

BEYOND THE KARABAKH CONFLICT: The Story of Village Exchange

Sevil Huseynova, Arsen Hakobyan, Sergey Rumyantsev

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BEYOND THE KARABAKH CONFLICT: The Story of Village Exchange

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CONTENTS

FROM THE PUBLISHER	7
PREFACE	9
CHAPTER 1. DANGER AT THE DOOR	13
CHAPTER 2. CIVIL SELF-DEFENSE	23
CHAPTER 3. THE IDEA OF A VILLAGE EXCHANGE	44
CHAPTER 4. CIVIL AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE COMMUNES	63
CHAPTER 5. THE EXCHANGE	74
CHAPTER 6. LEADERS AND ORCHESTRATORS OF THE EXCHANGE	92
CHAPTER 7. THE EXCHANGE: CO-RESIDENCE	110
CHAPTER 8. LIVING IN A NEW PLACE	126
CHAPTER 9. MOTHERLAND, MOTHERLAND!	158
CONCLUSION	173

FROM THE PUBLISHER

In the second half of the 1980s, with the beginning of the Armenian-Azerbaijani military escalation in Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijani residents of Kyzyl-Shafag, a village in northern Armenia, and Armenian residents of Kerkenj, a village in central Azerbaijan, met through their own initiative to negotiate a peaceful exchange of their villages.

On the one hand, that decision was a painful result of the ethno-political tension created by nationalists on both sides who sought to exile representatives of the “enemy ethnos” from their countries. On the other hand, however, without any support or interference from any political authorities, the wine growers of Kerkenj and the mountain people of Kyzyl-Shafag demonstrated great responsibility in enabling both parties to overcome the crisis in a peaceful, dignified way, thus setting a powerful example for civic interethnic cooperation in the midst of political conflict.

Agreements between Armenians and Azerbaijanis to exchange houses and property and take care of family graves have remained valid despite all the horrors of the Karabakh conflict. This is just one important aspect of an impressive but largely suppressed story of the past twenty years that the Caucasus can tell.

Almost two decades after the village exchange occurred, young sociologists and anthropologists from Armenia and Azerbaijan joined as a part of a working group, supported by the Heinrich Boell Foundation’s South Caucasus Regional Scholarship Program. They sought to document this story in as much detail as possible, taking into consideration viewpoints of both sides.

Perhaps when pitching the idea for the project, our fellows did not realize that they themselves were creating a new example of interethnic cooperation at the time of political crisis. Though on a different level and in another context, with far fewer personal consequences, what the authors say about Kerkenj and Kyzyl-Shafag residents in the preface applies to themselves as well:

“The project ... conducted during the ... conflict demanded that all of the participants demonstrated a high level of courage, team spirit, ability to withstand provocations, controlled emotions, and most importantly, see the other party also as victims of the situation, the same as themselves, not as enemies with

whom no dialogue was possible... This first and foremost required peaceful contact between representatives of both sides.”

Over the past twenty years the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has further widened the gap between Armenian and Azerbaijani societies. What used to be quite ordinary for the “heroes of the story” told in this book – that is, essentially peaceful coexistence with Armenian or Azerbaijani neighbours respectively – is not only a tale of the remote past for representatives of the younger generation on both sides, but also something that is frequently claimed to be politically and culturally impossible, and thus undesired.

Cooperating beyond hermetically sealed state borders requires courage in itself. Mutual understanding within the joint project calls for much patience, flexibility, and willingness to compromise. The authors of this book live and operate in societies that have completely opposite narratives of anything related to the Karabakh conflict, which also impacts the views promoted in academic environments. Even the smallest details of wording in each publication present a potential cause for conflict.

We are glad that our fellows have gone the distance and completed this challenging journey, thereby demonstrating their professional and personal maturity. We hope that this example will inspire other young scholars in the South Caucasus who will be able to study history and contemporary society out of the bounds of political and ethnic categories and regardless of state borders.

Heinrich Boell Foundation
South Caucasus Regional Office

PREFACE

“We managed to part ways without a war” – this is the leit-motif of a variety of politicians’ statements, claiming to one extent or another to have actively participated in the processes preceding the disintegration of the USSR. While from the perspective of the South Caucasus republics such claims appear more than arguable¹, nevertheless, the information collected as part of the research project that forms the basis of this book concerns just the example of successful conflict resolution. Truth be told, politicians and government officials cannot be credited with the success of this undertaking, as it is rather the result of a civic initiative that took place within the process of ethnic separation during the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict.

Many specialists attempt to analyze the specifics of the processes of *ethnic separation* related to the dissolution of the previously unitary political space and establishment of nation states in former Soviet republics. On the one hand, we find Rogers Brubaker’s point of view to be relevant.² He proposes to review the practice of processes of *ethnic separation* in post-Soviet countries as *post-imperial* and places this case in the broader context of earlier collapsed political formations, such as the Ottoman Empire or the Austro-Hungarian Empire. All in all, Brubaker says that after the collapse of the USSR, much as after the collapse of other empires at the end of the World War I, the “national principle was applied with unrelenting rigor at that time by way of relocating groups of people”³.

However, Brubaker’s macro-model cannot and should not take into consideration all particular characteristics of the array of practices that have been used in the processes of forced ethnic separation. We have analyzed the specific case of residents of two communities exchanging villages as an example

¹ This is the case of different perspectives, foreseen by Raymond Aron when he said “perhaps to historians of the future, it will seem that in the global diplomatic space, the absence of a big war equals big peace” (Aron R., *The History of the 20th century: The Anthology*. Moscow: Ladomir, 2007, p. 68). However, to both historians and ordinary people of the small nation states in the South Caucasus, local wars are quite large-scale in the sense of their effect on these communities.

² Brubaker, R. *Myths and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationalism*. Available at [http:// abimperio.net/scgi-bin/aishow.pl ?state=showa&idart=576&idlang =2&Code=](http://abimperio.net/scgi-bin/aishow.pl?state=showa&idart=576&idlang=2&Code=)

³ Aron R., *ibid*, p. 27.

of a civic initiative which thus escapes the horrors of forcible deportation and its possible outcomes: the loss of property and threat to their lives. Naturally we understand that the very emergence of the necessity of such an initiative was caused by the kindling conflict that determined the day-to-day life of the Armenian and Azerbaijani village residents, the course of which they were not able to control. At the same time, in the environment of the rapid deterioration of the Soviet regime and emergence of the new power – that of the national movement, the village residents had several options as to how to resolve the situation. The decision they reached gave them hope for preserving the unity and integrity of their communities and, to the extent possible, their property as well.

It must be understood that it was very difficult to come to that collective decision, and even more difficult to implement it. The project of village exchange, conducted during the ever-escalating conflict, demanded that all of the participants demonstrated a high level of courage, team spirit, ability to withstand provocations, controlled emotions, and most importantly, see the other party also as victims of the situation, same as themselves, not as enemies with whom no dialogue was possible. Both parties involved in the future exchange were taken hostage by the confrontation, which was stoked by politicians. However, when they refused to take their cue from the circumstances and short-sighted decisions of government officials and politicians, they managed to find a dignified way out of this most complex situation in which they happened to get involved due to the force of circumstances. This first of all required peaceful contact between representatives of both communities – the Azerbaijani from the village of Kyzyl-Shafag and Armenians from the village of Kerkenj. Two parties, the Azerbaijani and Armenian rural communes or, in other words, representatives of two sides of the escalating interethnic conflict, as it had by that time become common to call them, entered into a civil agreement with each other. That agreement was arranged and carried out practically without any support from the authorities, but rather in spite of the authorities. This civil agreement has retained its validity to this day.

This publication documents the results of the research project conducted by Azerbaijani sociologists in Kerkenj (Shamakhi region, Azerbaijan) and Armenian sociologists in the village that at the time of the exchange was called Kyzyl-Shafag (Kalinino district, the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic) and is now renamed the village of Dzunashogh (Lori Marz, Armenia). The research

project was conducted in 2006-2007 with the assistance of the South Caucasus Regional Office of the Heinrich Boell Foundation.

The civil agreement between the Azerbaijani community of Kyzyl-Shafag and the Armenian community of Kerkenj was in development throughout the first months of 1989, until April. The main idea of the agreement was that the two communes would peacefully and collectively swap their villages. This was realized mainly in May-July of 1989. One of the most important terms of the agreement was to preserve the integrity of cemeteries – the Azerbaijani cemetery in Kyzyl-Shafag and Armenian cemetery in Kerkenj. This condition is still being honoured.

The goal to maintain the unity of each of the communes in the situation under analysis has been achieved successfully, to varying degrees. For Azerbaijani residents of Kyzyl-Shafag, two thirds of whom would later move to Baku and other cities in Azerbaijan (and several families would emigrate to Russia), the density of settlement in Kerkenj still remains. With the exception of a few families, the present-day population of Kerkenj is almost fully comprised of former Kyzyl-Shafag residents, and the village itself serves as a small “motherland” for the whole community.

There are currently about 240 people in the village of Dzunashogh in Armenia (80 households in total, out of which over 10 families are from Kerkenj). Former Kerkenj residents have big families. In recent years local Armenians from the neighbouring village of Metsvan have relocated to Dzunashogh, driven by social and economic factors. Armenian refugees from Baku and other villages of Shamakhi region live there as well. Much like former Kerkenj residents, they settled here in early 1989. In addition, many Armenian migrants from Yerevan and Georgia live there. In 1992-1993, former Kerkenj residents started to rather actively leave the village. Their migration was caused by various economic and social issues as well as the energy and food crises that were unfolding in the republic during that time. Most former Kerkenj residents left for the Ciscaucasian town of Georgiyevsk (Stavropol Krai, the Russian Federation).

The project of the peaceful village exchange, in the environment of forced exodus, was developed in the course of democratic discussions of the ways to deal with the situation, with the participation of practically all residents of the villages. The decision to swap villages, the prolonged search for the village most suitable for the exchange, conducting the civil agreement, creating a committee to perform preliminary evaluation of the houses – all of these collective activities

were carried out with the consent and active participation of all the members of both communes. They were also complemented by individual agreements made between the families who actually swapped houses.

Before we proceed with the detailed story of the village exchange, we should say a few words about the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which started in 1988 and served as the catalyst for the events in question. The conflict has resulted in the practically complete ethnic separation of the population. Hundreds of thousands of people from both sides have become refugees.

Military clashes that would later ignite into war began on the eve of the collapse of the USSR. In May 1994 in Bishkek, representatives of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh (which according to that document constituted the parties involved in the conflict) signed a ceasefire agreement. This protocol is still in effect and the current situation can be characterized as “neither peace, nor war.”

It should be noted that the sequence of chapters in this book does not closely follow the chain of events. Each chapter presents two separate versions of the events, from the viewpoint of Armenian and Azerbaijani researchers respectively. Each party participating in the project bears responsibility only for their own part of the text and may have a point of view different from that of the other author. Sevil Huseynova and Sergey Rummyantsev analyzed and narrated information regarding the Azerbaijani residents of Kyzyl-Shafag who now live in the Azerbaijani village of Kerkenj. Arsen Hakobyan is the author of those sections that describe the events from the viewpoint of the Armenian community of the Kerkenj village who currently reside in the village of Dzunashogh (Kyzyl-Shafag) in Armenia.

The book tells the story of how and in which context the project of the village exchange developed, as well as the twists and turns of its implementation. Based on the analysis of their field research data, the authors draw their own conclusions regarding the results of this exchange. They also describe the current state of affairs in the communes and the effects that the exchange has had on the communities' existence. Finally, the authors record Kyzyl-Shafag and Kerkenj residents' reminiscences of the homelands that they have left behind.

CHAPTER 1

DANGER AT THE DOOR

S. Huseynova, S. Rumyantsev

1.1. “The situation was getting more and more difficult”

Over the years a resident of Kyzyl-Shafag who has settled in Kerkenj comes to regard the idea of the village exchange as simple and comprehensible. When the troublesome times came, the “director of our state farm, Bayram-mu`allim, our Aqsaqals, our elders [gathered]. They advised us that it would be better if we were to gather together in one place” (Zakhid-kishi, 58 years old)¹. Later on the village of Kerkenj in the Shamakhi region of Azerbaijan became that place. The exchange, however, was preceded by a great deal of rather significant events that forced Kyzyl-Shafag residents to abandon their native village. Not just the exchange itself but also the process of reaching the collective decision about joint relocation continued for quite some time and required participation of every member of the communes.

The situation in the region had started to heat up long before the residents became aware of the inevitability of their exodus from their native village and before they had the idea to exchange villages. As an informant now recalls, in early 1988² a villager by the name of Aly-kishi passed the Armenian village of Shakhnazar by car on his way to work when he heard his Armenian companion ask, “Aren’t you afraid to go to the district?” He was greatly surprised by that question. “I said, ‘Why should I be afraid, when I just returned from there yesterday? What happened, what should I be afraid of?’ I mean I had absolutely no clue as to what was going on. And he told us, ‘You ought not to have gone to the district. They can hurt you there.’” Even now when he reminisces about

¹ In this text we are keeping the honourifics used in everyday language. Kishi, mu`allim – for a man, khanum – for a woman.

² It should be noted that according to the memoirs of the Kyzyl-Shafag state farm director Bayram Allazov, mass protests demanding that the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast be annexed to the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic started in Kalinino district of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic in late October – early November 1988.

that time it seems to him, as it does to many other villagers, that everything happened as if completely out of the blue.

“So, we are driving around the town, well, the district [center Kalinino], well, it was called the town, and it is situated on such flat ground that one can see, e-eh, a lot from afar, like from here to Baku, it is flat on all sides. So we see that the people are worked up about something, people are gathering and they are yelling and shouting, ‘Mer Karabakh, Mer Karabakh, Mer Karabakh’, which means, ‘Karabakh is ours’” (Aly-kishi, 72 years old).

Still, despite all those unordinary events, in those first months nobody could have foreseen that eventually it would become simply impossible to go on living in Armenia.

In fact it is only natural that Kyzyl-Shafag residents’ recollections of those early days of the conflict do not paint a unitary picture of how the confrontation unfolded. As one resident remembers,

“Everything began there (in Kalinino, the district center)...with meetings in our district. And then...it started...<> They already began to force people out. Well, our village was almost the last to be relocated. <> We just kept hanging in there, holding on, and so we were practically the last ones to go” (Nasib, 45 years old).

While in this case the whole situation is remembered as being influenced by these events occurring in some remote locations, many other villagers remember this differently. Much more often they have memories of personal clashes with formerly good neighbours, who suddenly changed their behavior.

“I went to the district, before this whole refugees business. Who would have thought [that one could get into a sticky situation]? There I see people with slogans on placards, chanting ‘Karabakh, Karabakh!’ How was that possible? And then the cars from our state farm went into the neighbouring state farm to get some livestock feed. They were blocked when passing through the Armenian village. Our drivers were beaten up. There was the District Party Committee there... Saakyan was his name or something like that, he came, he tried to prevent the whole thing somehow. I said, ‘Okay, here is what you are saying, and what is Yerevan saying?’ Well, the conflict started to enflame, and then it came to



Photograph 1. Mamed-kishi in his own house in Kyzyl-Shafag (the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic) not long before the conflict.

a point that we began to reassign our livestock gradually somewhere else, to sell it” (Suleyman-mu`allim, 75 years old).

This expression – to gradually sell – suggests that Kyzyl-Shafag residents also slowly realized that the exodus was necessary and inevitable.

Quite frequently the villagers mention in their recollections the names of those who they consider the “inciters” of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. “What was this Armenian writer’s name... Zori Balayan! Yeah, that’s him all right! He is the one to blame; it was the higher-ups who have started it all!” (Aly-kishi, 72 years old). The name of this novelist has already become a sort of marker for the confrontation among the Azerbaijani. Abel Aganbegyan, an economist and academic of the Russian Academy of Sciences, is another familiar social and political activist. One resident references him:

“I came home from school to have lunch, and my wife was not at home. She had gone to the neighbours. The kids were at school. I turned on the radio. Here I am, sitting alone, having lunch. Then all of a sudden I heard that a well-known scientist Aganbegyan had delivered a speech at the Senate in France, in which he stated

that if Nagorno-Karabakh were to be taken from Azerbaijan and returned to Armenia, then the Armenian economy would improve and so on, the quality of life would improve, too. When I heard that I was just pouring myself a cup of tea, and the glass fell out of my hands and broke. I was so worried, how could anything like that be true! <> I have been very nervous since then” (Avdy-mu’allim, 69 years old)¹.

For Kyzyl-Shafag residents, the tipping point came with the events that had led to the death of an old Azerbaijani man. It likely happened on November 23, 1988 in close proximity to the village itself, in the district center of Kalininov². Before that all the events surrounding the escalating Armenian-Azerbaijani confrontation mostly occurred somewhere “over there”, and nobody knew whether accounts of those events were true or just invented out of exaggerated rumors. As long as relations with the closest Armenian neighbours did not undergo any major changes and the Soviet Union still existed, there was hope that the dust would settle.

“No, our relations stayed the same, they remained the way they had always been. There were changes in other regions, in Kirovakan, Leninakan, Yerevan and its satellite city, Ashtarak, in the region of Sevan. Something was going on there; they were saying that people were being killed, but we didn’t see any of it, we can’t talk about that. They were saying that they had put people in a pipe and sealed the ends and things like that. But we didn’t see that, I couldn’t talk about something that wasn’t true and say that similar things were happening here, to us. Just one person was killed in our district, one old man. And that was all. Aside from that, there was nothing out of the ordinary in our village and in the neighboring villages, nothing [was happening]” (Aly-kishi, 72 years old).

However a single murder was already enough to realize that no one could guarantee safety for the Azerbaijani residing in Armenia. That murder happened somewhere too close for comfort; anybody could have been an accidental acquaintance of either the victim or the murderer. The conflict was already there, close to each of them.

¹ The quote refers to the interview that A. G. Aganbegyan, Mikhail Gorbachev’s economic advisor, gave to the French Communist newspaper L’Humanité in Paris in the middle of November 1987. He argued that in the nearest future, the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast must be annexed to the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic. This interview in which Karabakh was mentioned as the “historical Armenian territory” has increased international attention on the issue.

² There is more on the old man’s murder in the next chapter devoted to the self-defense of Kyzyl-Shafag residents.

“After that the situation was getting more and more difficult. Take our Bayram-mu’allim... He stood guard, he stopped... Just like a real combat leader, he stopped them. They threatened him several times – they would call him on the phone, tell him, ‘Get out, you!’ And he would answer, ‘Well, come on, let’s see what you are going to do’” (Suleyman-mu’allim, 75 years old).

The state farm director Bayram Allazov played the key role in the exchange process, and his recollections of the events of those years demand to be told separately. This was the very moment when Kyzyl-Shafag residents became aware of how inevitable their exodus was. The tensions steadily increased. The sense of peril intensified, not in the least because of the lack of reliable information.

“It started with Ağbaba [Azerbaijani name of the Armenian province on the border with Turkey]. People were fleeing from there, then from other Azerbaijani villages. So, this finally reached Kalinino and then... This serious thing started... Well, how should I put this, that thing with Armenians <...> And then we were getting various rumors that Armenians were ready to attack, for instance on such and such date Armenians would attack such and such village at night; they would kill people” (Gyulshan-khanum, 52 years old).

Nobody knew what was going on. The villagers saw refugees from other Azerbaijani villages, and that sight brought on unhappy thoughts about their own destiny.

“People from Ağbaba and other villages in Azerbaijan passed through our village. I was thinking to myself, where were they going? Where were they going as I was shepherding the sheep in the field? I saw them hauling a chiffonier, a table, other stuff with them” (Veysal-kishi, 78 years old).

“They lived among Armenians. They were surrounded by Armenians on three sides and by Turkey only on one side. At that time they couldn’t go to Turkey. That’s why they chose to pass through our territory to Georgia and then to Azerbaijan. They <...> were passing us in cars jam-packed with stuff. We used to be so surprised that they were leaving; we were thinking it was not possible to leave one’s motherland. How could we know that the same thing was ahead of us?” (Gyulshan-khanum, 52 years old).

The sense of peril was growing stronger with every passing day.

“One night, only God knows what happened to us... People said... I was sick and my neighbor came and said... ‘Get up, Armenians are killing people in Ilmezli [the neighbouring Azerbaijani village close to Kyzyl-Shafag]. Get up; let’s go to the village [the center of Kyzyl-Shafag].’ And so we went, my husband, her [the woman’s daughter] and me. Two younger daughters and two daughters-in-law had gone to Irganchai [the neighbouring Azerbaijani village on the part of Georgia] to visit relatives; they came back the following day. So here we were and we saw that o-oh, all the people had gathered near the store, a very large crowd. So here our town leader, he is a very good man, he was always there for his people. Oh my God, so many people had gathered, mainly men but you could see women there too. Everyone had either an axe or a pitchfork. And there were so many lights in Ilmezli! It turned out it was the military going to their military field exercises. Someone from that village, Ilmezli, came to our village on a horse and said, ‘Oi, Bayram-mu’allim, don’t worry, it’s not Armenians, it’s just the military, the military maneuvers’. The people dispersed only after hearing that, the tractors, the cars drove away, what was happening, God forbid, there were a hundred people per every car. What we have had to go through because of those Armenians! But I can swear on my life that not a single word was uttered to no young girl, nobody...” (Maygaxanum, 75 years old).

