The search for the same “quality of life” can lead some to a city, others to a rural homestead to grow their own food. The differences are tied to underlying different assumptions of what life is about—its purpose.

The “quality of life” increasingly imagined in post-Soviet rural Azerbaijan as access to the possibilities of consumption offered in the city reflects the spread of the belief that the purpose of life is to supply the self with comforts and pleasures. In contrast to the Soviet belief that comforts and pleasures are and should be by-products of purposeful human activity for the higher good, comforts in the post-Soviet context are viewed as ends in themselves. Subscription to this belief not only encourages migration to “where there is a better life” in terms of material comforts, but is what ultimately makes extended consumption in a market society possible.

The city’s role in the imaginaries of (commodified) comfort is special. Designed to be centers of consumption for a globalizing market society, cities offer a concentration of new forms of comforts, all in commodity form, and possibilities of consuming them through cash employment.

Harvey (2012) points out:

Quality of urban life has become a commodity for those with money, as has the city itself in a world where consumerism, tourism, cultural and knowledge

based industries, as well as perpetual resort to the economy of the spectacle, have become major aspects of urban political economy, even in India and China. The postmodernist penchant for encouraging the formation of market niches, both in urban lifestyle choices and in consumer habits, and cultural forms, surrounds the contemporary urban experience with an aura of freedom of choice in the market, provided you have the money and can protect yourself from the privatization of wealth redistribution through burgeoning criminal activity and predatory fraudulent practices (which have everywhere escalated). Shopping malls, multiplexes, and box stores proliferate . . . , as do fast-food and artisanal market places, boutique cultures and, as Sharon Zukin slyly notes, “pacification by cappuccino” . . . This is a world in which the neoliberal ethic of intense possessive individualism can become the template for human personality socialization. The impact is increasing individualistic isolation, anxiety, and neurosis in the midst of one of the greatest social achievements (at least judging by its enormous scale and all-embracing character) ever constructed in human history for the realization of our hearts’ desire. (P. 14)

Consumerism in the city is presented as art, of not only finding bargains, but of living with “taste,” with “style.” Only in this context can buying a cup of cappuccino from the global giant Starbucks be regarded as an expression of style.⁵⁷ The innate human desire for a purposeful life is channeled to an illusion of creative expression through the consumption of (mass-produced) fashion, living necessities, housing, cars, entertainment, travel, food, and more. Buying into this presentation turns consumption from the satisfaction of material needs to an end in itself, an art form, a venue for creativity. The presentation is effective only because of the innate human yearning for a purposefully creative life, which the former channels to the coordination of one’s consumption of mass-produced items to represent “taste” or “style.” Ironically, what the system presents as “style” is devoid of the socially transformative quality that historical works of great art contained, and only serves to preserve the existing social hierarchy (Adorno and Horkheimer 1944). Buying into the city as a center of style and

⁵⁷ Caricatured and subtly criticized in Korean pop-artist Psy’s world-famous video “Gangnam Style” (Fisher 2012).

refinement thus represents a form of the enslavement of creative aspirations and energies of individuals in the capsule of consumerism.

Rural Outmigration as Moral Transformation

Rural outmigration is essentially a plunging of the masses into the idea of the purpose of life, as self-gratification (and its concomitant interpretation, consumption), as much as it is a movement of labor to supply the growing economy of Baku or Moscow. This plunging happens (1) through city-based exposure to the mediums of entertainment and mass media, or what Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer called “the culture industry” (Adorno and Horkheimer 1944); and (2) through rural migrants’ transformation from semi-subsistence producers to consumers.

First, in the city, rural migrants are immersed in a life saturated with media, especially entertainment media, to a degree unmatched in rural Azerbaijan. The effect of screen media over the countryside is weak, despite its expanding reach, both because of practical obstacles, like the electricity shortages that characterize the rural areas, and because of the foreignness of life portrayed in the media and the difficulty of relating to it from (semi-subsistence) lifestyles as lived in the countryside. For a rural migrant to the city, immersion in the world of media—not just through direct viewing, but through billboards and its rule over fellow city dwellers—entails immersion in a new set of messages and values with respect to what life is about.

That the media immersion characterizing Baku city life entailed a moral transformation was suggested in an interview with an uneducated woman in a remote village high in the mountains of Lenkeran-Lerik. Her son was a recent migrant to Baku (together with his wife) and worked at “the constructions.” Discussing the difficulties of the rural migrant’s life in Baku, the woman mentioned not financial difficulties but the mindset of people surrounding them in Baku, with the following:

These people in the city have mixed up what life is about. And all of this is due to those soap operas. People watch those soap operas and start thinking that this is what life is about.

A migrant has to evaluate his or her stance towards the new values she or he is suddenly surrounded with. Rural–urban migration is thus fundamentally a personal re-evaluation of one’s worldview and aesthetic values in relationship to the new ones. How could surrounding oneself with soap operas, TV shows, and the admirers of this entertainment become a channel of moral transformation? Interestingly, a former kolkhoz’s manual laborer, the uneducated woman from a remote mountain, put her fingers on a process studied at length by the Frankfurt school theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer.

Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) explained how “culture”—shaped by news media, entertainment, and government discourse together—can contour the intellectual-moral activity of humans. In a chapter called “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” in their book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) argued that different modern mediums of culture, “Films, radio and magazines”—(in our times globalized through the Internet as well)—“make up a system which is uniform as a whole and in every part.” Exposure to these mediums facilitates a powerful transmission of values, as well as a passive reception on the part of the viewer and internalization of the offered worldview:

The whole world is made to pass through the filter of the culture industry. The old experience of the movie-goer, who sees the world outside as an extension of the film he has just left (because the latter is intent upon reproducing the world of everyday perceptions), is now the producer’s guideline. The more intensely and flawlessly his techniques duplicate empirical objects, the easier it is today for the illusion to prevail that the outside world is the straightforward continuation of that presented on the screen. This purpose has been furthered by mechanical reproduction since the lightning takeover by the sound film.

Real life is becoming indistinguishable from the movies. The sound film, far surpassing the theatre of illusion, leaves no room for imagination or reflection on the part of the audience, who is unable to respond within the

structure of the film, yet deviate from its precise detail without losing the thread of the story; hence the film forces its victims to equate it directly with reality. The stunting of the mass-media consumer's powers of imagination and spontaneity does not have to be traced back to any psychological mechanisms; he must ascribe the loss of those attributes to the objective nature of the products themselves, especially to the most characteristic of them, the sound film. They are so designed that quickness, powers of observation, and experience are undeniably needed to apprehend them at all; yet sustained thought is out of the question if the spectator is not to miss the relentless rush of facts.

Even though the effort required for his response is semi-automatic, no scope is left for the imagination. Those who are so absorbed by the world of the movie—by its images, gestures, and words—that they are unable to supply what really makes it a world, do not have to dwell on particular points of its mechanics during a screening. All the other films and products of the entertainment industry which they have seen have taught them what to expect; they react automatically.

The results, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, were, on the one hand, a homogenization of worldviews and aesthetic values (where differences are “illusory”), and, on the other hand, the intellectual passivity of individuals, whereas an individual's task of connecting “the varied experiences of the senses to fundamental concepts” is performed by the culture industry instead.

What the culture industry says about the purpose of human life, then, is a paramount question for understanding the values and intellectual direction of a society based in the culture industry. If the Soviet culture industry indoctrinated Soviet citizens in the idea that the USSR was the protector of each individual citizen and that serving it was the ultimate purpose giving meaning to life, post-Soviet Azerbaijan's culture industry, operated by the profit motive, frees individuals from this moral debt to the state and points to self-gratification (in various forms) as the ultimate goal of one's life.

This is not to say that rural migrant workers automatically become mindless consumers upon their exposure to urban life, with its culture industry. It is to underline some fundamental pressures exerted on the migrant laborers to redefine their role and

responsibilities in society, and the criteria for valuing one's worth in society. These pressures and the corresponding soul-searching over the essential questions of a human's relationship to society are a massive ongoing process, transcending Azerbaijan's experience. Glimpses of this process are recorded in social science discussions under the topic of "identity formation,"⁵⁸ a subject that has become an established subsection in migration studies.

Once feeding material comforts to the self—consumption—is viewed as the goal of life, the value of life itself becomes the ability to acquire/access these comforts. In his study of the experiences of migrant traders from southern ex-Soviet republics to Moscow, Sahadeo (2011) shares the following about his interviewee from a village in the outskirts of Baku:

Elnur Asadov's time in Moscow "made [him] feel like a man." After scraping by with his family in Baku, he reminisced about how "[i]n Moscow, money, women, and drink suddenly appeared for me." After discussing how work dominated his life, Asadov shifted to a narrative that highlighted his ability to spread cash around at eating and drinking establishments. (Pp. 530–31)

Asadov's words are indicative of his subscription to the new purpose of life and its valuation scale. When consumption becomes a criteria for evaluating one's worth, then consumption—of whatever is fancied, from the Internet to eating out to drinking alcohol—becomes a factor in identity formation, making one feel "like a man," like a woman, like a human.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ See for some examples the collection of essays in Elliott, Payne, and Ploesch (2007); also Parreñas (2011) and Sahadeo (2011).

⁵⁹ If Cohen and Sirkeci (2011) are correct in asserting that migration is not only about economics but equally about socio-cultural facts, then rural outmigration in Azerbaijan is both a reflection of the advent of the new purpose of life, and a powerful mechanism of perpetuating this idea, transmitting this new purpose of life back to the countryside. Acknowledging a "cultural" aspect of migration—tied to values and desires of the purpose of life as bettering one's own position in this world, and to acquiring the expanded ability to consume—is not accusative. This acknowledgement is a conceptual necessity to understand both, (1) at the micro-level, the dilemmas and moral conundrums faced by the migrants in

Second, another facet of the moral transformation that rural outmigration represents is that entailed in procuring one's livelihood from the market (versus from one's backyard to a significant degree, as a rural livelihood-maker). When migrants enter labor market competition in the city, they are not just under pressure to serve their own interests to first survive. Coming to work in the city for rural migrants from remote villages is simultaneously a process of transforming from semi-subsistence (backyard gardener and dairy) producer to complete consumer.

Robert Reich (2009), a professor of public policy at the University of California–Berkeley, points out that the reconstitution of individuals as consumers in relation to society is in conflict with their role as moral actors in society:

As moral actors, we care about the well-being of our neighbors and our communities. But as consumers we eagerly seek deals that may undermine the living standards of our neighbors and the neighborliness of our communities.

Reich points out that the ensuing moral conflict—which is systemic in a system of consumption—seems to be historically and massively avoided in two ways. First, responsibility for the morally objectionable results of consumerist lifestyles—for ecology and for the lives of people far removed—is popularly assigned to producers and sellers rather than to consumers. (This logic is flawed, Reich points out, because producers and sellers respond to market demand and try to make a profit by cutting costs. Consumers carry an important share of the responsibility for the making of the market society.) Second, the very nature of the modern market mechanism—whereby places of production and consumption are far removed—“compartmentalizes” people's market desires from their moral visions:

host locations, affecting their reaction to the oppressive regime (questioned, imagined, and theorized by Davis 2006; Goonewardena 2012; Liss 2012; Yiftachel 2012; and Harvey 2012); and (2) at the macro-level, how these migrations can play into the establishment and deepening of the global market at large—a role beyond migrant reshaping of urban and rural labor markets.

When we buy from a seller who is the local franchisee of a giant retailer, and that giant retailer obtains the product through a distribution network that gets it from a manufacturer, and that manufacturer assembles specialized components from contractors who employ subcontractors all over the world, the ultimate social consequences of our purchase are so far removed from it that we can easily shield ourselves from moral responsibility. We simply don't see the connection between our consumer choices and, for example, the child laboring in a poor nation or our neighbors losing their jobs and wages. (Reich 2009)

The nature of the market mechanism thus facilitates a dual morality, allowing “us to retain our moral ideals even when our market choices generate outcomes that would otherwise violate them” (Reich 2009). Is this similar to Gramsci's (1971) observations of “the contradictory state of consciousness,” which “does not permit any action, any decision or any choice, and produces a condition of moral and political passivity” (P. 333)⁶⁰?

The process of soul-modification is so essential to the expansion of global marketization that it would be accurate to say that globalization is simultaneously a massive moral transformation—ongoing, contested, not predetermined, where all the power of human choice, individual and collective, is visible to an exploring eye. Rural migration in this context is an undervalued mechanism through which new ideas (about the purpose of human life as profit maximization and comfort seeking) travel to

⁶⁰ Gramsci (1971) wrote:

The active man in the mass has a practical activity, but has no clear theoretical consciousness of his practical activity, which nonetheless involves understanding the world in so far as it transforms it. His theoretical consciousness can indeed be historically in opposition to his activity. One might almost say that he has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness): one which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with his fellow workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and *uncritically absorbed*. But this verbal conception is not without consequences. It holds together a specific social group, it influences moral conduct and the direction of will, with varying efficacy but often powerfully enough to produce a situation in which the contradictory state of consciousness does not permit any action, any decision or any choice, and produces a condition of moral and political passivity. (P. 333, emphasis added)

remote rural areas not yet integrated into the global networks of production and consumption by business and state interests.

Through migrant experiences and stories, people in migrants' natal communities come into contact both with the narratives and effects of the "culture industry" and with the iron fist of market competition for a job. But the means-to-ends-oriented market-rationality-shaped behaviour of the migrants in their natal communities is also an intimate channel through which the new moral vision of human life is communicated to locales and their inhabitants living with different consolidated worldviews. This process is an arena of contestation, as noted by two migration experts from the distinct disciplines of anthropology and geography:

Transnational migration brings global economic ideas to rural communities, and the impact of these ideas and ideals is not simple . . .

Socially, transnational migration reorganizes sending communities and introduces debates over the meaning of tradition. Movers do not leave, but rather rethink and redefine their roles, and nonmigrants or nonmovers may not be particularly supportive. (Cohen and Sirkeci 2011:8)

Some ways in which this happens are demonstrated through two ethnographic examples below.

New Values about Human's Role in Life Travel to the Countryside through Migrants

It is a hot and humid summer day in a Lenkeran village. There are seven cars, including three SUVs, parked in front of one of the houses. A passerby would notice much hassle and noise here. Women in colourful dresses hold large trays carefully covered with shiny wrapping paper and secured with red bows. A woman in her 40s in a floral dress instructs the crowd to give way. A plastic crib, fully assembled, is loaded into one of the cars by two men. The procession is heading to another house in the

same village to give the presents in the trays and the crib to a young couple who have had their first baby. These are gifts from the young wife's family delivered according to a local tradition literally called *beshik aparmaq*—"taking the crib."