Kyzyl-Shafag residents were already aware of the fact that their lives were being irrevocably changed. “We had already understood by that time that there was no sense in staying... It was already impossible to go to the district, we were afraid...” (Elmira, 37 years old). However, before the plan of the village exchange project fully took shape and was carried out, the villagers had had to live with the sense of danger for some time. And so in that situation Kyzyl-Shafag residents by their own forces mounted a defense of their village.

1.2. "Sumgait": the countdown for the new age

For Armenians living in the village of Kerkenj in the Shamakhi region of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic, the situation became alarming right after the Sumgait Pogrom in February 1988¹. Their fellow villager, Gabriel Trdatyan², became one of the victims of the pogroms. Trdatyan's funeral was held in the village under police supervision.

The "contemporary" history of Kerkenj residents begins here, as all interviews start with these events. Gabriel Trdatyan was not only a fellow villager but also a relative – either a close or a distant one – of many villagers, and this is reflected in the perception of the events of the recent past. To this day many stories about Gabriel Trdatyan's death remain among the residents of Kerkenj. The villagers note with great pride that the Trdatyan family courageously fought the pogromists.

In the words of one of the residents of Kerkenj, the situation gradually began to change after the pogrom, and people started to feel this shift.

"After Sumgait the danger was always present... It was very noticeable. An [Azerbaijani] acquaintance would see you and turn his face, walk the other way, wouldn't want to talk to you, some people would say things they had never said before... and then you saw that the police is not on your side..."³

That feeling forced people to look for some kind of escape from the situation. It is noteworthy that at this point, ideas of compact relocation to Armenia or Russia in order to build a new settlement, as well as ideas of an "exchange" with an Azerbaijani village in Armenia, were beginning to germinate. But those "projects" did not have any serious support within the community because as Kerkenj residents said they could not count on such an outcome. Their hope and belief in the Soviet regime was too strong, besides a choice like that seemed too "tough." People were thinking, "Who will care for the graves of our

¹ Pogroms targeting the Armenian population of Sumgait (Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic) took place on February 27-29, 1988.

² In fact G. Trdatyan is mentioned in the official death roll of Armenians who died in the Sumgait Pogrom. In the death roll he is recorded as Gabriel Trdatov, born in 1925 (for further detail, refer to: Sumgait, glasnost, perestroika? Yerevan, 1989).

³ Hakobyan, A. Field notes, Dzunashogh village, 2006. Hereinafter, unless specially noted, the field notes refer to 2006-2007, Dzunashogh village, the Republic of Armenia.



Photograph 2. Mayga-khanum on the threshold of her new house in the village of Kerkenj, Azerbaijan, 2006. Photo by S. Huseynova.

ancestors and relatives?” “Sumgait” generated the feeling of danger, but it was a somewhat passive feeling that did not stimulate any action. More precisely, despite appeals from some people, the idea to act had not yet been conceived.

However, the events unfolded by leaps and bounds. Everything changed in the matter of a few months. By the fall of 1988 the situation had already become quite tense. In November Armenian refugees from the villages of Shamakhi region (Kalakhany, Sagian, Meysari and others) and the city of Shamakhi found shelter in Kerkenj and Madrasa villages. The majority of those refugees settled temporarily in the neighbouring village of Madrasa, the largest Armenian settlement in the Shamakhi region, whereas Kerkenj welcomed mostly those families who had relatives there. In the words of Kerkenj residents, people became alarmed and increasingly aware of the real threat of danger.

On November 17, 1988 our Kerkenj informant and his fellow villager decided to go to the Alyat settlement in order to buy some pork¹ for the upcoming holidays.

¹ In this case it is interesting that Armenians were aiming to buy pork from the Muslim Azerbaijani who apparently had had a long-standing business agreement with them. A Muslim Azerbaijani does not have to keep pigs for his own needs. This makes one think that this group of Azerbaijani had a secret “clandestine” farm. That was against the Soviet law and completely against the Muslim law since the Muslims are not allowed to consume pork. Therefore such business relations with Armenians required a high level of trust since the authorities were not to find out about those business deals. This relationship becomes even more obvious as the story continues.

They had some acquaintances among the Azerbaijani of that settlement. When they were getting ready to go back, their Azerbaijani acquaintance, the bakery director, told them he could not let them travel alone. “He was afraid they would slaughter us...Then he said, ‘My son will see you out, he will be with you’...We were saying that wasn’t necessary, that we would take a different road, there was another road there...” (male, born in 1926). According to the informant, up until that time there had been no collective intention to leave the village. Everybody was getting ready for the upcoming holidays, most likely New Year celebrations. It is also telling that despite the state of conflict, Armenians managed to maintain long-standing business and personal relations with their Azerbaijani acquaintances.

When our informant and his fellow villager were already on their way and after they had passed several villages, the car of another Azerbaijani acquaintance stopped them:

“That acquaintance was from the authorities [working in the police]. He asked, ‘Where are you coming from?’ We couldn’t tell that guy we were coming ‘from there’. We told him we were coming back from the town. He said, ‘Don’t go through Shamakhi, they are slaughtering your people there, I will escort you’... ‘We said we were taking the shortcut. He escorted us anyway... It was still quiet in our village but that night Armenians were attacked in Shamakhi, in the sixth state farm and in other places. Armenians had to leave everything behind, they ran naked, half of them to Madrasa, another half – to our village.”

Another informant recalls how he and his brother Avag, as well as a few other fellow villagers (five in total) at the time still worked at a stonemason workshop near the city of Shamakhi, where they milled the stone.

“When it started in Shamakhi we were on our lunch break and they [their Azerbaijani acquaintances] came and told us there were pogroms in the Armenian quarters, they were... breaking windows in Armenian houses; there were no Armenians in the streets. Later in the afternoon we saw people moving towards us, towards our workshop from the... [town’s side] to attack us... No, there was no fight. There were some people who took our side. They wanted to do something with our car, they took the carpet off of the car, took our tools... There could have been a fight but Avag had an acquaintance in Shamakhi to whom he had sold his car... And that acquaintance was the son of the Shamakhi sheikh. That guy heard what was going on there, and

he drove to us right away in that very car... There were a lot of people there. But they all listened to him and allowed us to leave... We got in the car and drove out. This was the last time... When we got up the road far and high enough to get a look at the city, the place where we had worked was already burning... There were elderly people [at the workshop]...but they failed to protect us" (male, born in 1955).

Like other Kerkenj residents, our interlocutor blames the Azerbaijani intelligentsia for inciting the conflict and fomenting the tension.

"...Their writers, their actors were in the squares, delivering speeches... One of their writers, Vakhbade, and another one, Anar, the Chairman of their Writers' Union, and also Zeynab Khanlarova, People's Artist of Armenia¹, were saying that Armenians were to be forced out... For instance, Vakhbade himself was saying, 'Why do Shamakhi Armenians not want to leave? They had already taken root there.' On the same day people started to hurl stones at Armenians' houses in Shamakhi, breaking the windows..." (male, born in 1955).

Gradually, when the tensions had run high and the first refugees from the neighbouring Armenian villages had arrived, the situation in Kerkenj became critical. As described by one of the villagers, "the people were panicking, they were afraid the Turks² would attack, the slaughter would commence...anything could be expected." The informant's elderly mother became disabled and soon passed away precisely because of the described events.

"The worst times were during the earthquake, the earthquake in Leninakan [on December 7, 1988]. This was the most difficult time, as on December 14 my mother passed away. She was healthy; it was all because of that one incident... My sister caused panic by saying the Turks were coming, and my brother's house was on the outskirts of the village, so my poor mother fell down and broke her back, but she was telling me, 'Take the kids and leave, I've seen the massacre of 1918.'"

¹ In Soviet times Azerbaijani singer Zeynab Khanlarova (from Azerbaijan) was awarded the honorary People's Artist of Armenia title. The informant wishes to emphasize that Z. Khanlarova received that honorary title from Armenia and then she would call for forcing Armenians out.

² In Armenian colloquial language, the Azerbaijani are called "the Turks." This term does not carry any pejorative connotation. Our informants also call the Azerbaijani "the Turks." Since such a term is potentially open to opportunistic and corrupt interpretations, at the request of my Azerbaijani colleagues I have changed the word "Turk" to "Azerbaijani." In the text this changed term is given in square brackets to indicate that this is not an informant's term, but mine. In some cases when the word "Turk" is used in the stereotypical sense of the word and conveys a certain meaning, I have left it unchanged.

CHAPTER 2

CIVIL SELF-DEFENSE

S. Huseynova, S. Rummyantsev

2.1. "And so we organized self-defense"

In the situation of collective decision-making, it was not customary to force those who opted for a different alternative for themselves to follow the group's direction. Long before the village exchange many residents of Kyzyl-Shafag tried to move their families to the Azerbaijani-friendly and safe regions of Georgia or directly to Azerbaijan. Feeling alarmed and worried about their lives, some people decided to move to the neighboring village of Irganchai, located just across the Georgian border about four kilometers from Kyzyl-Shafag. However it did not seem possible from complete families to suddenly abandon their households, and so at times when danger escalated, predominantly women and children were sent to safety in Irganchai.

"So... my husband and my younger son found a truck, hauled it to our house, loaded it with our things, and my daughter-in-law was pregnant and was due any time, and there were also two little kids, boys. They all got into the truck and drove away [to Irganchai]. My husband and me, we stayed behind in the house. Oh my God, at nighttime...we were going mad... We had two heads of cattle left at our household, one was for Kurban [a sacrificial animal], and a sack of flour. And there was an Armenian village nearby, [Shakhnazar]. A woman and a man came to us from that village. They were good people. Here's what I'll tell you, there were also many good people among them. So while all those events were happening, they didn't say a word to our women, our children, didn't take a dig at us, didn't throw a single stone at us. She said to me, 'Oh, sister, have you gone crazy? Why are you leaving, has anybody done anything to you?' I said, 'No. Take the flour, do as you wish, take the cattle and sell it in your village.' We had some unfinished business in the district center, needed to take some documents and money from our bank account. My husband would go to the district center



Photograph 3. Mamed-kishi in the days of Kyzyl-Shafag (the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic) village's self-defense efforts.

and no one would say anything to him. That's the way my husband and I lived another two months in the village" (Mayga-khanum, 75 years old).

However, while quite often relations with neighbours from the Armenian village of Shakhnazar remained friendly for a rather long time, unfortunately those residents of the nearby village were not the ones who determined the general conditions for the Azerbaijani in Armenia.

Apparently the situation changed faster than people could process the events. Still Kyzyl-Shafag residents were fortunate to have enough time for the gradual search for the most acceptable way out of the situation. Their village's location on the border, close to regions of Georgia with a considerable Azerbaijani population, played a significant role in the process of the exchange itself. According to the villagers' recollections, this factor to a great extent allowed them to hold off until the moment when the exchange became fully possible.

"There were Azerbaijani villages on the border with Georgia. I must say that's what kept us going. That's why we moved so late. They helped us a lot; we got the arms and other things from them" (Suleyman-mu'allim, 75 years old).

The Kyzyl-Shafag and Irganchai communities had strong ties. Still, one could also suppose that villagers' hope that somehow sooner or later the conflict would be settled also prevented them from leaving sooner. The Soviet Union still existed, and it was not easy to accept the fact that this conflict was occurring in the country where they first had been taught to take pride in peoples' friendship, and then were suddenly being forced to leave their native village only because they were Azerbaijani and not Armenian. Of course interethnic relations were not always as trouble-free and unclouded as the Soviet propaganda suggested, but much valuable experience of rather peaceful and neighbourly co-existence existed. Also, at that time nobody dismissed the Soviet regime as the guarantor of its own citizens' security regardless of their ethnicity. However, nationalist passions did not subside; on the contrary, they were beginning to flare up stronger than before. The time to find an escape route was running out.

At this moment, the elderly Azerbaijani man dies. The well-informed state farm director, Bayram Allazov, presents his version of this man's death:

"We had not been giving much weight to [the escalation of interethnic tensions]...until November 1988. On November 23, a 90-year-old man by the name of Karabogaz who lived in the district center Kalinino was murdered... There was a crowd... how should I put this, an ethnic crowd.... When they were walking along the Nariman Narimanov Street after the meeting [chanting], 'Turks¹, get out of here, you have no right to live on our Armenian land!' The old man could not bear that. He was alone in his house at the time. Turns out, that 90-year-old man had a revolver at home. He took it – tr-rup, tr-rup, [he started to shoot into the air]. And the meeting was still going on. And so they hurled a stone at him, to his head, and they killed him... That was the day... we realized that it was dangerous in Kalinino district and so we organized self-defense."

Therefore that event became not only the reference point of the countdown to their collective exodus, but also the moment when the villagers finally became fully aware of the need to collectively defend themselves.

¹ As a rule in everyday life Armenians call Azerbaijani people the Turks. In our (S. Huseynova's and S. Rumyantsev's) opinion, interpretation of this term depends on the context of the situation in which it is used. Quite often in everyday life the term "Turk" had a pejorative connotation. "They sort of used that word to humiliate... It was somewhat of a bad word for them... Well, there are Turks in Turkey. We have relatives there, in Turkey. But still you somehow sense that he [an Armenian] doesn't mean anything good by that word, he says it like it means something disgusting. Turk!" (Nasib, 45 years old). Moreover, in the conflict's context the term "Turks", in our opinion, brings to mind the collective image of the "historical enemy."

Though the directors of the state farm assumed primary responsibility for organizing self-defense, the decision itself was made with everybody's participation, including the commune's informal leaders.

“The village’s Aqsaqals, the elders, gathered around us. ‘It is likely that they [Armenians] will be attacking our village. Let’s organize self-defense,’ they said. We blocked the road leading from the Armenian village [Shakhnazar] to our village. We put machinery across the road so as to block the way for cars and also set up a night watch, around the clock. The Chairman of the Village Council and I organized self-defense. We took turns keeping watch at the headquarters. The headquarters were in my office as the state farm director” (Bayram Allazov, 72 years old).

The headquarters operated non-stop, day and night, coordinating the actions of those who stood guard at the improvised self-defense posts blocking the roads to the village.

“Bayram-mu’allim, the Village Council Chairman was Gumbat Guseynov, yeah, that was him. They organized self-defense. They kept watch together with us, they came to check up on us, to cheer us up... We kept watching at nighttime, too... We couldn’t sleep anyway... We felt uneasy. There was no one we could count on. No women, no children in the village. We had either sold the cattle or moved it to Georgia. The women were in Irganchai at that time. Only men remained in the village, and we had to be on the defensive. Like if you wanted to sleep, you would say, ‘Hey, stay here instead of me, will you? I’ll go and sleep for a couple of hours””(Suleyman-mu’allim, 75 years old).

At the same time, the very fact that the village's formal leaders spearheaded the self-defense effort did not suggest that others lacked initiative as well. As with any collective endeavor undertaken by the village community, the leaders, orchestrators and managers of the self-defense effort were all necessary. It was only natural that the official heads of the community, and first of all the state farm director Bayram Allazov, became those leaders. Kyzyl-Shafag residents had entrusted him with managing the commune long before this point. In their darkest hour, he did not let them down, proving himself to be a competent and skillful leader of both the self-defense effort and the subsequent village exchange.

Practically all of the village's young men opted to stay in the village at that difficult and dangerous time and they participated in the collective self-defense.

"We put self-defense posts in three parts of the village... And so it was that some of the people, the Aqsaqal, would leave to look for a new village and the young people would stay for defense purposes" (Suleyman-mu'allim, 75 years old).

Therefore Kyzyl-Shafag residents, who left to look for a village where they could relocate collectively, did not have to worry about their fellow villagers awaiting their return home.

That moment marks the start of the village's eventual isolation.

"People from Shakhnazar could not come to us anymore. Any ties with Shakhnazar were severed completely. We did not pass through their village, we were travelling only through Georgia. It was strictly forbidden to go to the district. If it was absolutely necessary to go there, we would go with the military. For instance, I needed to go to the district, I had some money in the bank there, and I needed to get it. I couldn't go, but what was I to do? And just then some other people came to me saying, 'Suleyman-mu'allim, what are we going to do?' I went to the military base right away. Yes... I said, 'Please allow me.' Well, a corporal came out. I said to him, 'Comrade corporal, will you shoot us down or will those Armenians do that?' [The corporal asked], 'What's the matter?' I said, 'What do you mean, what's the matter? Can't your eyes see anything? Don't you see what's happening, what the situation is? You should go out to the street and take a look around – there are women, men here, they all have stayed.' [The corporal seemed to be somewhat confused.] 'A-ah, what's that here?' I said, 'I don't know what this is, see for yourself, think for yourself'. He gave an order right away... to one of his men... They put us into a military vehicle and off we went to the district center, taking a different road, a shortcut. Yeah, so even something like that happened quite frequently. It was tough... There was also an Armenian among those military men. I must tell you, my son beat him up. Where are you sending an Armenian? How could you send an Armenian? He was told to go somewhere, he disobeyed and so my son beat him up... But truth be told many of us took part in the self-defense – both soldiers and us. Young people. We didn't sleep at night" (Suleyman-mu'allim, 75 years old).

The specific nature of the moment was determined by the drastic segregation of then still Soviet citizens into separate antagonistic ethnic communities. The conflict had yet to lead to the state of affairs when that separation would be complete. A Soviet soldier who was an ethnic Armenian could still be detached to protect the Azerbaijani travelling to the district center. But at the local level, the potential for mutual trust between Armenians and Azerbaijani had suffered to a great extent. In that situation even the military could not be completely trusted as guarantors of Kyzyl-Shafag residents' safety, especially if they had ethnic Armenians in their ranks.

“At the same time we had a military base there. Their detachment was quartered in Kalinino, and that was their post, well, it was like that – one post was in one village; other posts were positioned in other villages. They were defending and we were on the defensive” (Suleyman-mu'allim, 75 years old).

The presence of the armed Soviet Army soldiers brought little comfort to the villagers. The central regime and the military as its direct representatives increasingly lost trust with each passing day. Kyzyl-Shafag residents continued to keep their volunteer watch near the military post, too. They were fully aware of the fact that defense and protection of their village was their responsibility alone, and if real serious danger presented itself they could not rely only on the military. Suleyman-mu'allim says, “You know why, because we were better informed about what was going on. The military base, what of it! Let's assume you were attacked, they burst into your house – what was in it for the military base? They would say, ‘We didn't know.’ I mean, we didn't trust them much.” In the environment of mistrust of the authorities, which at times proved to be justified, the self-defense was in fact temporary. That measure allowed residents to continue the search for a village suitable for collective relocation.

In reality, only the defenders' courage served as their main weapon to counter possible attacks in case of danger.

“Well, perhaps some people had hunting rifles or small-bore guns. Perhaps somebody had a pistol. Who could openly say then that they had these fire-arms? So, we organized self-defense but no one was attacking us...Yes, over the phone, at night. One day they called me suddenly at 2 a.m. They cursed in Armenian, as some kind of street punks. ‘What is your deal, why are you playing



Photograph 4. Young women and children waiting out the dangerous times in the nearby village of Irganchai (Georgia). Kerkenj village, Azerbaijan, 2006. Photo by S. Huseynova.

a general, a hero, why are you not leaving, why do you keep your people here?’ So I answered them in the same language in which they had cursed me. ‘You might know where my house is, where I live, so why don’t you come here and we’ll see who the boss is here.’” (Bayram Allazov).

Even if somebody had firearms, they often lacked the necessary ammunition.

“Once we heard a car approaching. The road from Shakhnazar goes down into the valley and leads to our village. And that car was just going across the valley. But it turned out it was going from a different direction. We were thinking, ‘What kind of car is that?’ A lot of people gathered, including my older son who lives in Baku now. And he is a nimble guy, my son. He went directly towards that car. He didn’t realize that they could have had an automatic. Boom, and that would have been it for him! No, he was walking directly towards them. Well, to cut a long story short, he stopped them. He had an automatic, but it was empty. Not a single round of ammunition, see! [laughs] Those people said they were coming from some Georgian village. Right, but they could have stopped! They saw that there were armed people in their way, suppose they’d shoot. That’s what happened” (Suleyman-mu’allim, 75 years old).