The overseer of the procession, the woman in the floral dress, happens to be the mother of the young wife. She is back from Russia just for this occasion. Eight years ago she left for Russia to follow her husband with her three daughters. Working difficult manual jobs at first, they eventually managed to open a grocery shop near a renovated large factory. The workers of the factory would buy bread and other needs on their way home from work, and "the business was good." The girls (the oldest being 18 and the youngest 16 at the time of the interview) did all the housework and learned to cook very early. "They did everything, as I was in the shop until late in the evening," the mother confides.

"The shop is mine, completely on my shoulders," she says, both with pride and in a matter-of-fact way. "My husband moved to other business activities and I took over the shop." When the business was good they started visiting Azerbaijan in summer, renovated their family home in the village, and looked into real estate in Baku. Last summer a distant relative, a young army officer stationed in northern Azerbaijan, proposed to their eldest daughter. With both families' agreement the wedding was organized swiftly, gifts to the newlyweds given, and the bride's family returned to Russia to their business. This year the mother with her younger daughters was back to see the baby, and to fulfill the motherly duty of "taking the crib"—providing the young family with baby items and some monetary gift.

"Now I am working on [i.e., finding contacts and negotiating the price for—S.R.] transferring the boy [the young husband] to [a military base in] Baku," the mother says. "My poor girl is left alone in a town with no family around her while he is at work." "I don't have a lot of time here," the mother says. "I have to plan

everything quickly. I had to organize *this* [“taking the crib” ceremony—S.R.] very fast. Got off the plane in Baku with the girls, went home [their Baku apartment], went shopping [for the crib and the gifts], finished in one day and came here.” Relatives in Lenkeran, who are expected to give their own gifts to the young parents, were notified of her visit and the date of the ceremony in advance, by her calling from Russia. A suitable young man from their own distant family wanted to propose to her second daughter at this visit to Lenkeran, but her daughter declined, so the mother has no other wedding and responsibilities during this visit. “I have to go back,” the mother says. “I left everything—merchandise and money—to the sellers in the shop. The business is slow also.” The business is slow because the workers at the factory that her shop serves are “having a hard time themselves. They are deep in credit debt. Many bought flats in the new condos with credit [i.e., mortgage] and now cannot pay it. In the past several months, the situation is very stressful.”

This mother’s sister, herself a mother with two teenage children, has also come from Russia for the crib-taking procession. She will stay longer, though, because in her family the husband, who stayed in Russia, is the only one working. “It is very tough for Azerbaijanians in Russia,⁶¹ but I like it there,” this young woman says. “I have more freedom there than here in the village. I drive. My husband lets me do these things. He is proud of me doing them. Times are very difficult now, it is hard on him. But we will weather through this too.”

Not everyone in the crib procession ceremony is as optimistic. Take two other women who have to make do with income opportunities available in Lenkeran. One has one unmarried son “who is just getting on his two feet.” She grows vegetables in her backyard, has one cow, receives a pension from the state, and has other “kids”

⁶¹ Because of ethnic discrimination, legalities of immigrant residence.

working in Baku. She compares her ways to the others' livelihood strategies: "I could not go to Iran to trade like others do."⁶² You have to be able to verbally stand up to border officials, police, customs officers. I am not that kind of a woman." The other woman's husband does not have anybody in Russia who would host him, and "is not the kind who can take/give bribes and make money here." He has rented out half of his backyard to a cellular company to install its receiver for a yearly payment of 1,000 USD.

Gatherings like this crib-taking are a big expense for each of these families, as they are expected to contribute gifts in a "becoming" way. But participation in *xeyir-sher*—literally, "the good and the bad" events of life, in weddings as well as in funerals—is important. I am told: "*Xeyir-sherden qalmaq olmaz*"—"you can't stay outside of the good and the bad." You cannot cut ties with relatives and community. This woman hopes that when her teenage sons grow, the relatives in Russia will not forget about their education.

The stories shared during this baby shower example carry signs of the changing nature of tradition in the relationship of émigrés with their relatives back in the village. Traditional principles of reciprocity among relations put pressure on stay-behind relatives, for whom it is hard to reciprocate in an honourable, face-saving way with cash. The contributions of the émigrés to the relationship are expressed in cash or commodity form. Non-moving relatives' in-kind and manual labor contributions to the relationship are devalued in the capitalocentric valuation prism of the émigrés to Russia. Non-moving relatives feel inadequate from not fulfilling, not being acknowledged as fulfilling, the traditional reciprocity in family obligations. In this feeling they border on accepting capitalocentrism themselves. The more that people

⁶² Going to Iran to bring goods to sell in Lenkeran town is common in this village's vicinity. This petty trade is dominated by women.

around the poorer non-movers view the value of gifts in capitalocentric terms, the more the non-moving relative is viewed as inadequately fulfilling honourable reciprocity obligations, and the more social pressure she experiences to reciprocate properly or accept inadequacy as a relation—all based on capitalocentric valuation. In the process, many non-movers accept a capitalocentric valuation of things, labor, and life. The non-movers' resentment of the inequality of material abilities—a personal, inward-oriented resentment—is a manifestation of the acceptance of capitalocentrism, as well as of the belief that one's wealth is a product of one's own ability and industriousness. Under the pressures of others with capitalocentric valuation criteria, poorer non-mover relatives are paralyzed between the message that they are inadequate and the feeling that the ongoing application of reciprocity is different from the past, and unjust. Indeed, something is different about the ongoing application of reciprocity—ongoing is a fundamental reinterpretation of the tradition. The poor non-mover is feeling both the social disciplining effects of the new interpretation and the disconnect between the new practice of tradition and the old, when honour and responsibility depended on reciprocating in family relations in a socioeconomically much more egalitarian context.

Here is another example. The families who own a cow in the proximity of Lenkeran town know. Most days of the week a truck with the letters “PAL SUD” (PAL MILK) printed on it stops by their gates to buy the day's milk for about 20 cents per liter. The milk is then taken to PAL SUD's dairy processing factory in the region. The price PAL SUD offers is about 30 percent less than the price per litre at Lenkeran town's “bazaar.” But most families do not have the time and transportation to take a few pails of extra milk to the bazaar every day. In this context, PAL SUD views itself as doing Lenkerani villagers a favour by providing them with a sale outlet right at their own door. According to many villagers, however, no one is doing anyone a favour;

PAL SUD is getting value nested in the villagers' inability to get that extra value using their own resources.

PAL SUD is one branch of the PALMALI Group of Companies based in Turkey. PALMALI is actually a ship construction and management company. Today, with over 120 ships, it is one of the five largest flotillas in the world. The PALMALI group comprises tens of companies, including a news company, hotels, and more in Turkey. But what does a Turkish shipbuilding giant have to do with door-to-door milk purchases in rural Lenkeran?

The founder of the PALMALI Group, Mubariz Mansimov, is originally from the Lenkeran-Masalli area. A young Azerbaijani émigré to Turkey in the 1990s, he registered PALMALI in Istanbul in 1998, and was able to secure investments in his business. Focusing on oil tankers, PALMALI successfully competed with major shipping companies operating in the Caspian Sea, the Black Sea, the Mediterranean, and the Baltic and the North seas. It secured its position as “one of the principal carriers of liquid hydrocarbons and of general cargoes going via landlocked waterways of Russia” (Azerbaijan Business Center report, http://www.abc.az/eng/b2b/category_59/238.html).

In 2002, PALMALI registered in Azerbaijan. PAL SUD was registered in 2008, together with PALDAD—an ice cream plant also located in Lenkeran. Mansimov also invested in Lenkeran's soccer club, re-built the sea port of Lenkeran, undertook a number of charity activities across Azerbaijan, and allocated funds to aid all Azerbaijanian students in Turkey. But if Mansimov views his dairy business in Lenkeran as a charity, the milk sellers to his company do *not*. With all due respect to Mansimov's spending on the soccer club, sea port, and student fund, the milk sellers view Mansimov as business-minded first, someone whose milk purchase policies are not a charity. (They would be if the milk was not purchased for below-market prices at

the door.) Mansimov is the epitome of new thinking, separating personal attachment from work, keeping charity separate from business, even if business is done with those many times poorer. This is not so much a negative phenomenon for the milk sellers as it is a new phenomenon. The appropriateness of this new approach, ethically, is one subject of discussion among the milk sellers over glasses of tea on quiet afternoons.

Mansimov is just one of the most wealthy, famous, and charitable examples of émigré reinvestment in Azerbaijan. According to local executive government officers in Shamakhy, since 2003 many of the migrants from Shamakhy have returned to open businesses in towns and villages, which provide jobs to the migrants' relatives and others. Besides being a boost to rural economic life, migrants' involvement in their natal communities—whether or not in the form of investments—is an important channel through which the market mindset travels to the rural areas, where market competition does not travel so much as livelihoods are to an important degree based on subsistence production. Rural villagers encounter the manifestations of the new profit-maximizing mindset in personal and business relationships with the émigrés and urban migrants. In these contacts the migrants act and speak from the position of power granted by their access to cash income and freedom from communal obligations for livelihood-making. The relationships are based on “asymmetrical power,” to borrow a term from Reddy (1987). The unavoidable part of such encounters—the scrutiny and evaluation of the new outlook and profit-oriented priorities by non-movers—takes place in this context of asymmetrical power relationships, where migrants' “making it” is presented as the proof that the new mindset indeed “works,” is what the age demands. This scrutiny and evaluation of the existing values of life and related ways of thought from the contact with émigrés and migrants are processes of tension with much conflict and no pre-defined outcome, as Cohen and Sirkeci (2011) have pointed out.

In these ways, rural migration is a channel through which ideas about the rules of the market, and the purpose of human life as self-service, enter remote rural communities through the “meso-level”—the “social universe” (Cohen and Sirkeci 2011)—and suggest themselves as the right attitudes about life and living, backed by the power and authority of money, sometimes prior to the actual establishment of market institutions there, laying the ground for these very institutions.