Photograph 5. Suleyman-mu'allim was one of the most active participants of self-defense in Kyzyl-Shafag village (the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic) in 1988-1989 and later on, he was one of the orchestrators of the exchange. Photo by S. Rumyantsev.

Any car coming from the direction of the Armenian village raised suspicions and was stopped at self-defense posts. Such cases were infrequent, however.

The fact that the defenders' village was close to Georgian regions densely populated by the Azerbaijani to a great extent enabled the villagers to escape any confrontation. Practically all the participants hold this perspective. This proximity to Georgia also prevented the village's complete isolation¹. As a result, the majority of Kyzyl-Shafag residents stayed in their native village practically until the exchange.

"Yes, some women and kids stayed. Some families sent their children and their elderly members to the nearby village in Georgia, which was very close. But the majority of people remained in the village. We were not afraid...because we...were thinking that Azerbaijani villages in Georgia were on our side. They supplied us with gasoline...which we could no longer get from the district center, from Kalinino...Sometimes with groceries, they would bring groceries to the store, and people would get them and help us. They [Armenians] didn't risk... attacking our village" (Bayram Allazov).

Many villagers still note how during that time, one could see a lot of traffic, both cars and people, on the border with Georgia at night. In their opinion, to a certain extent it was due to the fact that large numbers of the Azerbaijani were involuntarily leaving their native villages in Armenia.

The villagers believe that this busy traffic across the border understandably raised fears among Armenians. Close by, hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijani lived in Georgia, and no one in Armenia looked forward to clashing with them.

¹ In addition, relations with the district center Kalinino were maintained to a certain extent. In emergencies (as a rule, those were the cases when it was needed to obtain personal documents or take out money from personal bank accounts, which one could do only in the district center), those problems were solved in some way. Naturally, the heads of Kyzyl-Shafag and the district center's authorities kept in touch as well.

“They really believed that we were receiving firearms from somewhere. People were saying that there was one guy in that village, Ibad was his name, who was smuggling firearms for us from Turkey. All those rumors scared them away. Also, they could see the road from the [Armenian] village of Shakhnazar, and day and night trucks on that road drove to Georgia and back. It was just us transporting our...[personal belongings, but] that only reaffirmed the rumors” (Suleyman-mu’allim, 75 years old).

As a result, that sudden actualization of the internal border of the Soviet territory, still one country at that point, significantly increased Kyzyl-Shafag residents’ chances of avoiding direct confrontation. Suleyman-mu’allim explains:

“But they knew that we would leave, sooner or later. We said, give us time... For some reason the District Committee Secretary respected us. But we said we would leave no matter what, we just needed some time. Give us a chance. So that’s how we stayed on, but we were looking for a village for ourselves.”

Self-defense, coupled with the beneficial and fortunate geographic location, allowed villagers to gain some time and find a suitable village in Azerbaijan for relocation. Self-defense efforts continued from November 1988 to late April 1989. The members of the military protecting Kyzyl-Shafag, mostly cadets of the Ministry of Internal Affairs military academy in Sverdlovsk, according to the state farm director’s recollections, left the village around the same time, at the end of April.

Even despite the local authorities’ best efforts to prevent any serious outrages, it was not possible to stay in the village much longer.

“The heads of the district were also helping me then, especially that First Secretary of the District Committee, who had been elected from our village... Demikyan Khachik. He made sure no one was killed in our village” (Bayram Al-lazov).

However the speed with which the general conflict situation unfolded seriously limited both the goodwill of the certain members of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic’s authorities and the military’s resources.



Photograph 6. The self-defense post of Kerkenj Armenians (Kerkenj, the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic). I. Tsaturyan recalls, "Here's us blocking the way for an Azerbaijani's car." These photos from the family archive of I. Tsaturyan were taken by soldiers of the Soviet military troops deployed in Kerkenj at the time.

"The district's commandant used to be the commanding officer of the troops in the unit in which my son did his military service [in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic]. I made his acquaintance when I came to visit my son. And when they declared the state of emergency in our district, he was appointed the commandant. And he helped us a lot. So one time near the end he secretly called for me. He said, 'Allazov... No need to think any longer. You understand, don't you...It's time...This is a difficult moment, you need to draw the right conclusions yourself, I can only tell you that much.' I knew he wanted to say, off you go, leave" (Bayram Allazov).

By this point, Kyzyl-Shafag residents had already lost all delusions that they might be able to stay in their village.

2.2. "The people had already taken control into their own hands": Self-organization and self-defense of Kerkenj Armenians

In those troubled days at the end of 1988, self-organization for Kerkenj residents became the only way to deal with this difficult situation. Not only did that self-organization save them in the time of crisis, it also served as their main instrument supporting their relocation and proper settling down in their new environment. The critical situation that had taken full shape by November-December 1988 brought to light many interesting forms and mechanisms of communal and individual organization in unorthodox conditions. In the environment in which, in the words of our Kerkenj interlocutor, "the Soviets had died, Gorbachev had died", a "new power" was born. That "power" emerged in discussions in rural communes, debates with official authorities, various negotiations and ultimately in situations where decisions had to be made and immediate measures had to be taken in order to ensure personal safety. Apparently this was happening precisely when the villages of Kerkenj and Madrasa provided shelter to refugees from Shamakhi and nearby villages. Azerbaijani authorities would later send them to Armenia. At that time, however, Kerkenj and Madrasa residents refused to obey the authorities' bidding and leave for Armenia.

One of the eyewitnesses of the events recalls:

"That night Armenians of the Lenin state farm in Shamakhi were attacked. They left everything behind and ran empty-handed; half of them ran to Madrasa, the rest – to our village. Then Madrasa residents came to us and we agreed that if we had to die, so be it but we would die as humans, with dignity. The men and young people of Madrasa, spearheaded by Sophyan Edik (he used to be their director) came to us saying, 'If they attack you, give us a signal and we will do the same if we get attacked, and thus will be able to come to each other's rescue.'"

Another informant recounts that they had faith that Madrasa would be safe because that village had more people, especially more young people, than Kerkenj. As Kerkenj residents note, the district authorities offered them to at least send the women and children to Armenia, but Kerkenj villagers refused.

“Our villagers didn’t do that, they didn’t make that decision, they said...[our families] would be where we were... We didn’t leave, we stayed, everybody in our village stayed...”

The situation unfolded in leaps and bounds. One resident described the state of affairs in late November – early December 1988:

“An unpleasant incident occurred, very unpleasant... My mother was on her deathbed, I went to Madrasa and the Secretary [of the Shamakhi District Committee] came, and those Armenians from various small villages in the Shamakhi region had already loaded their cars to leave for Armenia, the earthquake had not happened yet, it was December 2 or December 3, something like that... Well, the Secretary came, and he held a meeting [in Madrasa]... He went out on the balcony [of the Village Council’s Office], and he said, ‘Well, you know what, there is no government any more, total anarchy, we can’t hold off...Get ready, I have talked to people in Baku, the cars will come. Men, tell your women to take children and clothes...’ As if he was sending us on vacation to a summer cottage... And then I asked to speak, I stood up and said, ‘We are not going anywhere, our village is not relocating anywhere.’ He turned to us and said, ‘You know, there is no state, no government, I can’t hold them off if anything were to happen tomorrow’... And I answered him, ‘Let them attack, don’t try to hold anybody off, let them come.’ And then they [the Azerbaijani]...thought, ‘It looks like they [Armenians] are so sure of themselves and their power that they can stand against us.’ We would indeed withstand them. I am not saying that they perhaps would not beat us up afterwards, but had they attacked that night we would have defeated them. Several days past, the Secretary came again and said, ‘Go to work, the state is back, everything is in order.’ Again I asked to speak, ‘We will not stay. We will leave.’ [the Secretary responded,] ‘You are a strange man. You were saying the opposite last week.’ ‘Well, that was last week and this is what I am telling you now. Open the road, we are leaving the village, we are not staying here!’ [I said].”

Disregarding the authorities became an important marker of self-organization. At the same time, these authorities were no longer seen as institutions of the Soviet regime¹ that could have guaranteed their safety. Therefore, disobeying

¹ District and republic authorities were perceived and identified according to their ethnic markers – as the Azerbaijani authorities, as the Azerbaijani.



Photograph 7. A soldier of the USSR internal military forces stands near the self-defense post of Kerkenj Armenians with children, residents of Kerkenj, N. Tsaturyan and A. Vardanyan (Kerkenj, the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic).

and resisting them was not a goal in itself but instead highlighted individuals' perspectives on the conflict situation and on appropriate actions in that environment. Here is what one of our interlocutors recalls:

"It just so happened that we separated from Azerbaijan right away, it was as if we got a separate government. The District Committee tried to take over the village twice. We didn't even let them in the village. We blocked the roads and said, '...There will be no such thing [as the Committee] here until this situation is settled'... Cars and fuel were in our hands... everything was in our hands: vodka, wine [meaning those that belonged to the state farm]."

According to our interlocutor, "the people" were in charge of allocating and using these resources. Cars and fuel were used for self-defense – for keeping watch, making gasoline bombs, etc. In that context self-preservation was the first and foremost objective, achieved through self-organization.

Our Kerkenj informant (male, born in 1951) has mentioned that the passage of time makes the retelling of these memories a bit artistic, but even these recollections cannot describe everything that these people had to go through during those dark

times. Our interlocutor mentioned that in November, when meetings started in Shamakhi, they had already begun putting up self-defense posts. Everybody knew that there were ten to twelve hunters in the village, but they were surprised to find out that “each household supplied a rifle,” and according to another informant, there were up to eighty rifles. They organized self-defense of their villages together with Madrasa residents. No outsiders were allowed into the villages.

It is also interesting to note that no clear and strict division existed between the leaders and the community. The period is characterized by “the rule of the people,” when every decision was made by “us” or “the people.” This underscores that villagers expressed no doubts regarding the leaders’ legitimacy, which appeared so natural that to a large extent nobody raised any objections to the decisions they were making. This response also bears evidence to the fact that when faced with a crisis, the community consolidated. At the same time, the mechanisms of internal relations within the community were also being determined by the situation. These two markers of self-organization – group consolidation into a sense of “us” and special internal relations within the community when “the people understood one another,” characterize the commune’s adaptation to unorthodox conditions brought on by the external adverse factors. During the war, Karabakh Armenians displayed those markers as well¹.

Who were the Kerkenj villagers leaders, how old were they, what was their social status, which social “units” did they come from, and did they later assume responsibility for the commune’s destiny?² Unfortunately due to various reasons, we have not been successful in obtaining information about all the leaders (some of them have either already died or moved to Russia), but we have gained at least some idea about them.

According to collected data, it was not the administrative, agricultural or Party authorities who took the lead, but common rural workers. “Officials” do not even figure in the stories in this context; there is no mention of their positive or constructive role, nor of any expectations that people might have had from the rural authorities’ participation in those processes. The only names mentioned are those of regular people, without any status or title or other

¹ For further reference, consult Shakhnazarian N., “Our mountains will keep us fed!” The structures of daily survival in post-Soviet Karabakh. Bulletin on anthropology, minorities, and multiculturalism. New series, v. 1(7), N 1-3, 2003, pp. 57-58.

² For information about the leaders and leadership in Kerkenj please refer to the respective chapter.



Photograph 8. Defenders of the upper section of Kerkenj village.

“official” characteristics. When asked who the orchestrators or leaders were, people say “we were,” or they reference “the elders of the village.” As one of the informants describes the situation, “The people had already taken control into their own hands: young people of Madrasa, young people of Kerkenj.” By “young people,” the informant means young and middle-aged adults (under 45 years old); there were about forty of them in the village.

If official representatives of the local authorities are sometimes mentioned in the stories describing those events, they are not mentioned within the context of leadership.

“The director¹ of our village (that’s what they were called back then, directors) left, went away...[The Azerbaijani] brought cars and told us to take them and leave for Armenia, and he [the director] went with them when they were leaving... The director went with the people [refugees from the neighbouring Armenian villages and Shamakhi]. That...was before the earthquake.”

¹ He means the state farm director [Kerkenj, Madrasa]. As we were told by the informant, the director was from Kerkenj but he lived in Shamakhi.

One of the leaders, rafik Martirosyan, had been a foreman at the state farm until 1987 and then he worked on the water supply team. Another one, Avag Vardanyan, was a mason. Kerkenj residents usually say that it was their elders who were making all decisions, but this was not always the case because relatively young people were also among them. Vardanyan, for instance, was one of the younger men who participated in the decision-making process. rafik Martirosyan told us that it were those villagers who did not fear the Azerbaijani who took part in negotiations with them.

Apparently there were a number of criteria that determined whether a person would become a leader: seniority, resolution, trustworthiness, experience, etc. In this particular context it is rather interesting that Martirosyan and A. Vardanyan organized the installation of a monument to Kerkenj residents who had died in the World War II. Martirosyan was an ordinary worker with rich and diverse life experience, and when the situation called for it, he possessed the courage to assume the responsibility for making important decisions. From 1988 on, his life story closely intertwined with that of his community since he became one of the leaders of the exchange.

There does not seem to have been much differentiation between the leaders and the community. Here is how one of our interlocutors characterizes that situation: “Leaders? The villagers pretty much did whatever they desired. The leader...this was nothing like a regiment under the command of, say, Andranik Pasha or Kevork Chavush¹... No, there was nothing of the kind, the people understood one another.”

The rule of the people had another interesting aspect as well. According to collected data, different sections (blocks) of the village were the important centers of self-organization, providing the environment for this to take place. The village’s self-defense was also organized according to these different sections, which each having its own leader. As one of the Kerkenj residents recalls,

“Avag Vardanyan was the leader of one of the upper sections...That was an important section: Shamo was there, Vova, rafik, Martirosyan rafik – that was their quarter...They were there. There was also Yegish in the upper section,

¹ Andranik Ozanyan and Kevork Chavush were the leaders of the Armenian national liberation movement in the late 19th – early 20th centuries in the Ottoman Empire. Andranik was also a major general in the Tsarist Army, he fought in World War I, and during that time he oversaw and supported the exodus of Armenian refugees from Turkey.

Yegish Airapetyan... and also Seroge...There were four sections. The fourth quarter – Makar was there...That was their quarter. That was the lower section.”

Each of these groups had its own objectives, which were determined by their location, among other factors. Our interlocutor continues,

“The fourth section overlooked Madrasa directly, as if they were ...face to face. Another section faced, for instance, Kelakhana... The upper section – that was our quarter, we overlooked the...nearby [Azerbaijani] village of Gyagyali. We controlled that village’s road and also the road from Ortabulag. It just so happened that all the territory was under our control.”

Of note, the quarterly principle of self-organization and self-defense was also characteristic of Karabakh Armenians during the conflict¹.

The villagers constantly expected danger. According to our informants, in November 1988, the threat of attack was very real. In the words of one Kerkenj resident [male, born in 1926],

“They [the Azerbaijani] were ready to attack us, but then their sheikh came... They didn’t listen to their District Committee, but their sheikh came and told them, ‘I swear on my law, on my religion, nobody will come back, they will slaughter all of you’. Honest to God, we decided to die and Avag, may he rest in peace, said, ‘Guys, we’d rather die than let a single Turk into our village. Let them attack – we will fight to the bitter end!’”

According to the informant’s recollections, the following situation unfolded at the entrances to the village where they kept watch:

“Then, yes, she [his wife], her brother and the district police officer came out [of the car] and said, ‘They’re coming, they’re coming.’ ‘Hey, who’s coming?’ The police officer said, ‘We can barely hold them off, but the rest are coming’. And we said, ‘Let them come, we’ll see what happens’. We...were roadside, in an orchard, and we saw a car approaching from Shamakhi. Seven or eight guys were standing on the road, four on one side, and seven on the other. We said, ‘Let

¹ Shakhnazaryan N., *ibid*, pp. 55-56.



Photograph 9. At the entrances to the village of Kerkenj. Soldiers block the entrance for a car.

them come'. The car came to us, I was the first to approach them and ask where they were going...[The passenger] said, 'I am employee of the OBKhS¹, I am going to see Ramazanov'. I told him to drive back, 'Which OBKhS? As if there is the Soviet Union or the Party? Drive your car back!' He started to make excuses, and then our guys came out of the orchard armed with rifles, and they said to him, 'Turn around or we'll burn the car!'... So he turned the car around and went back. We didn't have any human casualties... just some property was lost."

Soon detachments of the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs arrived in the village. According to Kerkenj residents' recollections, those soldiers were cadets of the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs Military Academy in Alma-Ata. Still, self-organization and self-defense continued even after the troops' arrival. "We kept watch at those posts even after those cadets had come, up until our departure...for six months...until June 1989." Our informant then goes on, "We stayed in those positions up until our relocation, despite the fact that we were

¹ Translator's note: Department Against Misappropriation of Socialist Property.

already allowing people [representatives of the authorities] from the district and from Baku into the village...but we would still ask who they were.” The population lacked confidence in the law enforcement agencies of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the USSR and had little hope for their support, as even police detachments exercised no control over the situation.

In the minds of Kerkenj residents the situation was already seen as the clash between “Armenians” and the “Turks”, and that dictated a different logic to their actions. With that context in mind, many Kerkenj residents to a greater or lesser degree refer to the “Armenian-Muslim” tensions and confrontations of 1918¹, when the Ottoman Army invaded Eastern Transcaucasia, in their memories of the more recent past events.

It is of interest that actualization of those prior historical events would at times lead to unorthodox behavior in critical situations on the part of both Armenians and Azerbaijani. According to one of our interlocutors, his grandfather was killed in 1918 in his own native village, and his murderers were from the neighbouring village of Gyagyali. At that time fifteen or twenty people from Gyagyali came to Kerkenj and killed those Armenians who had not had enough time to escape. They say that each of those pogromists would later meet a violent death. One of those murderers died when he was already quite elderly, and nobody in the village knew that he had died for about six or seven days. He was a lonely man and all his family members had already died by that time. When the situation became critical in 1988, people in Gyagyali suddenly remembered that story.

“...The mullah of that village gathered the people, held a meeting and said, ‘If any one of you goes to that village and brings back even a tiniest piece of anything...I will throw you out of this village, and don’t you hold that against me. You have all seen what happened to that man... If you do anything of the kind now, think of it as destroying our village for the second time.’ And so not a single person came to our village from that village.”

According to another informant, the Gyagyali state farm director even visited their village during those hard times and offered all kinds of help, asking for example if they needed meat for any kind of event.

¹ In the late 19th – early 20th centuries the Turkic language speaking population of the Eastern Transcaucasia didn’t have a common ethnonym and was known either as “the Muslims” or “the Caucasian Tatar”, or etc.



Photograph 10. Soldiers of the USSR internal military forces in the village of Kerkenj.

However, in the words of another informant, the villages of Charaan and Admanli still posed a threat.

“You know why? A government officials and some policemen were from those villages. They went to Kelakhana and the sixth state farm...[They] came to our village, too, but we didn’t let them in, they came to buy something¹...The people gathered and said that they would not sell a thing; they didn’t have anything to sell. It was already February [1989] then.”

For Kerkenj Armenians, the situation of 1988-1989 not only formed severe and confrontational boundaries with their external environment, but also simultaneously strengthened already existing friendships. This situation manifested itself differently, depending on the case. For example, with the help of close Azerbaijani friends Armenians could even obtain ammunition in those challenging times.

¹ The informant means that Armenians were to leave the village anyway and so it was understood that they would be cheaply selling their possessions.

Our analysis shows that self-organization and self-defense of Kerkenj Armenians under the critical circumstances of 1988-1989 occurred at a high level. Separate stages and components could be singled out in that process: insubordination, resistance to the Azerbaijani authorities who tried to force Armenians to relocate at the end of 1988, self-defense as a means of self-preservation and survival under dire conditions, self-governance in the time of crisis and incapability of official rule. If not for self-organization and self-defense of Kerkenj residents, no exchange would have been possible, because by the end of 1988, no Armenian settlements remained in the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic¹.

The most important aspect of the villagers' self-organization was that it did not become just a passive form of adaptation. Instead, it enabled them to propose and carry out various projects for escaping the situation in an environment where villagers were unable to influence or control the general state of affairs. By organizing, they discovered and used rare and accidental opportunities for addressing the most complex challenges.

¹ In this case we do not include the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast and the adjacent Shaumyan district, populated by Armenians, as well as some villages of the Khanlar district.

CHAPTER 3

THE IDEA OF A VILLAGE EXCHANGE

S. Huseynova, S. Rumyantsev

3.1. “We were going to have to move to Azerbaijan anyway”

By the end of 1988 the villagers fully realized that it was inevitable that they would have to relocate. Thus the mechanisms of collective decision-making were fully put into action. The people felt the situation around their village change every day, becoming more and more alarming, causing them to accelerate their search for the best way to resolve the situation. At this point, the period of continuous collective discussions began in their lives. “Yes, that decision was made by the whole village. Everybody agreed to an exchange. We all gathered in the village club and decided” (Avdy-mu’allim, 69 years old). “Yes, definitely, our people would gather every day, hold meetings, and have discussions...Yes, we definitely came to the decision together. We gathered every day to talk and we arrived at the decision to relocate together” (Zakhid-kishi, 58 years old). These villagers reference the collective discussions of closely-knit people who understood each other quite well. The majority of those who participated in the discussions do not remember all the details of how that collective decision-making mechanism operated. They just remember that these meetings occurred, which mostly involved “just talking, just having conversations” (Zakhid-kishi, 58 years old).

Often, this was the most that could be recaptured about the events of those years. The villagers are not inclined to see their actions as a manifestation of civic initiative. However, the events surrounding the exchange constitute, without a doubt, an important site of memory for the whole commune. Though the village residents have no memory of any other events that could even remotely match the events of those tragic days, today those are just “usual conversations” to them. The very fact of remembering those collective discussions as something mundane may point at the fact that such an approach to making important decisions that could

affect the whole community was not unusual or unfamiliar to them¹. Yet in that case, the reason for those collective meetings and debates was rather uncommon, and any potential decision would inevitably lead to the future upheaval of their whole everyday world.

The course of those meetings as well as the efforts to work out a solution that would fit everyone's needs did not suggest any peer pressure towards those who opted for an alternative course of action.

“Yes, sure, the Aqsaqal gathered a few times and young guys, too, and they said, ‘Let’s go together’, and so that was what we eventually did, all of us, everybody, the whole village... We were just discussing that. What vote! [meaning, there was no vote] Those who wanted to go came here, those who didn’t – they went to Ganja, to Baku. How do you tell [or force] anyone to go somewhere?” (Mamed-kishi, 68 years old).

Apparently the protocol for those collective discussions was formed spontaneously. Surely the Soviet people’s habit for participating in various group meetings was at work there, as well as the common idea of the “correct” way to conduct that kind of meetings. In addition, the practice of participating in a group discussion that can lead to developing a more or less common stance on something is quite habitual for rural communes. This practice extends beyond special meetings of community members to discuss various problems; villagers are used to gathering together at the time of all significant events, for instance, at weddings or funerals, as well. At the same time, the very urgency and gravity of the moment made everybody mobilize and participate. The more the authorities demonstrated their inability to influence the course of the events, the more significance the grassroots initiative gained. The village residents’ collective memory formulates the main objective of those meetings as seeking to preserve their community.

¹ In his musings on the nature of the phenomenon of civil society, which in his opinion is characteristic only of North Atlantic societies, Ernest Gellner points out that these “societies have been living by their rules since 1945 at least, without – or almost without – realizing it” (Gellner E., *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and its Rivals*. Moscow: Moscow School of Political Studies, 2004, p. 23). It is by all means unacceptable to directly transfer these notions of the phenomenon of civil society to the case at hand. That is why we are not talking about civil society but only about civic initiative. Rather than referring to a group of free individuals, we are talking about familiar mechanisms of collective decision-making in a rural commune. We only point out that the described decision-making mechanisms have a number of characteristics in common with the mechanisms of civil society. For instance, the democratic practice of making a decision, which is to a large extent quite a common activity in a rural community, serves as one example. Significant differences definitely exist there, too, however.



Photograph 11. Kerkenj village (Azerbaijan), 2006. Photo by S. Huseynova.

The gathering of whole large groups of families, groups of the Aqsaqal, or members of one family (or “taifa” in Azerbaijani) in order to discuss and settle important matters can be counted among the customary practices of collective decision-making that were common for the community.

“We exchanged villages together. The Aqsaqal gathered; for instance, Bayram Allazov, he is still here now. He was there along with the village council chairman and other Aqsaqal of the village. The people came to the meeting, which was held at the village’s club. We debated what we had to do in order to preserve the commune so that we would all turn out together in the new location. Such was the will of the whole village. So we sent our representatives there [to Kerkenj]. And there it was the same, Armenians in that village all agreed to do just that. And then everybody was trying individually to get along with those with whom they were exchanging [property]” (Avdy-mu’allim, 69 years old).

This expression, “everybody agreed”, masks the main peculiarity of those meetings in which practically all members of the commune participated. They made a decision that was perhaps the most important in the life of their community,

and practically everybody assumed responsibility for making and carrying out this decision. Via daily plebiscite, the people sought a solution to a situation that had developed suddenly and the likes of which had never been seen before.

The villagers' somewhat diluted memories constantly demanded additional reflection and several follow-up questions. As researchers, we faced a challenge in reconstructing the long chain of efforts that made it possible to find the *new location* for their settlement.

“So our people used to go to Khanlar [a district in Azerbaijan]. I was in Khanlar too. We stayed in Khanlar for several days. There was one village there, we wanted to exchange with them. But apart from us there were also people from five or six other villages there. There were already some arguments as to who would exchange and who wouldn't. We left, we went to Qabala [in the north of Azerbaijan]” (Zakhid-kishi, 58 years old).

Certainly, memory offers other reasons for turning down that option for exchange, too.

“Yes, off we went. There was one village in Khanlar district. We didn't like it, it was even worse than this one. Truth be told, there was water there, everything was there... At least here we have Baku nearby. So we go there, I have a son who lives there. Someone has a son there, a sister or a daughter there. We all live together, yes” (Mamed-kishi, 68 years old).

The process of looking for a new village clearly took quite a long time. It turned out to be a rather difficult affair to find their new village, and there were many failed attempts along the way.

The possible options for the new location of their settlement were quite limited, and thus in the process of the exchange, every one of its participants had to make compromises. A series of recollections paints a more detailed and comprehensive picture of the search for the new location of their settlement. The value of these memoirs also lies in the fact that they allow us to experience all the specifics of the villagers' relations with the authorities on whose will the commune's future depended to a considerable degree.

“We called the people, had a meeting. We said we were going to have to move to Azerbaijan anyway. We decided we wouldn't fall apart. That... district Qabala, Qutqa-



Photograph 12. Dzunashogh village (Kyzyl-Shafag), Armenia, 2006. Photo by A. Hakobyan.

shen [the Soviet name of the town of Qabala], a lot of people had gone there. But they were not expecting us there. Colonel Adyl Aliyev and novelist Navruz Suleymanov, who works at a radio station now, they assisted us. We went to check that place out. We took our cars, perhaps 35 or 36 cars, four people per car. And there the first secretary, he came out, showed us a place on the riverbank. He said, 'Build your houses here, I will provide everything for you, I will give you the stone, supplies and building materials. We will build houses for you, here you will have everything the way you used to have it. Until then you will temporarily live in a boarding house' (Suleyman-mu'allim, 75 years old).

This is an example of positive collaboration with the authorities. At that point in that country, there were still those representatives of the authorities who were ready to help Azerbaijani from Armenia in crisis because they understood the hopelessness of their situation. But as we will see, such government officials and public figures were a rarity.

Kyzyl-Shafag residents still had some time left to make another attempt at finding another place for relocation, one that would better accommodate their needs. Apparently there were a number of reasons to turn down the offer to build

a new village from scratch in a completely new location. “Then our people started saying, 'Hey, there is a nuclear power station [Gabala Radar Station] nearby.' And I said, 'So what, let it be, it's not that close.' Well, I really don't know the reason why we left. We then went to Khanlar, stayed there for awhile and then we finally came here, to Shamakhi” (Suleyman-mu'allim, 75 years old).

Admittedly, if the village residents' memories did not preserve them, it seems as though there might have been no convincing arguments for turning down the idea of building a village in a new place. In retrospect many people see that as a simple unwillingness to build houses.

“We must have had about sixty cars, a whole column. Almost all of the village's cars went on that journey. There were four or five people per car. First we went to Qutqashen. We were very welcomed there. They placed us in a hostel at a campsite, temporarily. The chairman of the District Committee (we still had district committees then), he came, talked to us,...an Azerbaijani. A very good man. He said, 'I will give you all kinds of help, you may settle wherever you want here. Build yourself a village. I will help you, with cement, with everything. Live here...near the river, if you want, wherever you want'... I simply don't know what happened there. It looked like we had to build again, and we had just finished building there (in Armenia). All houses in our village were new. Everybody had built a two-storied houses” (Nasib, 45 years old).

They were builders and could build new houses for themselves. But it was a troublesome matter and perhaps the disappointment, weariness and angst were beginning to show. They had just finished building their houses and they had to leave them all behind and start from scratch one more time. It was not easy for them to bring themselves to do that.

“We went to Qutqashen. And the Chairman of the District Committee said to us, 'I will give you enough land, you may build wherever you want. Near the river, the lake, anywhere you want. Let's build a village since you all want to live together. I will help you with building materials, just build.' And our people, they were mainly builders, used to work in Russia... And then we thought that no, it was not all that easy to build a house. And then we found this place... Our state farm director, the Chairman of the Village Council and some Aqsaqal came to Shamakhi. They came and checked out the village” (Zakhid-kishi, 58 years old).

There certainly were more convincing arguments against rebuilding in a totally new location. However, we will return to this subject later.

We would like to mention here that declining the offer to build in the new place turned out to be a wise decision because of the USSR's quickly approaching disintegration, followed by the economic collapse and rapid regime change (in addition to a whole series of new regimes in Azerbaijan) would most likely would have kept the Chairman of the District Committee from fulfilling his promises to Kyzyl-Shafag residents. We also emphasize the importance of the human factor in that context. Some people, like the Chairman of the Qutqashen District Committee, were able to demonstrate strong will and take responsibility by supporting the future migrants, but a number of people were unable to do so.

The residents followed authorities' commands, which could have been detrimental for anyone who had counted on them for help and had not left in time. The days of the Soviet Union were numbered, but the government officials still had it within their power to provide assistance to those for whom relocation was inevitable. However, the orders from the "higher-ups" were to leave everything as it was, and only a few people had the courage to act against those orders to allow the Armenian and Azerbaijani residents to swap their villages.

"There were several of us. And there [in Shamakhi] was a District Executive Committee...and they had that tall blue-eyed first secretary working there. We came into his office but there was a military base stationed there [in Kerkenj] at the time so they didn't let us into the village. I told him, 'How is that possible, Armenians are allowed to do as they please, they do whatever they want, and we are held by the military as if we are going to kill or blow up somebody!' I don't remember that First Secretary's last name, but we came to talk to him... I said, 'Why don't you give us permission to go to that village [Kerkenj]? You are the First Secretary, tell them to check us, search us, and then make them let us into the village. We want to exchange our villages'... The schoolmaster Isakhan Aliyev and Muhammad Orudjev were there with me as well... And Isakhan-mu'allim also said something, and the First Secretary responded, 'Hey, you, hick, what do you know!' This was...well, kind of rude. And he responded, 'You are a hick yourself!' Yes, he said that. The Secretary was quick to responde, 'I will put you to prison right away!' The officers were quartered in that building on the first floor. Just as the Secretary said that, they jumped on their feet and stood facing each other; I got between them. I said, 'Get back to your seat, this is the only thing that has

come from you so far that I will believe, that you will put us to prison. That I can believe. You will rather do that than anything else” (Suleyman-mu’allim, 75 years old).

The Kerkenj village, where the Armenian population was still present, was being protected by the military troops. Somewhere in the mother country, the rulers of the state, which was falling apart at the seams, believed that such measures would help save the situation by minimizing contacts between the two sides.

Moreover, since there had been no orders from “above” to support the grassroots initiative, authorities felt they had to hamper it.

“You will not help us! We came... Are we worse than Armenians? What do you want to say by that? Think about it really hard, did you see on TV when they showed the earthquake and how Gorbachev went to Yerevan, to Spitak? And when they brought an elderly woman out of the ruins, her first words to Gorbachev were, ‘When are you going to give us Karabakh back?’ She is dying, she is practically at death’s door and her dying words are ‘Karabakh!’ And what are you saying, huh? Put you in prison! What else can you do other than that, what else are you good for? Despite that incident we still managed to check out that village and Madrasa, too... No, they didn’t give us any permission! We used a secret path to get into the village. I came to the school. There was a military leader there. An officer came out to me and I said to him, ‘Please let me take a look around the village’. ‘Where are you from?’ [he asked]. ‘We are from Armenia, you see’. He answered, ‘No! No way’. ‘Why not? Tell me, why? What have we done wrong? We just want to exchange houses, that’s it!’ So... he tells me, ‘Watch your language, you are saying risky things’. I say, ‘What kind of life is that, better off in prison! What is that?’ So, that’s how we saw the village. And so we left. Later on Bayram-mu’allim would go check it out himself a couple more times” (Suleyman-mu’allim, 75 years old).

These recollections demonstrate the specifics of the situation when it was necessary not only to look for and make completely new decisions, but also to have a lot of courage to enable their realization. Certainly it was much easier to go to the length of an open confrontation with the authorities when the situation was that hopeless. Still we need to account for the fact that during that time, nobody could have foreseen that the Soviet Union would cease to exist shortly thereafter. Nobody could be absolutely sure that a confrontation with the authorities would not lead to any serious complications later on. The authorities themselves had no

understanding of the state of affairs whatsoever; they were just trying to hold off the overlapping of ethnic groups by using the strong arm. Peoples' friendship – one of the Soviet regime's key brands – took blow after blow. The only thing left was to simulate internationalism, protecting it with tanks. That is what was being done instead of, for instance, assisting with the village exchange. The authorities were not ready to give up the image of the institution managing the domain of "peoples' friendship." However, this image steadily crumbled, while claiming more and more lives and turning increasing numbers of Soviet citizens into refugees.

The authorities themselves were limited in their powers as well. When confronted by representatives of a rural commune, whom they associated with a Soviet state farm, government officials actually confronted a situation similar to peasants' quiet resistance to taxation, as described by James Scott. Kyzyl-Shafag residents were not giving "the government a clear and obvious cause for repressions. There were no institutions which could have been shut down, no unofficial leaders who could have been traced and caught or bribed, no rebels who could have been brought to court, only disagreement, by and large"¹ with the role they had been assigned by government officials. Villagers were expected to act as passive observers of the flaming conflict, which actually threatened the lives of Kyzyl-Shafag residents.

Government officials simply washed their hands of the situation and left the villagers to find an escape route themselves. "Back then, in 1988...I was already living in Surgut by that time. My mother sent me a telegram saying, 'Come, they are not just evicting us, they are forcing us out of here!'" (Mustafa, 40 years old). Kinship was strong despite the long distance and the specifics of the situation demanded that everybody who was ready for action mobilized regardless of where they lived at the beginning of the conflict.

"We came. There was even a commission from Moscow there. The whole village, these days there are not so many of us here, but back then there were a lot of our people there [in the village in Armenia]. The whole village gathered in the club, even the First Secretary of the District Committee came, and a representative from Moscow, too... I don't remember his last name, Volkov or something. He came, too, he observed... He had been most likely brainwashed by Armenians or something; he said, 'I can't do anything, you should go to your Azerbaijan'...So we came to Azerbaijan. First Bayram-mu'allim came here (to Kerkenj), you know, to agree on ex-

¹ Scott J. Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance. In: Peasant studies: theory, history, modern times. Yearbook, 1996. Moscow: Aspect Press, 1996, p. 35.

changing the villages for the sake of our cemetery. It (the cemetery) remained there, and that is why we were exchanging with that village. But then those who had the opportunity went and bought apartments in the city. Those who didn't have an opportunity like that went to the village. And there you have it" (Mustafa, 40 years old).

Other villagers also remember that visit from the First Secretary of the District Committee, which was not an ordinary event. All recollections about that visit demonstrate both the unquestionable weakness and inaptitude of the authorities, along with their attempts to simulate rapid settlement of the conflict that was gathering steam at the time.

Even appointees from Moscow did not have any real power and could not offer any actual assistance. Moreover, they found themselves in a situation when they had only a vague idea of the scale and scope of the events.

"I went to quite a few places myself, visited Khanlar, too. When we were in Khanlar, a representative from Moscow came there. There were three of us and we went to the District Committee office. We arrived at two o'clock. They [the District Committee officials] said they were starving; they hadn't had a bite to eat since that morning. The First Secretary was there as well. So I stood up and the guys asked me, 'What are you doing?' And I said, 'What do you mean, what am I doing?' I stood up and said, 'Wait a minute, will you? You came from Moscow, didn't you?' He said, 'Yes'. And I asked him, 'Where are you going?' The Party District Committee Secretary said, 'We're going out to have something to eat'. I said, 'Don't just be thinking about yourself, what about me? You have been hungry only for three hours; I have been hungry for days. Have you given this a thought?' So that guy from Moscow sat back down. I approached him, told him about the state of affairs. Well, what could he do, what was in his power? Well, we just talked" (Suleyman-mu'allim, 75 years old).

From this anecdote, it seems that this conversation could not influence anything. The representative of the seemingly still omnipotent mother country simply lacked any actual resources for solving their problems. The government official from Moscow could only help find them a place to stay the night before they headed back home.

"We were going to go home but we needed some place to spend the night. They told me to go and find out if maybe they could help us somehow. So we

came here, there was a huge line there but I went in anyway, line or no line. He... what a man he was (!), he took one look at me and recognized me, he said, 'You have been here before'. I swear to Allah! I said, 'Yes, I have'. 'What is your question for me?' I said, 'We need a place to spend the night, and there are several of us'. He ordered the District Executive Committee to settle that and they sent us to a club. So we arrived at the club. And some people from...the [Azerbaijani] village of Lembeli [in Armenia on the border with Georgia], same as us, had already taken shelter in that club. They put beds and couches there. But it was...so dirty and messy there, cigarette butts lying around on the floor. We also went inside. I said, 'Please get up'. They stood up, curious about who I was, where I had come from. I told them, 'Shame on you, maybe we will spend a year here, not just three days. How can one live like that? We are refugees but we are still people! Is a refugee not a person? Cleanliness is a must'. They whispered between themselves that yes, I was saying the right thing. I called for the club's deputy manager, asked him to get a maid for the next day so that she would come and clean the place.

And starting the next day we would put two people on duty every day so that they would not let anyone into the building until, say, seven o'clock in the evening. That's how we gradually set up the new order of things. Then some people came to me and told me, 'Someone among your guys is making a lot of noise, and they interfere with our sleep'. And I saw that it was true, our guys were talking too loudly. I told them, 'You either stop this or get out tomorrow. The law is the law for everybody'. And that's how it was. Well, then we came here [to Kerkenj], settled in the houses, we were coming in groups – some came sooner, some later" (Suleyman-mu'allim, 75 years old).

This episode from those tragic early refugee days, which in fact still continue for some people, is rather telling. The fact that Suleyman-mu'allim places himself among the ranks of refugees is a retrospective view. However, what is most important about this episode is not this attempt to place themselves in one situation with refugees from Armenia but the fact that there were a lot of Kyzyl-Shafag residents who had not lost their spirit and self-respect even in the most dire moments of their lives.

During the time after the conflict had broken out, meetings with representatives of the authorities occurred quite frequently. But as a rule, they did not herald any positive changes.



Photograph 13. Kerkenj village (Azerbaijan), 2006. Photo by S. Huseynova.

“People came from Moscow...from the Central Committee, Volkov was his last name... He came, he tried to persuade us, saying, ‘Where are you going, look at the Armenians – they are returning to Baku’. This was during Vezirov’s time¹... He took out one newspaper, the Pravda, and it read, ‘Armenians are coming back to Baku’. And I had the Komsomolskaya Pravda, an Armenian newspaper, that is, the Communist. And there was an article in that newspaper saying that after the devastating earthquake in Spitak, a grapple dredger dug out so many artillery missiles, so many machine guns, that much ammunition from under the ruins of one house. Can you imagine – all that from one basement! I said, ‘Comrade Volkov, you are telling us that...’ there were representatives [at the meeting] from the Stepanavan District Prosecutor’s Office and Kalinino District Prosecutor’s Office, one guy from the (Ministry of) Internal Affairs of Armenia. Three Armenians. And that Volkov guy, he was a friend of Farman Salmanov (that was before he became an oiler in Russia). He said, ‘Your Farman Salmanov was in tears when he was sending me here’. I said, ‘Comrade Volkov, you have read that yes, ‘Armenians are coming back to Baku’. Here, you should also read this Armenian newspaper, the Communist, read it out loud’. The newspaper was in Russian. ‘What is written here?’ And he said, ‘What, as if you

¹ Vezirov was the First Secretary of the Communist Party Central Committee of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic in 1988-1990.

don't have enough guns, too! Just yesterday we confiscated a thousand revolvers in Baku'. But revolvers and artillery missiles aren't the same thing, are they? He said, 'Don't you tell me they don't have rifles in the Dmanisi district [an Azerbaijani area in Georgia]'. What rifles? They had taken away even their hunting rifles! I said, 'Sure, when neighbours are fighting and one of them attacks another with a sharpshooter spade, we also must respond with a knife. Sure we have the arms [in reserve]'. We didn't have squat. But what could we say? We had to say something (laughs). So there you go" (Mamed-kishi, 68 years old).