Conclusion

Someone said during an interview, “*Chorek haradan chixirsa veten oradir*”—“The motherland is where your bread (income) is earned.” This was just a repetition of what has become a common saying in Azerbaijan. But this saying deserves elaboration, as it symbolizes a key mindset change in post-Soviet Azerbaijan.

The word “citizen” (*vetendash*) derives from the root word of “motherland” (*veten*) in the Azeri language. “Motherland” has always implied a state–citizen, community–individual relationship model. In Soviet school textbooks, stories placed on children a host of responsibilities, *veten*, towards the motherland—from cleanliness and environmentalism through civic participation to improving the economy, ensuring the prosperity of the land, and protecting it in wartime.⁶³ The reason for the responsibilities before the spatially bound *veten*—motherland was concretized. It was expressed in the famous Azeri poet Abbas Sahhat’s renowned lines, written nearly 100 years ago, and in the Soviet period, printed on the first page of first-grade alphabet books and memorized in schools:

Vetenim Verdi mene nanu-nemek, My Motherland has given me bread,

⁶³ In some ways the Soviet-era usage of the term “motherland,” *veten*, was similar to the romanticized English usage of “community” to which an individual is seen as owing responsibilities.

Veteni unutmaq mence ne demek?! What does it mean (how unacceptable it is) to forget Motherland?!

When the motherland “gave bread,” its owner took care of it, improved it, fought for it. Now, in post-Soviet Azerbaijan, if the motherland did not give “bread” (the desired level of life from production for the market), how did this change the expectations from the owner, “*vetendash*,” the citizen? The new saying in post-Soviet Azerbaijan expressed by my interviewee, “*Chorek haradan chixirsa ora vetendir*”—“Motherland is where your bread (income) is earned”—was a self-proclaimed abandonment of responsibilities towards the land. It symbolized an abandonment of interest in the affairs of the land and community that ceased to “give bread,” that could not provide livelihoods.

Ironically, the places where the “bread” is earned, the hosting locales, do not become a true motherland with which the rural outmigrants are in a give-and-take community relationship. In fact, the migrants’ embracing of the host locale as a true community to which they have rights and towards which they have obligations as citizens and residents is systematically discouraged.

Crucial, however, is the need for an expression *to come to terms with* the responsibility towards a place, so engrained in Soviet discourse. The popularity of this saying represents the massive nature of the attempt to *come to terms with* the discrepancy of what one ought to do (in relationship to community) and what one is in fact doing. Unfortunately, the redefinition signifies the assertion of a consumerist relationship with land/homeland, whereas responsibility to a place—natural surroundings, hometown, village—is seen as dependent on one’s ability to continuously extract material income from that place.

With this saying, the responsibility towards the social-ecological well-being of the natal community is dismissed. The citizenship responsibility to the place that does

provide material income, on the other hand, is discouraged/curbed by the institutions of legal and political control, so the migrant says. In this way, the migrant may make moral peace with not taking responsibility. Yet this need to make peace gives her or him up: the migrant is a human, a fundamentally moral being, whose nature is not selfish, but designed for responsibility towards others. It is because of this nature that the culture industry cannot “take a vacation” and is in constant need of shaping moral preferences, while the surveillance institutions must continuously keep their check on a system based on moral irresponsibility and carelessness, if they are to continue to exist.

This is also why questioning and dissecting the ways in which individuals, communities, and masses *come to terms with* the new role assigned to human beings is so important—global marketization fundamentally rests/depends on these historical coming to terms.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

In “Engaging the global countryside: globalization, hybridity and the reconstitution of rural place”, projecting the globalization processes forward, Woods (2007:492-494) discerns 10 characteristics of the ‘global countryside’ in the time to come:

1. Distancing of consumption from production, dependency of primary and secondary sector economic activity on elongated commodity networks;
2. Transnational corporate concentration and integration;
3. Both supplier and employer of migrant labor;
4. Increasing globalization of rural resorts;
5. Increasing “non-national property investment, for both commercial and residential purposes”;
6. Commodification of nature, “finding new opportunities for the commercial exploitation of natural resources”;
7. “Inscription of the global countryside with the marks of globalization”: “the large-scale destruction of the primary forest, planting of the secondary commercial forest and the expansion of pastoral farming and scrubland, the opening of new oilfields and mines, the introduction of more commercially

attractive crop varieties, and the proliferation of the symbols of global consumer culture in the environment of small towns”;

8. Social polarization of rural communities;
9. Increasing perception among “the residents of the global countryside that political authority has been scaled up beyond their reach”;
10. Constant contestation of the global countryside.

Woods pointed out that,

“[T]here are no rural localities that can be labeled at present as ‘global countryside’ in quite the same way as London and New York are described as ‘global cities’. Yet, it is possible to anticipate the characteristics of this imagined space by projecting forward actually existing globalization processes and, in doing so, to create a framework for identifying the partial articulation of the ‘global countryside’ in real, present-day rural localities” (2007:492).