Therefore the authorities did not offer assistance. Moreover, they continued to play their own game in which people were nothing more than bargaining chips.

If proximity to Georgia gave hope that the majority of the village population would be at least spared the very worst because they could quickly relocate to the nearby village of Irganchai in a critical situation, there still remained the issue of losing houses and property.

"And when people flee the village, they really flee. There were four of us, four brothers... We were still living there; we actually stayed there for a long time. Some people had gone to Baku, some to Shekhi. I don't know, some found a place, some found a house... We stayed there. Then we saw it was no longer possible, we couldn't go to the district... Yeah, there were other people there, too. But people were leaving the village in front of our eyes. So we packed our things too, we hired a car, collected all our belongings and moved them to Irganchai. And there our clothes, our rugs got stolen. Well, then we moved here (to Kerkenj)" (Aly-kishi, 72 years old).

A stop in Irganchai was only a temporary solution anyway. Some people moved their families out of Kyzyl-Shafag, which was no longer a safe place to be. But then it was time to decide whether to come back or go somewhere else. There were families who decided not to wait for the collective exchange and left the village. "At first our folks, about ten families, went to Qutqashen and settled there. Then they got the news that our whole village had settled in Kerkenj. So they moved here as well. Some of them had lived in Balakan [a district in northwestern Azerbaijan] for almost a year before they moved here" (Muhammed-mu'allim, 52 years old). However, the unity of the commune was still intact, and the idea of relocating together was strong among those who did not want to or could not leave individually.

The fact that the situation grew increasingly more complicated and the authorities did nothing to help resolve it forced some to develop questionable escape strategies. Sometimes the quest for a new place for collective relocation led their gazes towards more faraway lands.

“Some people even wanted to go to Rostov region. They even wrote to Moscow, saying, ‘Will you accept us if we come?’ And as far as I understood they even got a reply, ‘Yes, come to the Rostov region, we will give you a vacant lot, we will give you work. Come.’ But then people said that we had the elderly, elderly women, too. We couldn’t go to a strange land, if they were forcing us out of our homes here; they would just as easily force us out of Russia. That’s why we didn’t go, and I think we should have. We would have had a better life there” (Mustafa, 42 years old).

It’s hard to say whether that project was seriously considered and discussed. But the mere possibility of that option demonstrates a rapid transformation of the group’s consciousness. The awareness that tragedy could be avoided only by staying within the political landscape of their own republic was growing.

A. Hakobyan

3.2. “We decided to exchange a village for a village so that the village would remain intact”

As we have already noted, the idea of compact relocation to Armenia or to Russia germinated in Kerkenj after the Sumgait Pogroms. But at the time that idea was not really popular, as people still had trust in the Soviet regime. In December 1988, however, the tensions significantly increased, causing Kerkenj residents to start looking for villages in Armenia that would be suitable for exchange. The following are the recollections of one of the participants of that quest (male, born in 1955), who visited the Kalinino district in Armenia with his fellow villagers:

“I came to Kalinino district on December 27, 1988...There was me, a son of my paternal uncle, Shamil, he now lives in Russia, there were our fellow villagers – Sergey, he lives near Echmiadzin in Zvartnots, and a relative of his, Anushavan. We came, checked out those villages. Truth be told, we didn’t visit that village [Dzunashogh, then Kyzyl-Shafag], there [in that district] we had Evly, Mikhailovka. We

went to see those villages. It was too cold there, we wouldn't have been able to adapt there."

It is of note that the climate factor was also discussed regarding the choice of Kyzyl-Shafag. However, this topic was raised later, after Kerkenj residents had already gotten to know Kyzyl-Shafag better; at the beginning that was by no means a determinative factor. According to K.S., some people were against exchanging villages with Kyzyl-Shafag because "it was just like Siberia. That's why Avagyan Anuvashan told people, 'Let's get together and move to Russia, we'll build a village there. To Russia or to Armenia. We need a country with a warm climate, it's too cold here, we won't survive'. But we didn't go."

Former Kerkenj residents who had already relocated to Armenia some time before were also recruited to join the quest for alternatives for the exchange. According to one informant, one of their fellow villagers who lived in Armenia had driven across the whole republic to find a suitable location. He even offered to settle temporarily in one of the Azerbaijani villages in the Ararat valley so that the villagers could relocate further if a better place was found afterwards. However Kerkenj residents didn't like the location and the climate, so they declined the offer to either temporarily or permanently settle in the Ararat valley.

We cannot say that there was any definite request on behalf of the village to their former fellow villagers who had already lived in Armenia for a significant period before the conflict. It is also unclear whether the idea germinated among those Kerkenj villagers living in Armenia at the time. The idea just seemed so natural at the time. It was simply verbalized, and it mobilized people, including those living in Armenia. The latter had relatives in the village, and they continued to be invested in the fate not only of their relatives but also of the village and the community as a whole. For individuals, any solution to the situation demanded a communal decision. The community did not oppress the individual; in those dark times, however, a clear distinction existed between the collective and the personal. Collective decisions took priority, which enabled them to provide an appropriate escape route for everybody. This was a consciously made choice.

To this day, villagers continue to refer to the experience with the words, "we were exchanging", which speaks for the naturalness of the decision and the extent to which it was perceived as a collective choice and exchange: "We were exchanging, we wanted to exchange. You know why? We decided to exchange a village for a village so that the village would remain intact, so that our relocation would be easy."



Photograph 14. Dzunashogh village (Kyzyl-Shafag), Armenia, 2006. Photo by A. Hakobyan.

Kerkenj residents found themselves alone: “That’s why, when Sagyan left, Mesari left, Kelakhana left, the sixth left, Madrasa left, everybody was gone except for us, only our villagers remained.” Apparently in the villagers’ opinion, group decisions were to ensure, if possible, an “easy” way out of the situation, without any “losses.” Solidarity and unity formed not only the basis of survival in crisis (through self-defense and self-organization), but they also determined decisions and objectives concerning the future (“to live together”). As one of our informants puts this, “We were exchanging, we said, we’ll stay together, we’ll go together, we’ll live together.”

The collective decision to exchange villages placed certain limitations on personal exchanges. As one of our informants describes,

“We decided we needed to exchange villages. Several times they [the Azerbaijani] came to buy a house, but we didn’t let them in... For instance, people were coming from Ijevan district, Qajaran, Agarak, Amasia [regions and locations in Armenia], trying to buy houses in the village, but we didn’t let them in.”

In this context an example given by our interlocutor is particularly interesting. According to him, an Azerbaijani from Qajaran wanted to exchange his apartment



Photograph 15. Everybody in the village agreed to exchange the villages. Village Kerkenj, Azerbaijan. Photo by S. Rummyantsev.

with a cottage in Kerkenj. He had received a recommendation about both Kerkenj and the house from the house owner's brother who lived in Baku. "We didn't let that happen, we didn't agree, the people said no...[Interviewer: 'Who didn't let that happen?'] We didn't. The people said, 'You are not exchanging.'" There were options for individual exchange but the priority was given to the "collective exchange." For instance, "the people would say, 'You are not exchanging. You know what? If you want to exchange, just wait a little bit, wait for us to leave and then do whatever you want, sell or exchange if you want'. So that's how it was... The people said...the village was to be exchanged one hundred per cent."

It was not only Kerkenj residents who began to look for an appropriate Azerbaijani village in Armenia for exchange; Azerbaijani villagers in Armenia were also on the lookout for a suitable Armenian village in Azerbaijan. Sometimes those paths would cross. As our informant (male, born in 1926) recollects,

"Many people came to us, we had people from Ijevan district, I believe that village is now called Khachpar [Khachardzan, the informant's son adds here that the village used to be called Polad]. People came from there. The first delegation came to us from there, they wanted to exchange villages... Then they told us that our houses were in

no way a match for theirs [meaning that both in quality and quantity their houses were a lesser match than those in Kerkenj, that they were in worse condition]... So that time we didn't allow the exchange to happen... It was February 1989. They fled [Armenia], there were barns not far from the Sabir state farm, so that's where they took shelter. That was Polad, as you called them, [the Azerbaijani] from Khachpar. Then our fellow villagers, my cousin, said that [the Azerbaijani] had come there, and I needed to go there and persuade them to exchange, if possible. I said I would.

Off we went. I took two soldiers out of those cadets from Alma-Ata and I went to that Sabir state farm, I had an acquaintance there. I came to him, and I said that I came to talk with those people [the Azerbaijani]. Well, I had soldiers with me, they wouldn't have... The soldiers charged their automatics. 'Stand still!'... [Local Azerbaijani] told us to step aside, and they said they would talk to them [the newcomers] themselves; we were not to interfere. That acquaintance of mine told me to wait while he talked with his brother, who was their sheikh. He was the sheikh's younger brother. He called his brother on the phone and said that there was a man who came to them to visit those people [the Azerbaijani] and talk to them. That guy told him not to take me there, said they could kill me. I said, 'Then do something about it!' He told me to wait for him to return. I went out, entered the barn. Those who stayed there had run away and come there, and it was wintertime. So they called one of them, and I went, too, to talk to him. Those soldiers were standing there with their automatic guns. I greeted them and said, 'We're in the same boat... Let's come to an agreement, come check out our village, and we will go to yours, and then we will exchange'. The following morning they needed a pass to enter our village. I came out and signed a pass for them. We had one guy in our village, he lives in Russia now (where did he come from anyway?), he came out, saw them, phoned the commandant and said, 'Why have you let them in, huh?' Well, the military were on our side by that time...they said, 'Don't fret, and get them in if you want, or get them out, it's the same to us'.

They [representatives of Polad] came and got kicked out of our village [by soldiers]...

I told them [the Azerbaijani], 'You see that village? There is no one there'. That was Kyalakhan, an Armenian village. They had water springs galore, plenty of land; it was better than our village in every respect. They [Kyalakhan residents] had already relocated to Ijevan. And so they [people from Polad] moved to that village from those state farm's barns and settled in the houses of Armenians. Then Armenians came and made the exchange. Our Armenians live there now, her [his wife's] sister also lives there."

Yet another delegation left Kerkenj for Armenia in February 1989 searching for a village suitable for the exchange. According to one of the members of that delegation he had “Artsakh” – the Armenian name of Nagorno-Karabakh - written on the windshield of his car in Armenian (“my wife wrote that”). They did this to avoid problems in Armenia; they wanted people to know that Armenians were driving the cars with Azerbaijani plates. The delegation of Kerkenj villagers went to Vardenis district in Armenia, where one of the Kerkenj residents’ relatives lived.

It is interesting that in the words of one Kerkenj resident, there were “the elderly, the young and women” among the members of that delegation. “Many people went...approximately...15 people. [Interviewer: Which women?] There was V., then M., our relative’s wife, but the majority were men. [Interviewer: On what basis were these women selected to join the delegation?] Well, for instance, if a woman had no husband, she would go herself.”

The delegation had some preliminary information about the villages and the district where they were going. They were shown the Azerbaijani village of Bakhar, which had already stood empty; its residents were themselves looking for a village for exchange in Khanlar district in Azerbaijan. There were representatives from that village with Kerkenj residents. They must have shown the village, the houses. But Kerkenj villagers did not like Bakhar. One of the delegation’s participants has rather grim recollections of Bakhar: “The place wasn’t suitable, it was cold.” He even remembers that “the river had overflowed the banks and the streets; the village’s central parts were all covered in ice.” Kerkenj residents did not find Bakhar’s economic set-up and climate acceptable. “What will we do here?” they asked.

The delegation came back to Kerkenj. Approaching the city, they were informed by the police that they had an Azerbaijani delegation from Armenia waiting for them in Shamakhi. These were Kyzyl-Shafag residents.

CHAPTER 4

CIVIL AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE COMMUNES

A. Hakobyan

4.1. Meetings with Kyzyl-Shafag residents: negotiations, agreement

In February 1989 when the expeditionary delegation of Kerkenj residents was returning from Armenia, approaching the city they were informed by the police that several Azerbaijani from Armenia had been waiting for them in Shamakhi for three or four days, as the commandant's office had not let allowed them into Kerkenj. One of the leaders and Aqsaqal of Kerkenj recalls, "They called us saying they [the Azerbaijani] had arrived. I said, 'You know what, you should come to the village in the morning and we'll talk.'"

The next day, according to the informant, he went to Shamakhi, met with the Azerbaijani delegation and came to an arrangement with the commandant's office so that they would let Kyzyl-Shafag residents go to Kerkenj. At the District Committee he signed a release form stating that he was taking responsibility for their lives, obtained a pass at the commandant's office and returned to the village together with the Kyzyl-Shafag delegation. The Azerbaijani delegation, comprised of four people, stayed in Kerkenj for several days in the houses of Armenians. The Azerbaijani delegation included the state farm director, the village council chairman, the head engineer and their driver.

Here's how our informant (male, born in 1955) describes those first contacts of Kerkenj villagers with the Azerbaijani delegation from Kyzyl-Shafag:

"People were talking... Yes, they gathered at the administrative office... We had an administrative office, they gathered in front of it, and people started talking. [Interviewer: What were they saying?] ... We had no interest in leaving our houses like those people who did not want to relocate to Azerbaijan. Our village had four hundreds years of history."



Photograph 16. The Azerbaijani cemetery in the village of Dzunashogh (Kyzyl-Shafag), Armenia, 2006. Photo by A. Hakobyan.

Self-defense posts in Kerkenj, where gas stoves kept villagers warm on those cold winter days, became discussion spots as well. The Azerbaijani delegation spent some time there too, enabling Kerkenj residents to get to know the representatives of Kyzyl-Shafag.

A delegation from Kerkenj then went to Armenia with the delegation from Kyzyl-Shafag in order to see their village. There were four people in that delegation; they were the Aqsaqal though their official status was not higher than that of regular peasants. Of note, Kerkenj delegates also stayed in the homes of those Azerbaijani delegates who had visited Kerkenj, all except for one person, who stayed at the home of the future owner of his house in Kerkenj. Negotiations between the representatives of the two communes were held in the Village Council building.

What was being discussed in the course of these negotiations? For example, according to our informant who participated in those negotiations, he told them that “their” (that is, Kerkenj) houses were older than those of Kyzyl-Shafag villagers, and Kyzyl-Shafag had more houses than Kerkenj. However that factor did not hamper the negotiations process.

They also discussed the specifics of the relocation and decision-making process. After the leaders had met and reached the principal agreement, it was



Photograph 17. The Armenian cemetery in the village of Kerkenj, Azerbaijan, 2006. Photo by S. Huseynova.

necessary to get approval from “the people”, as the final decision belonged to them. Our informant highlights that this is the reason why Kerkenj villagers first had to investigate the potential relocation destination for themselves. “When we came there [to Kyzyl-Shafag], we spoke to the director, the chairman, too. We said we would come and exchange the villages but they were to organize the people so that they...could check out each other’s houses and agree individually.” In the words of one of the participants in the negotiations, the leaders of the communes had met five or six times before the actual exchange commenced.

When the decision about the exchange had been made, they addressed the agreement’s key details, which first and foremost included the preservation of the cemeteries. Both sides agreed to preserve the cemeteries, that is, the Armenian cemetery was to remain in Kerkenj and the Azerbaijani cemetery in Kyzyl-Shafag. Our informant says, “We had no idea it would later come to that [to the current situation between the two countries]. We thought we would be able to visit our cemeteries freely.” He recalls that when he left Kerkenj in August 1989, he reminded the Kyzyl-Shafag Aqsaqal one more time that the cemeteries were to be preserved, and one of them swore on the Koran that they would take care of the cemeteries. According to another informant, they chose to exchange with Kyzyl-

Shafag precisely because they had agreed to preserve their cemetery. The fact that respective state property was to be transferred to the other party without any losses was within the general realm of the agreement. Ultimately, everything was indeed finalized in accordance with the law.

The agreement about the exchange and the corresponding terms and arrangements were verbal, but there was also a ritual component, which seemed to formalize the contract. As told by our informant, later on they gave the new owners the plan of the village. “We had kept the map of our village, and we then gave it to them... They took our land within our [Kerkenj] bounds.” The whole negotiation process was conducted at the table, while “breaking the bread.”

“A few times we sat on top of the hill [in Kyzyl-Shafag, there was a sanctuary there, replaced now by a chapel]. One guy from our village was singing sad songs in their language. The people were crying... Yes, they [the Azerbaijani] were crying... We stayed on that hill two or three times, they would not let just anybody sit there. Those people were far, far away. Those who needed to be there, came. The director... the leaders came too.”

In speaking about the exchange agreement, one has to highlight that this was not a one-time deal in which villagers agreed on everything in one sitting. Instead, the village exchange involved an extensive process, and the agreement’s finer points (such as the transfer of the map and the issue of preserving the cemeteries) were shaped throughout the course of that process. Certain mechanisms for carrying the agreement out were also implemented. Within the general context of the exchange, residents agreed on ways to avoid conflict situations at the time of the unavoidable co-residence of Armenians and the Azerbaijani in one village as part of the relocation process. Communication among the commune’s leaders also strengthened mutual trust.

Another important aspect of the exchange was that the parties tried to support and encourage each other¹. This approach enabled them to successfully overcome numerous challenges later on. The need to help and support each other was not in the text but in the logic of the agreement, stemming from the realization of the practical value of cooperation and simply from mutual understanding in the context of common misfortune.

¹ More on that subject in the next chapter.

4.2. "Maintain ours [our cemetery] and we'll maintain yours"

Waiting for news frequently turned into real torture for those who stayed in Kyzyl-Shafag.

"When our people were away visiting various districts in Azerbaijan, looking for a village, all of us who stayed behind in the village anxiously waited for results, guessing what news they would bring us. We were so eager to just leave already, and I swear to Allah, it was driving us crazy, it was the only thing we thought about, hoped we'd find some place, any place for us, for our children at least" (Gyulshan-khanum, 52 years old).

It was time to make a decision, and fortunately their quest was crowned with success quite soon.

It seems that if each family had made attempts to deal with the situation on its own, moving to Baku or Sheki (as some in fact had done), completing the overall task of relocating would have been considerably easier. But the people had already focused on collective resettlement in a new location, and due to that jointly-made decision, they had to look for an entire village.

"Well, we were looking for a place... We had exchanged entire villages, you know. Out of those in Armenia...ours is the only village that has gone through such an exchange. The rest dispersed somehow, went to various districts, some went to cities. Our village...is comprised mainly of the residents of that village, almost all of us are" (Zakhid-kishi, 58 years old).

These days the villagers have a hard time recalling exactly how they found the village in Shamakhi district. It is not easy to imagine how all that could have happened given the information vacuum that existed at the time and the frequent resistance on the part of the authorities.

"Our people arrived in Shamakhi... Our leaders, really. And there...the Russians had set up a block post at the entrances to the village, and they were not letting people into the village. Then when we had already come to an agreement, we finally entered the village and got the preliminary idea as to whose house



Photograph 18. The Azerbaijani cemetery in the village of Dzunashogh (Kyzyl-Shafag), Armenia, 2006. Photo by A. Hakobyan.

there would be a good match for whose house back home” (Veysal-kishi, 78 years old).

The search party’s arrival in Shamakhi was not coincidental, since Kyzyl-Shafag residents had already known that there was a village in that district which could be a potential for exchange.

Kyzyl-Shafag residents, now the residents of Kerkenj, mostly have a rather vague idea of how exactly they had learned about that village. Some people see that quest as an expeditionary trip with no particular end goal. According to them, Kyzyl-Shafag representatives just drove around Azerbaijan until they found the right village.

“Why Kerkenj? Well, our Bayram-mu’allim...and some other people from the village were travelling from village to village, looking for a place (a land) in Azerbaijan, a good empty village to relocate our people. Half of the village moved there following Bayram-mu’allim, then I moved too. We rebuilt, settled and still live there now” (Aly-kishi, 72 years old).

Another resident recalls a somewhat different story, saying that “there was one guy, he had been in the military with a guy from that village, and so we



Photograph 19. The Armenian cemetery in the village of Kerkenj, Azerbaijan, 2006. Photo by S. Huseynova.

found the village through him. They did military service together” (Mamed-kishi, 68 years old). Other people usually pondered the question, “How did we learn about it?” for a while, then recalling that “Bayram-mu’allim had a son who had gone to school in Baku. His neighbor was from that village. An Armenian. That’s why it was that village” (Zakhid-kishi, 58 years old). Some people add various colourful details to the story of finding Kerkenj. For instance, we learn that,

“It was Bayram-mu’allim who found Kerkenj. He played the crucial role in that. Even in Armenia, the very last village to go was our village. Our village. Bayram-mu’allim came to Azerbaijan, to Khanlar district... Bayram-mu’allim came to the First Secretary of the Khanlar District Committee. He [the District Committee Secretary] said that...he was on Armenians’ side at that time, I don’t know, some secretary. He said, ‘We have plenty of our own Armenians, why have you come?’ And so he went back. Then he found that village through some of his connections. What do you know, so many refugees, and only our village has exchanged! Only ours! That’s for the sake of our cemeteries. Bayram-mu’allim, he came to an agreement with them so that they would [exchange]... Compared to ours, their houses were chicken coops, oh, we used to have such fine houses! He said, ‘For the sake of these cemeteries, let’s exchange, so that they won’t touch them’. So

we have exchanged and now we have an agreement. They don't tamper with our cemetery and we steer clear of theirs" (Mustafa, 40 years old).

These rather contradictory stories are united only by the acknowledgement of the significant contribution of Bayram-mu'allim, the man who led the commune for many years and who has unquestionable authority among the villagers, in the whole affair. It seems that he was the only well-connected man who could obtain the necessary information to make the exchange possible. He received that information from his son who had been living in Baku by that time. Many accidental situations occurred in the process by which Kyzyl-Shafag residents found Kerkenj. The only planned aspect was the very project of the exchange itself, as they pursued that goal purposefully and single-mindedly.

"It was me who found that village. At that time I was a student at the Institute of National Economy. I had an Armenian acquaintance. And during that time our people decided to find a suitable village for exchange. They were travelling around Qutqashen, Belakan, and Khanlar. And I knew that his parents lived in some Armenian village. So I asked him about their village. He said, 'Come to Khutor [a district in Baku], we'll talk there'. Mostly elderly people lived in Kerkenj, and their children lived in Baku. And a lot of former Kerkenj residents lived in Khutor back then. Well, long story short, I came to Khutor, we agreed to meet near the...power station. So I went there, and a huge crowd, about a hundred people, had gathered there to meet me. Well, I told them everything. What kind of village Kyzyl-Shafag was, in which district, how far from the district center, what kind of households we had, that almost everybody had new houses, well, I laid out all the details. I explained that our people wanted to exchange with some Armenian village. They were satisfied but they wanted to see Kyzyl-Shafag first. And that is how it all started. They came, about five people, to check out our village and our guys went to check out Kerkenj. And that's how we exchanged" (Madar, about 40 years old).

From this account, it seems that the son of the state farm director has played a key role in the exchange.

When the village in Azerbaijan had been found, the representatives of the two communes made a preliminary agreement that had certain terms regarding the sacrosanctity of important memory sites, of which cemeteries were the most

important. “They are keeping our graves there, and we are taking care of theirs here. Yes, the only thing is that their cemetery has been preserved here, and our cemetery has been preserved there” (Nasib, 45 years old).

The finalization of the agreement was complemented by the ritual of “ehsan” (literally translated from Azerbaijani as “funeral feast”). This traditional custom of honouring the memory of the deceased also works as a ritual certifying the inviolacy of an agreement. The state farm director of Kyzyl-Shafag had “slaughtered good, the most tallowy, cattle” for “ehsan”, and then the collective feast was held at the cemetery.

“Armenians also participated in that funeral feast. Those who had left here [Armenians of Kerkenj], they took part too, ours participated as well. But we promised them so that they would not touch...our cemetery, that we would maintain their cemetery. They are maintaining, we are maintaining too... And we even decided in which month every year we would visit our folks [the Azerbaijani cemetery in Kyzyl-Shafag] to check on our deceased, and when they would come here [to Kerkenj] to check on theirs [that is, the state of their cemetery]” (Bayram Allazov, 70 years old).

Having representatives of both communities hold a common feast at the cemetery in close proximity to their ancestors’ graves seemed to sanctify the agreement. That’s what “our” ancestors, whose remains were in that ground, had been doing long before “us” and thus this tradition, blessed by the days of the past, gave hope for successful honouring of the agreement for years to come. Traditional rituals maintained their meaning even in the completely new environment resulting from the interethnic conflict¹. “We had a meal together [with Armenians from Kerkenj]. The Mullah was there. Then we said our good byes and told them, ‘Maintain ours [our cemetery] and we’ll maintain yours’. They have been preserving it so far” (Mamed-kishi, 68 years old). Nobody, and especially no authorities, could guarantee the protection of the cemeteries. This could only be made possible through the goodwill of the people themselves.

¹ In our opinion adopting an old custom to the ever-changing conditions and environment should be regarded as a rule rather than an exception. In this case we could not but agree with James Scott, who points out that “it would have been wrong to present customs as laws. Customs are best understood as acting practical agreements which are continuously adapted to new environmental and social circumstances including, of course, relations with the authorities.” Scott J., *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Moscow: University Press, 2005, p. 60.



Photograph 20. The Azerbaijani cemetery in the village of Dzunashogh (Kyzyl-Shafag), Armenia, 2006. Photo by A. Hakobyan.

Each party could hope for the observation of the agreement only if it also observed its end of the deal. Perhaps politicians and government officials could learn something about negotiating from these village residents.

In fact the agreement included mechanisms and opportunities for tracking its fulfillment. They defined the dates when representatives of the both sides could visit their respective cemeteries, which is another crucial element of the exchange project. Nobody had any idea that separation would become so extreme that it would not be possible to even visit the ancestors' graves, that the previously unitary state would disintegrate, and that a war would break out within a short period of time. Apparently nobody wholeheartedly believed that they were leaving for good. Prior to their departure, many Kyzyl-Shafag residents had managed to obtain monetary restitutions for their houses in accordance with respective Soviet laws. Those compensations were tied with the devastating earthquake in the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic that occurred in December 1988.

“Every house had a...price value. You know, state insurance value. They were paying...according to that price. They were paying everybody. In fact, there were



Photograph 21. The old section of the Armenian cemetery against the backdrop of the monument to the World War II soldiers, Kerkenj village, Azerbaijan, 2006. *Photo by S. Rummyantsev.*

only two or three houses in our village alone whose owners had not insured them, and their owners had already left by that time. The rest of our people were eligible for the recompense, every one of them was. So people took the money, signed for it. Well, they left about ten per cent, of course [ten percent was left to the government official who was distributing insurance money]" (Bayram-mu'allim).

The time had finally come for the whole village to relocate and the issue of exchanging individual houses was on the agenda.

CHAPTER 5

THE EXCHANGE

A. Hakobyan

5.1. "We were exchanging with Kyzyl-Shafag..."

After the February 1989 meetings and negotiations in Kyzyl-Shafag between the leaders of the two communes steps were taken to ensure that "the people" of each village would come to an agreement. Settling "global" issues was the leaders' domain, while specific problems of the actual house exchanges were to be settled individually

After the meetings of the elders, Kerkenj residents visited Kyzyl-Shafag, and Kyzyl-Shafag residents went to Kerkenj. But before any of that could happen, certain work needed to be done in order to provide at least some kind of guidance to the villagers. So that's how a "committee" from Kyzyl-Shafag arrived in Kerkenj in order to compile a preliminary list of homes for the exchange and inspect Kerkenj's houses. An informant (male, born in 1951) from Kerkenj describes that process: "[The Azerbaijani] arrived in our village in cars and two buses. Sixty households, a person from each household, came from that village. They inspected houses, writing down who could exchange with whom... This was in March [1989]."

Here the collective and individual approaches intersected, but the individual approach was dominant. Individual families made decisions recorded in individual agreements, while the "committee's" decisions were seen more as a recommendation. In many cases, upon seeing respective houses, none of the parties were willing to exchange, and instead they chose other options and agreed among themselves. The subject of monetary compensation was also discussed if the houses did not meet certain requirements.

Our interlocutor (male, born in 1951) tells the story of his house swap. Having reviewed the house in Kyzyl-Shafag that the "committee" had suggested to him, he did not agree to the exchange because of that house's location in the center of the village (he wanted to get a house on the outskirts of the village



Photograph 22. A house in the village of Dzunashogh (Kyzyl-Shafag), Armenia, 2006. Photo by A. Hakobyan.

since according to him that was better for farming and cattle-farming). He spent two days in Kyzyl-Shafag, staying with his relatives who had already relocated there (there were also still some Azerbaijani left in the village at that time), and looking for a more suitable house. He managed to find what he was looking for, negotiate the exchange with the house's owner, and agree to meet him in Kerkenj so that the house's owner could see his house as well. According to the informant, that man wanted to transfer his house to the State Insurance Company but the state farm director did not allow him to do that. In ten days the negotiating partner came to Kerkenj in order to see our informant's house for himself. Upon visiting the house, he agreed, albeit quite reluctantly, to the exchange. He also wanted to receive a monetary compensation as his house was new and the informant's house was old. But the informant said he did not "have any money... I said, 'We should exchange as is, you have five kids and I have five kids as well'. He had four sons and a daughter and I had one son and four daughters. Then he agreed, and we had a drink, sat down and had a meal together... Another two [Azerbaijani] were with us." Just as our interlocutor did in Kyzyl-Shafag, the man stayed the night in Kerkenj with his fellow villagers who had already relocated. During that meeting the parties agreed on the timeline for relocation: the Azerbaijani man was to move to Kerkenj on June 14 and our informant was to leave for Kyzyl-Shafag on June 15 in the same car.



Photograph 23. The house with the inscription "1972", the village of Dzunashogh (Kyzyl-Shafag), Armenia, 2006. Photo by A. Hakobyan.

Later our informant would change his mind and leave one day before the date they had agreed on.

Another informant tells us that for him, the main criteria in choosing the location for his new house were "the school's proximity, the presence of a water source, and that the interior yard not be seen from the street." He did not agree to the house that the "committee" suggested for him, despite the fact that it was a good house, because it had no water source in the backyard and one would have to go all the way down the street to get water.

In the words of one of our informants, if one were to compare Kerkenj and Kyzyl-Shafag, one would see that even if all of Kerkenj residents had relocated to Kyzyl-Shafag, about sixty houses would have still remained unoccupied in the latter village. Armenian refugees from Baku had settled in those houses, so the village had no unoccupied houses left. It should be noted that there were some houses that local Azerbaijani had put into state ownership, receiving monetary restitution, or, as the informants call it, they had transferred them to the State Insurance Company.

As one informant [male, born in 1926] tells us, upon inspecting Kyzyl-Shafag, one government official who "managed state farms" asked them, "What are you doing here? We will be taking these houses away for state purposes, for Armenian refugees from Karabakh." Our informant replied, "But our houses will

remain there,” and then he added as a valid argument, “It’s a lie. If the people of Karabakh are coming here, why are those guys fighting, dying? If Karabakh is going to be emptied out, whom are they dying for? Isn’t that right?” Our data confirm that this was the only time when the district authorities blocked the actions of relocatees or caused any misapprehensions. Apparently it was the lower grade or mid-level government officials who were hampering the process (if they were indeed hampering it); the higher-ups considered the Kerkenj residents’ arguments persuasive and reasonable. The active role of the authorities ended at this point, and they placed no additional obstacles in regards to issuing documents, registration, etc. in the course of the exchange process.



Photograph 24. The house with the inscription “1959”, the village of Dzunashogh (Kyzyl-Shafag), Armenia, 2006. Photo by A. Hakobyan.

The situation was much more complicated in Azerbaijan. Just when everything had been decided and agreed upon between the two communities and the process had entered the active implementation phase, the obstacles started to emerge. It was the authorities who impeded the process. According to our informant,

“That’s how it was at the end: their [the Kyzyl-Shafag Azerbaijani’s] director and three or four other people, the state farm director, the Chairman of the Village Council, their engineer, their Aqsaqal came... They told us they were not being allowed [by the authorities in Shamakhi] to exchange the village, the houses with ours... They wanted our houses sold. Our location was a good one, plenty of land. The district committee wouldn’t have any of that, the Shamakhi District Committee didn’t allow.”

Then both sides employed their connections in the system to make the exchange happen. The Azerbaijani of Kyzyl-Shafag appealed to academic Asad Kurbanov, the dean of the Azerbaijan Pedagogical Institute. “Asad Kurbanov phoned them [Shamakhi district authorities] and said, ‘These

people have managed to get along, they have bridged the gap between the two republics, and two villages are exchanging. Why won't you allow that to happen?' [appealing to the First Secretary of the District Committee]."

Great efforts were necessary to overcome the Shamakhi District Committee. The informant goes on,

"Then I went to the first secretary. The second secretary was a Russian woman, she had known me for a long time through work, I used to work as a foreman. She told me, 'Go and take him [the first secretary] by the throat, demand that he allow'... There were also some acquaintances there [the Azerbaijani], they took me aside and said, 'These guys are getting ready...you should hurry and leave fast, don't waste another minute'. That woman also told me, 'Hurry up, I am also...[going to leave]'. As far as I know, she is now the head of the Molokans commune in Baku."

In the long run their efforts were successful, but the Azerbaijani of Kyzyl-Shafag still had some exchange-related matters to take care of in Baku. "They went to Baku...told us [Kerkenj residents] to get ready, that we would sit down at the table together upon their return." That feast took place in our informant's house and according to him, it went extremely well; there was shashlik, wine, vodka. However, one of the Azerbaijani, the eldest one, was not drinking due to, as he said, his old age.

Afterwards the actual exchange finally commenced. Some obstacles still remained. At first three or four families from Kerkenj arrived in Kyzyl-Shafag, but the authorities [the Commandant's Office, the District Committee] did not allow them to enter the village. And once again they "went to the District Committee's Office!" as our informant recalls. He adds that a heated argument with representatives of the authorities occurred, which produced results. "[The relocation] started in May. On May 9, as was our custom...we would always go to the cemetery on Victory Day. The people would go to the cemetery...tough situation, very tough...Then the relocation started. First they came, but they were not let in, so I went to the District Committee's Office."

At the very last moment, when everything had already been prepared, new obstacles suddenly emerged. "I set out on May 17. We had a man, the Party Committee Chairman, then he became the director. He came to our village, said, 'I've heard you are leaving tomorrow, aren't you?' He appealed to us, 'Don't

sell, exchange'. I said I was leaving the next day. 'You are not leaving, no way'. I said, 'Of course I am.'" Since it was 1989, the administrative official's stance could have been determined by the command from his higher-ups. The Soviet authorities made a decision to ban relocation and bring back the refugees¹. But the people still managed to go through with the exchange. According to the informant, by that time they had already had everything ready – the houses, the agreements, the cars, etc.

Another informant recalls that several families who had opted out of the exchange because they wanted to sell their houses remained in Kerkenj up until the last possible moment. "They wanted to give their houses to the State Insurance Company as they [the Azerbaijani] had done here. After we had left they stayed and didn't follow us to the village [Kyzyl-Shafag]... At first we were saying, 'Don't sell your houses until we leave'... Such was the truth, such was the law... among our people." But when those who stayed attempted to formalize the transfer of houses to the State Insurance Company, the Company representatives started to stall for time with the paperwork, preventing the villagers from receiving the money that owed to them. At that point the District Committee Officials openly stated that it was not in their power to protect them. No Armenians remained in the Shamakhi district by that time.

One informant tells us about the fate of those who had chosen to disregard their fellow villagers' warnings, staying even when it was painfully obvious that they needed to move. His Azerbaijani friends who lived in Shamakhi – a doctor, a restaurat owner, and others – had consistently warned him to do so.

"In September [1989] only about twenty of our people were still there. We wanted to sell the houses [to the Azerbaijani]. Then the situation worsened significantly. They ran away through Derbent. They were saying, 'We'll wait, we'll harvest the grapes'... We had our own orchards. I said, 'Yeah, you stay, you harvest, I will not wait any longer, I will leave'. They left their houses. They raised some money, gave it to the district police officer, he came in his car... drove them to Derbent and left them there."

¹ For more information on the decision of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, consult the Khorurdain Ayastan – the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia, the Supreme Council and the Council of Ministers of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic, 1989, #96.



Photograph 25. A house in the village of Dzunashogh (Kyzyl-Shafag), Armenia, 2006. Photo by A. Hakobyan.

In May 1989 the first families from Kerkenj arrived in Kyzyl-Shafag. By that time the Azerbaijani had already packed their belongings and left for the neighboring village of Irganchai. Only about 50 people still stayed in the village. However, all the administrative officials stayed: “the director, the engineer, the technician, the livestock expert, the accountant.” The exchange proceeded at an intense rate. “We were not moving out all at once, not all at once,” our informant tells us, adding that the process was being regulated. But as the collected data show, that regulation occurred at the individual level, as villagers negotiated among themselves, establishing timelines for moving, and so on.

It is rather interesting how the issue of transportation of people and belongings was settled. According to our informants, the same car would bring an Armenian family and take back an Azerbaijani family. These were mostly cars registered at one state company (the informant called it “PMK”), which was located in Shamakhi and operated in the field of cargo transportation during Soviet times. Everything was properly formalized (official papers were prepared for each trip, including route maps, etc.) so that they would not “give them a hard time” on the road, since according to our informant, the times were quite challenging – “I am talking about April, May and June here.”

The same informant rented a “KamAz”¹ in Shamakhi, which had already made a few trips to Kyzyl-Shafag. In his words, when he came to that office and dropped by the accountant, he told them, “I need this car for a day, I need to take some things to Armenia.” They issued formal papers to him, called a driver and told him, “You are going to Armenia.” The informant was to pay for both the formal services (the office) and informal services (the driver). But our informant gave all the money to the driver, so that the driver himself would pay off the office. The prices for transportation had drastically increased in accordance with the logic of the free market. “They used to transport for 350 rubles, then the price went up to 450 rubles and then it went up to 600”, according to our informant, who rented a car for transporting his belongings but used his Armenian neighbor’s Volga to move his family to Kyzyl-Shafag. The date of their arrival had already been established. But due to various reasons, such agreements were frequently broken. One of our informants came a day earlier than previously agreed and that had a certain meaning for him. “We set June 15 as the date when he would come by car [to Kerkenj] and I would use his car to leave.” But then he pondered that idea for a while and arrived at the conclusion that doing so would be wrong. “To have a Turk come and kick me out of my own home? I said, ‘I will leave first. I’ll take a car here and go.’”

Leaving one’s own home was difficult. Often the need to preserve some symbolic memories about the house would arise at the very last moment before departure. For our informant, that was the old inscription with a cross on the front of his house, made by his grandfather in the 19th century and displaying the year the house was built. Our informant asked the new owner of his house not to destroy the inscription in case he would not be able to keep it or if he had plans to rebuild the house, because it would have constituted a sin to break a stone with a cross on it. He asked the new owner to just “hide” that stone underground.

There is also an interesting story about the exchange told by V. [female, born in 1950], a single mother of five, whose husband had died a year prior to the events in question. In her words, she was initially offered to exchange her home for a house on the outskirts of the village, but she was against that because of her little children. “We came to the center of the city...that man said, ‘Let’s go, take a look at my house.’” She liked the house and later decided to exchange it for her house. According to the informant, the owner of that house, Mahmud Aliyev, also owned

¹ Translator’s note: Heavy-Duty Truck.

some cattle. She recalls that later on the Azerbaijani and his family arrived in Kerkenj with all of their belongings without prior warning. Since she was not ready for relocation at that precise moment, she had to leave some of her belongings behind, despite the fact that six months prior, she had already sent the majority of her possessions to her relatives in Armenia. "On the day when I was going to mark the anniversary of my husband's death, he [the Azerbaijani] came and brought his things." The informant recalls that she welcomed him and his family and set up a table. She left the house the same day, spending the night at her neighbor's [an Armenian] and leaving for Kerkenj the very next morning. She describes her move to Kyzyl-Shafag: "We had already left our [native] home, visited my husband's grave (crying the whole time) with my five children, and then we came here." She then adds, "there is nothing worse than being evicted."

According to another informant's [male, born in 1935] story, it was his younger son and wife who went to Kyzyl-Shafag to select a house, and prior to that in Kerkenj, its owner had shown him pictures of the house. It suited them, and they agreed to the exchange. That family was among those that left Kerkenj later than other families because they had some unsettled issues with their jobs, paperwork, and the transfer of the village club to new owners. By that time the situation had become very difficult. For instance, a soldier had to escort them to Shamakhi. The informant says that for about 20 days, they had to live together with the Azerbaijani family with whom they had exchanged their house. In fact, the Azerbaijani family lived in the house while his family stayed in the garage. One night in order to avoid potential troubles, he and his wife took their car and left the house, leaving their belongings. They hoped they would be able to get them at a later time. But that never happened. Our informant remembers that the previous owner of the house in Kyzyl-Shafag asked him not to erase the inscription "1959" on the front side of the house because that had been made by his older son to commemorate the date of the house's construction. That inscription is still there.

As our data show, the first families from Kerkenj arrived in Kyzyl-Shafag in May 1989, and by July all Kerkenj residents participating in the exchange had relocated to Kyzyl-Shafag. Other Armenian refugees from various places in Azerbaijan, mainly from Baku, took shelter in the village as well.