My reader will recognize some of the above characteristics of the ‘global countryside’ developing in the post-Soviet transformation of rural Azerbaijan: separation of consumption from production (as more and more rural laborers relied on wages for subsistence), dependence on migration, introduction of rural resorts, commodification of nature, spread of the symbols of global consumer culture, and social polarization. What this case study suggests, however, is the inseparability of these processes from the massive moral transformation of rural communities and individuals.

In his article “The Subject and Power,” the French philosopher and social scientist Michel Foucault (1982) observed that the modern state and social institutions, carrying out historically unforeseen scales of individualization and totalization, wield disciplining power similar to the “pastoral power” exerted over Europe’s populations for centuries, “over a millennium”: this power “implies a knowledge of the conscience and an ability to direct it”(Pp. 783–85). With the diminishing role of the religious institutions in the organization of social life after the Enlightenment, pastoral power has not disappeared, argued Foucault (1982), but has changed form and “spread out into the whole social body” and “found support in a multitude of institutions” (P. 784). Now, however, it offered “salvation” not in the next world, but

rather ensuring it in this world. And in this context, the world “salvation” takes on different meanings: health, well-being (that is sufficient wealth, standard of living), security, protection against accidents. (Foucault 1982:784)

Modernity had eliminated religion from the organization of the state and social life, but not from the search for a purpose in human life. Instead, we have observed the historical rise of the new direction and mechanisms addressing, channeling, routing the universal human ability to make connection between things, relating our lives and choices to those around us, to the ideas and ideals of what ought to be.

The problem with the “globalization story”-type studies is not that they paint an overpowering picture of social structures that rule the world. Rather, this conceptual overpowering of structures takes place—and the historical link between structures and agents is lost from view—when human beings are regarded as primarily material beings, rather than as profoundly moral beings within a given historical context. This is an approach that E. P. Thompson warned against in “The Moral

Economy of the English Crowd” (1971), arguing that it would result in historical reification.⁶⁴

The market system and its materially successful⁶⁵ history carries with it a belief not only in the supremacy of the market of organization if unhindered by the state (Polanyi 1944/2001). Rather, the belief that the market is the best of social organizations itself rests on a set of beliefs about the purpose and role of a human in community and society. In post-Soviet rural Azerbaijan, spreading the belief that a human’s purpose during lifetime is simply to enjoy material comforts has furthered the market system as much as market institutions, specifically labor market competition, have furthered self-oriented profit maximization.

Human Choice and the History of the Expanding Global Market

The peculiar thing about beliefs is that they cannot be imposed. They can only be suggested, their outward manifestation supported or disciplined; yet the beliefs themselves ultimately have to be accepted by the living “subjects” of history to give power and legitimacy to a given social order. “Subjects”—people—can be bathed/immersed in historical convictions about an individual’s purpose in and relationship with community, through education, broader socialization, life experiences; yet external forces’ ability to “rule” over individual convictions is not the same as social institutions’ ability to physically constrain a body. In this fact lies the

⁶⁴ Thompson based his argument on his analysis of the food riots in 18th-century industrializing England, demonstrating how these were less about looting for consumption than about reacting to the violations of the established notions and beliefs about legitimate economic practices *within an agreed-upon, consensual model of individual–community relationship*. Millers’, bakers’, and middlemen’s profit-maximizing behaviour at times of dearth became a target of popular attacks, because this behaviour contradicted the established, legitimate notions of individual–community relationship: the millers and bakers were supposed/expected to serve the community, not use the community for individual profit maximization.

⁶⁵ Success here defined very narrowly as technological advances.

essential openness of history, the possibility for variations and social change.⁶⁶ Indeed, the view of the world history as built by “real, living individuals”—a view laid out by Marx, according to Derek Sayer (1987:83–112)—can only be held if we conceptually allow living individuals the freedom to choose their beliefs and to act on them.

The conciliation of the term historical “freedom of human choice” with critical social science—where it raises bitter responses—is necessary. The role of human choice in history has been a porous, vulnerable aspect of critical social theory. Arguing against rational choice theory, critical social theorists have committed to illuminating the ways in which the social conditions the individual. Yet, the commitment to rescuing humanism, the historicity of human “nature,” from rational choice theory’s assertions of homogenizing, innate, “natural” selfishness has been a challenging terrain on which to maintain the real historicity of human dispositions, the dialectical relations between historical human choices and the social context in which they were made, and which they in turn make. There is a fine line between studying how social structures suggest human choices and asserting that these structures define

⁶⁶ Nested in this freedom of choice is also the seeming separation between the unifying, “law-like” characteristics of a social order and the observed freedom/fluidity/relative autonomy of the “thought-world” and “life-world,” a contradiction occupying critical theorists of social structures. In *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographic Development* (2006), Harvey noted that such separation in the theoretical works of Frankfurt school scholar Jürgen Habermas was an effort to allow for the freedom of human predispositions within the confines of social structures:

Habermas turns to Husserl’s concept of “the lifeworld” understood as that sphere of both non-human and human thought and action outside of the economic, technical and bureaucratic rationality given in the concepts of capital and the state. In Habermas’s case, there is a manifest desire to retain a humanism in which personal passions and concerns, individual moral and aesthetic judgements, communicative ethics and dialogue carry their own distinctive and autonomous meanings. Formulations of this type guard a space against the overwhelming power of “capital logic” theory and the seemingly anti-humanistic stance which that logic dictates. (Pp. 81–82)

Sympathetic to the aims, Harvey (2006) nevertheless criticized the conceptualization urging that the “enquiry must center on the dialectical relations between abstractions and concrete events” (P. 82).

human choices.⁶⁷ The distinction is crucial, and arguments approaching the latter stance risk closing off the theoretical space for transformative action and social change, infusing the theories themselves with logical and political contradictions. One such assertion is that “Human predispositions are products of these individuals’ place in social hierarchy,” which has probably found most explicit expression in the works of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, an ardent critic of rational choice theory himself. But human dispositions are not simply a product of individuals’ place in social hierarchy, even if life activities associated with that position can be taken to mean the lens through which one makes sense of the world. From a middle-class entrepreneurial background can come both an individual who committed his life to arguing that market institutions endanger the natural and human substance of society (Polanyi) and an individual who believed unhindered markets to be the panacea for a nation’s ills and who committed all her powers to deregulating market institutions and restoring the power of the “captains’ of industry and finance” in the nation, even if this meant crushing the autonomy of a nation’s municipalities (Thatcher, as described by Harvey 2006).

The uneasiness with seriously and critically probing into human choice in the historical making of the global market does a disservice to the transforming potential of the studies of globalization.

Accepting the role of human choice in the mass acceptance of market ideology, carrying a particular—selfish—view of the purpose and role of an individual in society, is not an embarrassing hint at the inevitable ugly truth of human character.⁶⁸ It

⁶⁷ The latter may seem (only seem) true where principal tenets of an established order exist with legitimacy.

⁶⁸ If anything could be argued to characterize human “nature,” that would have been its propensity for compassion, persistent examples of which in our times—of human society’s deepening immersion in the globalizing culture industry’s messages of “serve yourself”—are nothing short of miraculous.

is an invitation to study the appeals and tactics with which market logic can be chosen/subscribed to as a guide for individual action, the effects of such a subscription for communal cohesion and collective resistance.

Human choices at all levels of social hierarchy have a bearing on how a society turns out. These choices are suggested—powerfully, but still only suggested, not defined, determined—by the historical social norms. A useful prism reflecting the totality of these norms is not particular food habits, dress, ethnic design, or reciprocity arrangements, but the underlying idea of the purpose of human life, and a human's role in and responsibility to her surroundings—nature and community. Indeed, these later conceptions in a society shape exhibitions of art, culture, and food.

The troubling duality/multiplicity of the globalizing market—its simultaneous homogenization and differentiation—reflects the spread of a particular view of the purpose of human life in relation to social and natural surroundings. Historical differentiations represent different ways of reinterpreting tradition and coming to terms with the newly suggested model of human purpose and the human's role. While varying manifestations represent different ways of coming to terms, the homogeneity, regrettably, represents *coming to terms*, making peace, with the new role of a human being in life: under the facade of different manifestations is a homogenization of the idea of human priorities as profit maximization and comfort seeking, best served by market institutions. Thus, reciprocity relations in a Lenkeran village continue, but their meaning for individuals and their role in the communal cohesion have dramatically changed. Or, for example, Islamic finance institutions springing up from Iran to the United Arab Emirates seem a continuation of a century-long tradition, are in essence far removed from the tenets of financial help in historical Muslim practice and in effect provide ways of reconciling one's verbal commitment to a Muslim economy while investing in a capitalist economy. The examples of historical coming to terms

with the traditional moral commitments and the morality of the human purpose as serving self through market mechanisms are rife with conflicts. Resting on fundamentally different notions of the individual–community relationship, inherited moral commitments and market morality cannot in essence be reconciled.

The global market-based system has been noted for its inherent contradictions, in very different ways by Polanyi (1944/2001) and Harvey (2003). Another contradiction that the spread of this system carries could be the moral-conceptual conflict experienced on a massive scale with populations' subscription to the idea that serving self—searching for material comforts first and even at the detriment of others—is a legitimate goal of life, while the responsibility to community and natural surroundings is secondary, marginal, a hobby or charity. This conflict may be critical to the reproduction and deepening of the market institutions globally as it paralyzes people, putting them in the state of “moral and political passivity” that Gramsci mentioned, turning “people” into “masses” manipulated in the manner described in much of the globalization theory.

Where Do We Go from Here?

It may be that the resistance to globalization requires seriously acknowledging and addressing the moral, individual support of the system that has currently acquired mass character. Necessary also are theoretical and ethical discussions of the purpose of human life and the human relationship to nature and community, some form of general guidelines for the discussions of these—as a part of the “meaningful mechanisms of social solidarity” that Harvey (2011) urged us to construct. Lack of these will leave mental and moral spaces to be filled with the visions that neoliberalism and market society supplies, perpetuating the passivity that Gramsci observed.

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