5.2. "Everybody should go, look around, and exchange their house to their own liking!"

After the preliminary agreement with Kerkenj residents had been reached, it was time to organize the actual house exchange. Once Kyzyl-Shafag villagers had visited Kerkenj, Bayram Allazov again "called a meeting. I said again, 'Don't interfere, and don't tell them where to go and which house to take, or whom to exchange houses with'. [I] held a meeting...created a committee...[of] seven people. Sent them here (to Kerkenj). [I said], go, see for yourself what kind of houses are here in this village."

Practically everybody remembers that sending this committee to Kerkenj was an important stage in carrying out the exchange project.

"Then it was as if a committee of our villagers came here. The committee started to walk around the village, look for exchange opportunities, like whose house to exchange with whose house. Let's say there in the village I had a small house, yes! Of course I couldn't ask for a two-storied house here. Small houses were to be exchanged with small houses, big ones with similarly sized houses... Sure, the best house here would be considered the very worst house in our village. How can we compare! It's all the same anyway... So they organized that a little at first, but then the villagers started to visit each other, those would come here, we would come there but still it was just slow... But nevertheless we have exchanged, one way or another... The committee was quite large, something like fifteen cars came here. Representatives of practically all the families were on that committee. Not just some three or four people... If there were fewer people, they could have come and taken all the best houses for themselves and leave bad ones for others. That way every household was represented, sometimes there even by two people. I believe every family sent its own car, and their own folks were in those cars" (Nasib, 45 years old).

The members of this committee, whom all the villagers trusted, were elected at the general meeting by the entire village.

"By an open vote. They suggested candidates. People voted themselves. I settled all the issues by the power and will of the people. Yes, by the power



Photograph 26. The picture of the former house of Aly-kishi in the village of Kyzyl-Shafag (the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic).

and will of the people... So yes, some people proposed that both father and son would sit...on that committee. I was against that. I said, 'Look, this is wrong, both father and son can't go'. But the people voted anyway. No, they both would be there. Ok, let them be, let them be... I was against that! Why should both son and father be among the members of that committee? But the people said, 'No, they both should be there'. That's the way we settled things...democratically" (Bayram Allazov).

The specifics of the actual house exchanges were left for the villagers' own consideration. Upon its return, the "committee" declared that they had preliminarily defined which villagers would exchange houses with which Kerkenj residents.

"So they came, said the committee had taken a look. They even said this person could exchange with that Armenian and this person – with that. I was against that at the time. I told the committee members, 'You can't say things like that, we will not force anyone. Everybody should go, look around...and exchange their house to their own liking! (Bayram Allazov).

The choice was tough. Their own houses seemed much better to Kyzyl-Shafag residents than those they had to settle for in the exchange. “Oh, what houses did we have! Most of them two-storied, tuf, stone! Plumbing... in every house! Steam heating!.. Despite the fact that there was water in our village I had laid out 19 kilometers of water lines...Water lines with water you could drink!” (Bayram Allazov). All of that familiar and comfortable world that they had cultivated and improved for so long – they had to leave it all behind.

“Then our people went there, negotiated with that house [the owners of a house in Kerkenj]. Rebuilt and settled. I come here, look around – what is that? This wall here and that one too – my sons built that, and the one in the back. They had only had that here [a one-storied house, a rather old one at that]. Are you out of your mind to have exchanged such a wonderful house for something like that! Oh well, what could we do...” (Mayga-khanum, 75 years old).

The main problem that Kyzyl-Shafag residents had to deal with right away was a simple shortage of houses.

“Our village was big, over three hundred families. Here they had only 120 families... Many people had to move to Baku right away, everybody did. You know some people would come here, take a look at the houses, compare them and then exchange. And their houses didn’t match. And then there we had more people, that’s why they moved to Baku right away while we stayed here” (Zakhid-kishi, 58 years old).

The disparity between the villages drove Kyzyl-Shafag residents to seek an exchange with the village of Madrasa, close to Kerkenj, but that turned out to be impossible in the course of the project’s actual implementation.

“They offered us here to look for houses, and they were looking for houses as well. We came here because that village [was ready for the exchange]. They didn’t let us in in Madrasa...Then they were giving away Madrasa to Meskhetian Turks. So we had to exchange with that village. We had 326 houses and they had...160 or so” (Veysal-kishi, 78 years old).

All in all, it appears that both Armenians and the Azerbaijani visited their potential relocation sites in order to establish personal contact with the owners of the house in which they sought to relocate and figure out the details of the exchange. It was already getting more and more difficult to visit each other.

“No, we visited them first. They couldn’t go there. They had to go through Georgia and they were afraid. There were the Azerbaijani in Georgia; they lived right along side the road that they would have used. That settlement was called Borchali. They had to pass through Borchali, densely populated by Azerbaijani. We came there...We talked to them...But they would not go alone; we were to escort them. So we took them here, they looked at the houses, whichever house they liked they selected it” (Zakhid-kishi, 58 years old).

Many villagers get very emotional reminiscing about that time.

“Ah-ah, how did we choose (!). There were no houses like that already (!) [meaning, the houses in Kerkenj were not as good as those left behind in Kyzyl-Shafag]. They had only two or three good houses here and the rest were pure rot. For instance, I used to have a two-storied house. I built that house [in Kyzyl-Shafag]; it was a palace, and I exchanged it for this barn here. Had to...Do you think they built that house? No, that was us, we built that later, you think Armenians did that? (!)” (Mamed-kishi, 68 years old).

We would frequently hear, “truth be told, I had a new house there. Eh-eh-eh, I had just built it. And this house here – I don’t even know when it was built, and it is decaying. The front is more or less all right, but the back is crumbling.” They felt sorry only about the newly built or newly renovated houses: “I have built a new house, the furnishings, the bathroom, the kitchen, the summer kitchen, the winter kitchen...Well, Armenians are shrewd. They liked it, and so I had to exchange” (Zakhid-kishi, 58 years old). This stereotype, “the shrewd Armenian”, only adds to the feeling of hopelessness¹.

¹ We should highlight here that according to our observations, in the majority of cases “the shrewd Armenian” stereotype doesn’t bear any pejorative connotation. In fact, this is a positive stereotype that more often than not operates as the basis for comparison through which Azerbaijani self-esteem is often lowered. Their attitude seems to say that if “we” had been that shrewd, “we” would have lived as well as Armenians, but alas...



Photograph 27. [Aly-kishi] in the yard in front of his new house. The village of Kerkenj, Azerbaijan, 2006. Photo by S. Huseynova.

In the stories about the exchange, the high quality of the houses that the villagers had to leave behind is demonstrated also in the descriptions of the impressions they made on Armenians who had come to exchange.

“An Armenian visited me there...Yes, an Armenian came there, the previous owner of this house. The house owner looked at my house... He was stupefied. A two-storied house and a metal garage...a yard full of trees, and what a harvest we had that year! Never had a harvest that great! He said, ‘I will live here’. I asked, ‘What kind of house do you have?’ He said, ‘Such and such, got some grape vines the yard’. So I left there...and that Armenian also came here, looked at that house, well, we came to an agreement... So that was the way we exchanged... First that Armenian came to us. We talked with him, he said, ‘I have a one-storied house, and yours is two-storied’. Then we exchanged, no money, nothing” (Aly-kishi, 72 years old).

There were those who had gone on several trips in order to find a suitable house.



Photograph 28. The village school opened for new students and teachers already in September 1989. The village of Kerkenj, Azerbaijan, 2006. Photo by S. Huseynova.

“[I] went twice. The first time, I went after Khanlar, the second time after I had gotten the permit (to visit Kerkenj), I came to look at the house. They had first sent a few people here so that they would define who would get whose house. But we had 350 houses and there was only 130 houses here. How were we to settle everybody? I didn’t go that time; they assigned me a house. But when I came myself and saw that house I said, no way, I wouldn’t live in that house. I had a two-storied house, a new modern house. I wasn’t going to exchange. I was the head of my household, I said I wouldn’t swap houses... That Armenian [the one he had been assigned to exchange with] came to my village to look at my house. I said to him, ‘The house is mine, I am not exchanging’. Well, his house was smaller than mine; I had a modern two-storied house. Then that Armenian [another man with whom he was ready to exchange] came and told me, ‘Now you should visit me and see my house’. So I came and looked at the house. The house was all right; I could see us living there. We made an agreement, and I went back. He had many other visitors after that, those who wanted to swap houses with him or buy his house, and he would say, ‘No, I gave my word, if that guy shows up and tells me he has changed his mind about it then yes, until then – no” (Suleyman-mu’allim, 75 years old).

Thus the exchange was more successful for some and less for others. The hopelessness of the situation forced them to agree to unequal exchanges. But these memories, full of bitterness, show something else too: that it is extremely hard for a rural dweller to settle in a new place. This became even more difficult when they realized that there would be no opportunity to return. A house is the first and most significant site of memory, and for these people, this sense remains connected to their former homes. To a great extent the walls of their current houses have remained alien to them.

The agreement ceased to be a collective affair; instead it disintegrated into a variety of individual contacts and decisions. Those contacts were not made at the politicians' and government officials' level, but among ordinary people who had found themselves in the same situation, sharing the same plight. They were much more productive than the authorities' attempts to disrupt the feuding parties. Citizens were able to come to an agreement; politicians were not.

The majority of Kyzyl-Shafag residents relocated to Kerkenj over the course of two months, in May and June of 1989.

For many people their recollections about the dates of the move are tied to certain cycles of life. Shura-khanum, 71 years old, remembers moving "when the grapes were still green." "We moved in June, on the 29th. When I arrived the school was closed for summer vacation. Then the school's director Asaf came back from Shamakhi; they gathered the teachers and the school opened on the 1st of September. Kids went to school. And all of the teachers came from our village" (Elmira, 37 years old). As far as the state farm director remembers, he was the last Azerbaijani to leave Kyzyl-Shafag and move to Kerkenj. "I was the very last one. On August 15, 1989, I officially resigned from the post of the state farm director... due to relocation" (Bayram Allazov). It is still extremely important to the collective memory of Kyzyl-Shafag residents that "the very, very... late village in the republic (the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic) was freed by us [meaning they were the last ones to leave their village in the whole republic]. It's just a saying, we didn't really free it, we were the last ones to move out." The pride of being the "very last ones to leave Armenia, our village was the very last one" (Zakhid-kishi, 58 years old) remains in the Kyzyl-Shafag residents' memory up to this day.

Here we should take into account the key aspects of the situation and particularly the specific nature of the exchange. All those events took place in the years when the Soviet regime remained stable, beyond any doubts. In the Soviet

Union in general, any collective move to a new place carried out by a whole rural commune required observation of certain mandatory formalities. From the administrative point of view, on paper the whole exchange was established as if one party had transferred all of their affairs and property to another party. The titles they received in the new place more often than not matched those that they used to have in their native village. In fact that rotation was completed and finalized in the spirit of the expression that had become an idiom in Soviet times, “the post was handed over – the post was taken over.” The paperwork, of course, did not reflect any details or specifics of the collective exchange. Only the villagers’ memories, the memory of the events of those days, allows us to read between the lines and understand the subcurrent of the situation.

Bayram Allazov, who stayed in his native village until the very end, not only documented the property and households left by his fellow villagers but also replacing those who were leaving by appointing newcomers to their respective positions. “There was that one Armenian from here [Kerkenj]... At first they wanted to give that job [the state farm director’s position] to another guy, a local Armenian.” He is talking here about the unpleasant incident with an old water-carting truck that the state farm director Bayram Allazov wanted to keep for getting economically established in Kyzyl-Shafag.

“I wanted to bring that water-carting truck here. We had pensioned it off legally. Wanted to bring that water-carting truck here. Those local Armenians gave me a deputy for almost a year [he was gradually taking over the farm and station in Kyzyl-Shafag]. I couldn’t visit other places to do other things for the farm. They wanted to appoint him after I’d leave. That water-carting truck... He found out where I had hidden it. He took it back to the garage. And because of that, on principle, I didn’t allow them to appoint him. The First Secretary of the Party District Committee was a friend of mine... He was the state farm director of the neighboring village... I told him they shouldn’t appoint that guy, they would do much better to give that job to the newcomer, that Armenian [from Kerkenj]. And so he gave him [the title]” (Bayram Allazov).

This incident with a water-carting truck shows us how personal connections still worked despite the fact that the interethnic conflict was gaining steam. A great deal of people still saw each other as friends and neighbours and not as enemies, and relations based on mutual support were quite natural.



Photograph 29. The former village store that operated during the time of the village exchange. The village of Kerkenj, Azerbaijan, 2006. Photo by S. Huseynova.

In fact only one of the original residents remained in Kerkenj. Ramazan-kishi had lived there for 40 years. He is 79 years old now, and people call him a Lezgian. He specifies, “No, I am not a Lezgian, I am a Laki.” He was offered to leave with everybody else, but he chose to stay. “Armenian guys told me, ‘Come on, leave with us’. I said to them, ‘Where do you think I’ll go? I am not Armenian. I am Ramazan Jakayevich Tadgigutayev, and your folks have different last names, they are all Petrosyans, Avanesyans, Vartanyans. Won’t they kill me when they see my last name?’ (laughs)...I said, I will not go.”

From Ramazan-kishi’s stories we learn that for many Armenians, the whole situation had ended even after their relocation to Kyzyl-Shafag.

“They, Armenians, didn’t like it here. Local Armenians were constantly on their back. That’s why they didn’t even try to live there. They all moved to Russia, to Georgiyevsk mostly, to Prokhladny, Nalchik. Only five or six households remained, the rest of them had dispersed. But the most of them now live in Georgiyevsk, Prokhladny, Pyatigorsk...They just couldn’t get along there. Those local Armenians would tell them that they were not real Armenians, they were Azerbaijani Armenians, Muslims, not Armenians.” It should be noted that for many Azerbaijani, the relocation process had also not ended, as they would later move to Baku, Ganja and even to Russia.

CHAPTER 6

LEADERS AND ORCHESTRATORS OF THE EXCHANGE

S. Huseynova, S. Rummyantsev

6.1. "If there is a God in heaven, then it is impossible to live here on earth without someone in charge"

The very fact that the exchange had in fact happened at the height of peril of the commune's existence enabled Bayram Allazov, Kyzyl-Shafag state farm director, to emerge as the village's true leader. His actions were to a great extent responsible for the success of the whole enterprise, and he later became the Town Council Chairman of the village of Kerkenj. Practically in all our interviews the villagers mentioned him as the man who was essential to the preservation of their community. In order to obtain a better and deeper understanding of the events in question, we find it necessary to refer to the memoirs of the commune's acknowledged leader.

First, however, we should say a few words about the specifics of the leadership structure in the Kyzyl-Shafag community. A solid system of customary statuses and relations, passed down for so many generations of co-existence that no one could possibly remember its initial origins, is one of the key characteristics of this society, although it would have been a mistake to call it traditional. Stringently assigned gender and age-appropriate roles lie, among other factors, in the basis of this habitual co-existence or co-residence. Men make and carry out all important decisions (especially in the public realm), and they also serve as the primary breadwinners for their families. Age, together with personal authority within the community (the Aqsaqal status), becomes a significant criterion for claiming the right to participate in collective decision-making. "There we had a lot of wise old men, the Aqsaqal, mullahs. Many people would come to my father-in-law. He was like a mullah, they would pray in our house" (Leyla-khanum, 67

years old)¹. The Aqsaqal system peacefully and habitually coexists with the official power structure (that is, in Soviet times, with the state farm director, village council chairman, etc. and presently with the heads of the town council), which was traditionally controlled by representatives of the same commune. As a rule a government official with no relation to or ties with the commune would not be appointed to any long-term position in the village². Under these circumstances the commune's formal leader, who has served in that capacity since 1968, combines his official position with the status of a charismatic leader and respected Aqsaqal. Furthermore, in the rather stringent family clans (or "taifa" in Azeri), segregation still occurs, and clans maintain strong kindred and emotional relationships within their groups. "Yes, that is true, especially if people are from the same "taifa." Everyone loves each other dearly. They visit each other if someone gets sick. And if there is a wedding, female relatives gather together and cook all night long. If the wedding is in the village then everybody from Baku arrives and vice versa" (Irina-khanum, 41 years old). The finest and brightest representatives of every "taifa" can represent their whole family at collective discussions even if they are not the Aqsaqal.

These qualities of the Kyzyl-Shafag community, though they may seem conservative and traditional, should not misguide us. Soviet modernization has etched its imprint on the villagers' everyday practices. Rapid industrialization complemented by urbanization caused the outflow of many of the commune's residents to the cities (primarily to Baku). In addition, the superfluity of working age men in the village and relatively low wages led many members of the village's male population to engage in pick-up work and immigrate to work mainly to Russia. At the height of this business, the villagers formed several

¹ Despite the fact that the Kyzyl-Shafag community is to a great extent an endogamous group, it is still rather open. In particular, the commune's men have been known to marry women from other localities. In this case the quote we use is from an interview with Leyla-khanum, a Christian Ajarian born in 1939 in Batumi. She met her future husband, an Azerbaijani from Kyzyl-Shafag, in Tbilisi.

² Kyzyl-Shafag residents recall only three cases when non-locals were appointed as their state farm directors in Soviet times. Two of those people worked there only for short periods of time and did not have good relations with people in the village. "Yes, something like that happened. In [19]59 I believe, when we had a state farm, Armenians appointed a Turkish Armenian as its director. He had fled Turkey. He was an elderly man; Papavyan was his name. He worked for a year and couldn't do it any longer, and our people drove him out... Well, yeah, they drove him out; he wasn't a good match for our village. People didn't accept him, they became insubordinate, and they didn't work. Then a Kurd came. They appointed a Kurd named Khudayan. There is no difference between a Kurd and an Armenian... Long story short, we drove him out too. Then another guy came...an Azerbaijani who lived in Yerevan, his name was Khasanov, and he became our director. His wife was Armenian, yes, she was Armenian. Her name was Lilith. Lilith means "beautiful." Just as we have the name Gezyal [translator's note: the name that also means "beautiful"], so do they. That guy, he worked for two years, and then Bayram-mu'allim came" (Veysal-kishi, 78 years old).

dozens of fully independent construction crews. A rather significant part of the village's able-bodied male population would regularly leave to earn money elsewhere: "That was not just young people, those who were almost 50 or 60 years old would go too. One could say everyone between 18 and 60 would go to look for earnings" (Nasib, 45 years old). Therefore a considerable part of the commune's male population had a long-term experience of living somewhere outside of their village and republic. In addition, every successful foreman, the majority of whom did not have the Aqsaqal status, was nevertheless a recognized leader, not only in his own crew but in the community as well.

"We would obey the foreman even though he was one of us. Zakhid, my cousin, he was our foreman. When I worked in Orenburg, I worked with him...The foreman would travel during the winter and negotiate contracts...for the whole season. He already knew what kind of work needed to be done and how many people he would need for that kind of work. Many...[were] not profitable [and] wouldn't earn as much. Say they needed a base built or a house, for instance; he knew that five or six people would handle that job. Taking more people there would mean earning less money. That's just about how that went. We traveled with him; 11 or 12 people, we would go with him. We worked. He managed, organized, negotiated, and compiled agreements with the directors. Those were his responsibilities...he was also responsible for our safety. Everything was his responsibility" (Nasib, 45 years old).

As a result, the structure of leadership in the Kyzyl-Shafag community suggested a much more complex system of relationships than that which was customary for traditional societies.

Besides, this particular kind of situation was to a great extent typical of all state farms across the USSR. In that context the rather similar mechanisms for the creation and development of a "stable common communication environment"¹ were quite established. All representatives of a "taifa", into which the Kyzyl-

¹ Peter Lindner describes this system: "This sphere can be called a 'semi-public' sphere because it is based on personal relationships, it doesn't belong to the nation-wide context, but instead it is limited by the local community and nearest surroundings. But it is also a public sphere where common interests are formulated, in the sense that it is comprised by individuals who own private property and have personal interests but within its bounds they come to agreements on issues that are mutually interesting and they address their concerns to the collective farm." Lindner P. Collective farms as the cradle of public sphere in the Soviet Union. In: Peasant studies: theory, history, modern times. Bulletin. Issue 5. 2005. Moscow: The Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences, 2006, pp. 128-147, 146.

Shafag society is customarily divided, are to a greater or lesser degree related to one another. In addition, years of co-residence and orientation towards endogamy to a greater or lesser degree have brought practically all of the villagers together. Therefore the life of the community has always been based on personal relationships. To a certain extent these relationships have without a doubt affected the public sphere as well – the state farm in Soviet times and presently, after the agrarian reform, a version of a joint venture on a voluntary basis. Actions of the commune’s leaders have always aimed towards achieving and maintaining consensus in regards to the interests of the community. The fact that they all essentially belong to the same social group has supported their efforts over time to achieve consensus.

In the villagers’ memory, membership not only in the Kyzyl-Shafag community but also in a concrete family clan has always played a significant role in community life. In this context of customary and close community ties Bayram Allazov is a prominent representative of a family well-known among Kyzyl-Shafag residents. His uncle, Gumbat Allazov, who served as the head of Kyzyl-Shafag for many years, had actively argued against the deportation of the Azerbaijani from the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1948-1950.

“I participated, too. I was 15 at the time. I was quite nimble then. And my uncle was in politics, and he was an economic executive. He would talk and I would listen. In ’49 they came to the school, which was the only Azerbaijani secondary school in our district. Those people from the Central Party Committee (of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic) came there. Held a meeting...They called the State Farm Director, the Village Council Chairman, the Party Organizer, and the School Principal from the Azerbaijani Villages. They called everybody there.



Photograph 30. Bayram Allazov, the leader of the commune since 1967, pictured in his office. The village of Kerkenj, Azerbaijan, 2006. Photo by S. Huseynova.

They held a meeting, told them there was a situation, there had been orders that they [the Azerbaijani] were to move out. Then...my uncle...he, I repeat, was an authority; he had a great reputation. He was known for his services to the Party, to the government. He wasn't afraid of anybody. He spoke out against that proposal right there... He insulted even the officials of the Central Committee of the Armenian Communist party. What a nationalist-chauvinist order!.. After that my uncle pondered and pondered that subject, [he] looked for ways to do something, to get the people somewhere. We had already heard that they were relocating people to places with a hot climate, to Ujar, to Aran territories [in the central part of Azerbaijan]. And we are mountain men. He went to Tbilisi, someone from our village lived there, and he took that guy too and went to Baku.

I will tell this story just the way he himself tells it. He went directly there, he thought Mirjafar Bagirov [the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Azerbaijani Communist Party under Stalin's rule] would meet him. They came here and Bagirov had already left. He had left for Moscow. There was that chairman there...the chairman of the Council of Ministers of Azerbaijan, what was his name... Teymur Guliev... He received my uncle... Teymur Guliev told him not to rush into anything, that Bagirov had gone to see Stalin... to argue against that policy... So his advice was to go on as usual, 'Go and be as you have sat (lived) before'. From Baku my uncle went to Kirovabad (or Ganja, as it is called now). He was also looking for a place there in Shamkir district [a town not far from Ganja]. There was a village there, Leninkend, he liked it very much. Told everything. Well, those people who wanted to build a house [in Armenia at the time], who had already bought construction materials, the majority of them sold their materials. We had one guy by the name of Ibrahim, people called him shepherd Ibrahim, and he didn't sell! He said, 'I'd rather die than sell, I will build my house here, I will not leave!'... Well, long story short... already...in '50, in January, we found out that they had recalled that policy, and they had suspended relocation of the Azerbaijani population from Armenia" (Bayram Allazov).

This recollection about the coercive relocation of the Azerbaijani, in which the authorities of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic are depicted as an autonomous force capable of making and carrying out such large-scale decisions, represents the narrator's retrospective view affected by the current state of affairs, in which a mosaic of independent nation states make up the South Caucasus. At the same time, the idea that ethnically homogenous territories could be ideal for resettlement also definitely prevailed in Soviet times, when

nationalization of the territories of the South Caucasian republics occurred, albeit rather slowly. We should not deny the possibility that representatives of the authorities in national republics were able to influence those events¹. In any case the stories about these events that occurred in the late 1940s suggest direct analogies with the situation of the late 1980s. These people had already had to think about collective relocation out of necessity once before. However, we can only guess that they might have drawn on their previous experience in looking for options for collective relocation at the time of new challenges.

Regardless, the fact remains that the future leader of the collective relocation had observed forced migrations during his youth. That experience was not one of passively accepting “fate”, however, but rather a demonstration of an active pursuit of a more or less acceptable solution to the situation. A pro-active attitude becomes the crucial characteristic of Bayram Allazov’s personal history, which is also an example of a successful Soviet-era career.

“I graduated high school (in the neighbouring village) in ’51...they gave us our certificates late. We had one school principal; he was somewhere in a sanatorium at that time. He came back to work on August 20. By then it was already too late for me to take my high school certificate and leave for university somewhere else. The next year, in ’52...there was that two-year teacher-training institute closer to us in the Kazakh region (of Azerbaijan). They offered me to apply, and so I went there. Well, I went, but I really didn’t feel like going. It wasn’t to my liking. I didn’t matriculate, I didn’t go. In ’53...I passed admission examinations at Kirovabad Pedagogical Institute [and] enrolled as a student to the history department. I graduated in ’57, with honours and straight A’s.”

Being a historian by training was rather prestigious in Soviet times, and in the long run this profession would advance Bayram Allazov’s career, in the course of which he would eventually become the state farm director. He started his career as a teacher at the school that he had attended.

¹ In our opinion the situation with the relocation of the Azerbaijani from the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1948-950 could be to a greater or lesser degree described as “forced migration”, the term suggested by Pavel Polian. “Forced migration is relocation of considerable amounts of people undertaken by the state in regards to its own or alien citizens by way of coercion” Polian P. *Against Their Will: The History and Geography of Forced Migrations in the USSR*. Moscow: Memorial, 2001. p. 11. For further detail, consult: Decree #4083 of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, “Of the relocation of collective farmers and other Azerbaijani population from the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic to the Kura-Aras Lowland in the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic.” Available at www.azeri.ru/AZ/karabakh/pereseleniye.htm

“I was appointed vice principal at the secondary school where I used to study...I started working there in '57. It was a bit difficult. How could I lead them! Those were my former teachers. Anyway...I managed, somehow. The next year they transferred me to my village as the school principal at the standard school, which had seven grades...I worked there for five years. Five years in a row as the school principal... From '58 to '63. In '63...I...was appointed, elected... secretary of the (state farm's) Party organization. Or, to be more precise, the Party Committee, since they had over 100 communists there. Those were very... tough times. The Party Organizer had the right to work for only one term, two years... After two years, as now, say, the President can work for five years, but back then after two years, according to Khrushchev laws's, he had no right to be the Party Organizer any longer. Well, I didn't want to get involved in that but he made me! One tough guy! The Secretary of the District Committee was Armenian... Well, I didn't want to get into that because in two years...I would be out of job. (He grins). The guy they would appoint as the school principal instead of me, do you think he would give me my job back? Never. And I didn't (want to stay) an ordinary teacher...So, long story short, they took me there. I worked for two years. I was elected in September, on September 9th... '63. Before my two-year term...was up, they transferred me as the state farm director to the neighbouring village where I had worked as the vice principal before and where I had graduated high school. So I worked there for three more years. After three years they transferred me back to my village as the state farm director... way, way before the Karabakh events. I have been working...since '68, yes, '68, from '65 to '68 as the state farm director of the village nearby, and then from March 1st, '68 to...August 15th, '89 as the state farm director here, without any breaks.”

Throughout the process of the village exchange, residents actively participated in various ways. This included taking part in the general discussion in the village square, joining the “search parties” (trips to Azerbaijan in order to find a suitable village), and assuming the role of a member of the “committee” responsible for allocation of houses in the new village. However, whatever the other community members' level of participation in the exchange process, the primary burden of responsibility in decision-making still laid on the leader's shoulders. This was not only due to his formal status but also because practically everyone recognized his authority at the time.

“God bless him, he gathered people around him, sheltered them... My father used to say, ‘If there is a God in heaven, then it is impossible to live here on earth without someone in charge’. Isn’t that so? If there hadn’t been such a person who showed us the right way, we would have most likely had fistfights with each other, would have argued over what was yours and what was mine” (Veysal-kishi, 78 years old).

“Bayram-mu’allim was our state farm director, he is the general manager here now, and he was managing the village, the collective farm back there. He stayed with us until the very end. Near the end Armenians started to call him, scare him, they would tell him, ‘Leave, take your people away’. And he had plenty of acquaintances among Armenians, he used to work with them, you see, he was the state farm director after all. They told him, ‘You know, Bayram-mu’allim, you’d better get your people out of here, it is only going to get worse’. And so we had to leave” (Zakhid-kishi, 58 years old).

It must be said that the leader himself sees this part of his biography in a slightly different light. He reviews everything that occurred in the broader context of the escalating confrontation in both republics. He led all collective discussions:

“Every day (!) we had a meeting near my office. Every day! [We’d discuss] everything that had happened against the Azerbaijani in the republic, in Armenia, since the day before that. I reported everything, every day! After I had visited here [Kerkenj] and went back [to Kyzyl-Shafag], I reported on the situation as well. I said, ‘What do you think now (!), comrades?’... Well, they didn’t say a word at first, kept silent for a while, thinking that over. ‘We... if we don’t leave, Armenians will kill us, if we do leave, where will we settle?’... I also told them about the state of affairs in the republic [in Azerbaijan]. Those events preceding that...well, that I had seen the refugees, I told about that, too.”

In fact, he had the responsibility of informing the villagers of current events. The world of the village is rather isolated, and quite often it is hard to imagine the true scale of the processes and events happening outside, especially in an informational vacuum, when the authorities intentionally try to minimize the scale of the catastrophe. Bayram-mu’allim’s personal visits to Azerbaijan when he had a chance to witness the plight of the refugees allowed him to inform the villagers of the reality of the situation.

From Bayram-mu'allim's recollections, we learn of the challenge of reaching that common decision:

"There [in Kyzyl-Shafag] we had the Aqsaqal, those who had taken part in World War II, veterans of labour and all that. There was one Sari-kishi there, Sari Aliyev. He took the floor and said, 'Comrades, let us...in the face...of the enemy...let's not run, let's die, we'll die together (!), if we stay alive, we'll stay alive together'. He had fought in the war, had fought all the way to Berlin... Well, all in all, one said one thing, another one said another thing. The common decision was to...to act so that...we wouldn't leave here disintegrated. One person to one district, another one to another district, we had to avoid that. I said, 'Come on, go to Azerbaijan, talk to them there, get the land. We will go there, and everyone will build a house for himself'. Our people lived quite richly there [in Armenia]."

Apparently, at first that decision seemed the most appropriate. However they soon decided against that idea.

Since for many years Bayram-mu'allim had been the director of the state farm and successful general manager of his own large farm, he understood that it was vital to deliberate and discuss different options thoroughly before making the final decision. Among all Kyzyl-Shafag residents Bayram-mu'allim specifically had people whom he could ask for advice – fellow executive managers at the same or higher levels, with whom he had built stable contacts and friendly or corporate ties over the years. His view of the situation's specific elements differs from that of any other regular member of the community. The latter do not clearly understand the reason why they did not choose a location where they could build "from scratch." But the leader has the advantage of analyzing the situation from a broader perspective:

"I came to Baku... The heads of the republic were there; I had an acquaintance, a friend there...a former First Secretary in Ganja, then he worked in the Central Committee...[as] the minister of transport. In fact he was the closest...companion. That's the advice he gave me; he said, 'It's not difficult to build a village in a new place. (But) you will need to...build communications, power lines, gas lines, highways, water pipelines, schools, so... That's very difficult. You have held out until now...You should wait a little longer; perhaps things will get better soon'...That was good advice that he gave me. When I came back I told our people everything."

Naturally it was already impossible to tolerate the circumstances any longer, waiting and hoping for the situation to settle somehow. So they came up with the idea for the exchange and made the trips to Azerbaijan in search of a suitable village. The aforementioned accidental encounter of Bayram Allazov's son with his Armenian acquaintance finally offered an actual opportunity to carry out the project of the collective exchange.

The villagers consider the accomplished exchange one of their leader's most important achievements. It would not have been possible without Bayram-mu'allim. Naturally the leader sees himself as the key figure of the exchange, too. But to him, and to his son, the course of the events and the driving force behind them look slightly different. During our interview, he repeatedly emphasized that he had followed the will of the people, that he was not the "master" of the situation, that people goaded and even forced him to suggest escape strategies rather than make tough autocratic decisions. "I told them, 'What if tomorrow Armenian bandits will come and kill the three of you?' The people will grab me like this [gestures as if somebody is trying to grab his throat], saying, 'Why have you let that happen, why haven't you let us flee in time?' This is res(!)po-onsi(!)bility too!" In fact, the state farm director found himself in a very difficult position. In the environment of total general confusion, Bayram-mu'allim had to take on the main share of responsibility and look for alternative solutions to a situation that these villagers had never faced before.

There were moments when his interference was essential to get the whole process off the ground. As we have already seen the villagers had to work hard to obtain permission to see the village of Kerkenj.



Photograph 31. One of the most active participants of the exchange, Zakhid-kishi and his family. The village of Kerkenj, Azerbaijan, 2006. Photo by S. Rumyantsev.

“I sent delegates from our village here...They didn’t let them, didn’t allow our guys, our comrades come here [to Kerkenj] while Armenians were still here. Then I went back to Baku again... Here I was in Baku, again... I met with some authorities. They told the Shamakhi District Party Committee that people from Kalinin district in Armenia would come. Kyzyl-Shafag people. Told them to let us in, let us take a look around.”

The state farm director took on a sizeable share of efforts towards overcoming numerous hurdles emerging from various directions. No one but he had access to the authorities and power structures upon which the realization of the village exchange project largely depended.

But finding new opportunities to overcome resistance of the authorities, Bayram-mu’allim nevertheless left a certain share of responsibility for making decisions to the villagers themselves. Everyone had to decide for him/herself whom they were going to exchange houses with in the long run.

“We came [to the village selected for the exchange]. I didn’t take responsibility for that either. You know, people are always looking for a reason to blame you somehow!.. I told...the people, ‘Off you go, look for yourselves, so that you wouldn’t say later that I made you...If you like it – then you like it, if you don’t – then it’s your business...’ So they came back, told me, reported to me that yes, they agreed, it was ok. Well, if it was ok then let’s do that, let’s start. And so we came...well, the people stood behind me, I might say I did it all. Me (!), the people (!), the villagers...They were right behind me. They dictated. They had heard my proposal and they came here...” (Bayram Allazov).

This statement could be interpreted as an example of the elements of a civil society, the absence of which in Azerbaijan is much discussed these days. Naturally under any circumstances someone has to take upon him/herself the main share of responsibility, but coercion is not necessary. The only factors forcing people to act in that environment were the circumstances of the conflict. However, the very mechanisms of counsel, collective discussion of a problem and how to solve it, were as democratic as possible under those circumstances. The key message of those discussions and the idea of the exchange itself was that notwithstanding the conflict, Armenians and Azerbaijani, who had been thrown on opposite sides of the barricades, could come to an agreement,

provided, of course, that they could minimize the interference and influence of the authorities who opposed and fear contacts between these groups. Therefore the good intention to protect Armenians in Azerbaijan turned out to hinder the most successful solution to the situation at the time – collective exchange through agreement of the communes' representatives themselves. After the authorities had demonstrated their absolute inability to resolve the situation, the mechanisms of its civil resolution were put into action.

What is interesting here is that in Bayram-mu'allim's autobiography, the role of the leader appears to be largely relative and dependant on the majority's opinion within the community. But among all community members, only Bayram-mu'allim has become the symbol that is regarded by all as the embodiment of the successful exchange. This highlights a situation of civil trust. A government official of many years, Bayram Allazov did indeed prove himself a man worthy of his villagers' trust. And in the crucial moment, they placed their trust in their leader, showing not the manifestation of their conformity to the official regime but instead the case of the majority of the villagers delegating to him the authority to orchestrate the exchange.

A. Hakobyan

6.2. "The people themselves were nominating": the leaders of Kerkenj

The conflict of 1988-1989 forced Armenian residents of Kerkenj to look for their own solutions to the situation, finally leading to the village exchange. Establishing leadership was crucial in the context of the commune's self-organization and actual carrying out of the exchange. Under non-trivial circumstances, this institution filled the power vacuum by assuming responsibility for the commune's management and governance. The nature and form of the leadership structure of Kerkenj Armenians was unique, determined by the extraordinary conditions and the leaders' personalities.

As already noted, representatives of the administrative, economic or Party authorities were not those who undertook leadership in the village of Kerkenj at that time, but rather ordinary rural labourers. Self-organization of Kerkenj Armenians led to the establishment of a new power structure, spearheaded by village leaders.

Again, due to various reasons we were not able to collect all data about all Kerkenj leaders, however, the information we have about two key people, Avag Vardanyan and rafik Martirosyan, provides us an opportunity to trace how the leadership structure was established in the dark days of 1988-1989. The example of their biographies also enables us to gain a better understanding and insider's view of the very process of self-organization, exchange and further development of the situation through the prism of their personalities. Both have very strong characters but they differ significantly as leaders – as a result of their different ages, occupations, and life experiences. They represent the combination of old/senior and new/young leaders, characteristic of the leadership of Kerkenj Armenians. What can their biographies explain and how has the new situation influenced their life journeys?

Rafik Martirosyan was born in Kerkenj in 1926. In the interview, he does not highlight his birth as an important event, beginning his biography with his school years. However, he later returns to the story of his birth, mentioning that the village council's registry inaccurately recorded his date of birth, including the month. His birth certificate contained a key piece of information. "Those papers came in handy later on as they had written 'the son of a poor man' on it... After I finished the seventh grade, I had no opportunity to continue with my studies. Those were difficult years. There were four of us, kids, in the family." According to the informant, it was difficult for his father to support such a big family, which is why he "didn't go to school [translator's note: beyond seventh grade]. Then the war broke out... But as far as I know the war didn't start in 1941, there was already war in 1938-1939, the war with Finns. We had a food shortage, not enough bread."

In the words of R. Martirosyan, he was only five years old when he started to help his father in agricultural work. The war has left an imprint on R. Martirosyan's life trajectory. He was drafted in February 1942 and sent to Belyadjar¹. "Many of my friends died", says the informant, adding that in Belyadjar one group was sent to the front while they "remained as a lower ranking group." According to our interlocutor, they were sent to work in the oil fields. He recalls that they were told that they were enlisted men, and they would be court-martialed if they tried to evade work or escape. The work was exhausting, and they did not have enough workers, so people had to work 16-18 hour shifts. "Many guys just

¹ Settlement in the Absheron peninsula, near the city of Baku.

couldn't bear that any longer, and among those who were sent to the front line, more than half of them died in Kerch." R. Martirosyan had worked in the oil fields until 1947 and then he relocated back to the village, which was challenging because he needed a legitimate excuse for quitting his job. He was allowed to resign due to critical family conditions, officially proven by a certificate sent from the village. Returning to the village, he started to work on the farm. He then began cultivating vineyards and later became a foreman.

R. Martirosyan remembers the change of eras particularly well. According to him, Kerkenj began to finally regain its footing after the Stalin era, and as early as the 1970s, they lived quite well. As a

result, villagers gradually began to move to Baku and then to Russia, especially to cities such as Georgiyevsk, Prokhladny, and Nalchik. As R. Martirosyan notes, Kerkenj residents mainly settled in Khutor, a district in Baku, which had abandoned barns that they purchased, and they built houses there. For instance, he built a house there for his brother. But it must be said that if the life of Kerkenj residents improved economically, then in Azerbaijan's public life at the time, especially with H. Aliyev's assumption of power, Armenians were forced out of government agencies, which instead gave preference to "ethnic" candidates who had obtained the necessary education.

A peculiar element of R. Martirosyan's biography lies in the fact that he speaks more about the different eras and events, along with the society and the village, than about himself or his family. Therefore, his personal life story is closely intertwined with the broader historical and political context. To him the social and communal is more important and more worthy of attention. This perspective also speaks to the fact that the informant has been successful in public life.



Photograph 32. rafik Martirosyan, one of the leaders and orchestrators of the exchange. The village of Dzunashogh (Kyzyl-Shafag), Armenia, 2006. Photo by A. Hakobyan.

It is no coincidence that in certain cases, when something needed to be decided or organized for the community, such an approach to life frequently brought R. Martirosyan to the forefront. As a result he became one of the orchestrators of the exchange in 1988-1989. But evidence of his proactive attitude and organizational experience can be found in Soviet times as well, for example, in his role in erecting a local monument to commemorate deceased Kerkenj soldiers. It was a community initiative on the part of the villagers to build that monument; they collected necessary funds and settled all administrative and organizational matters. This undertaking brought ordinary rural workers to the forefront, including Rafik Martirosyan and Anushavan Avagyan, who were foremen at the state farm at the time. How did R. Martirosyan get involved and find himself as one of the orchestrators of the whole affair? He says, "The people themselves were nominating." Then he adds that for instance, when the monument was being constructed, he had no spare time, "but they called me out of my house... The people gathered together. Anushavan said I was the only one who could do that with him."

Anushavan Avagyan was also one of the leaders of Kerkenj Armenians. He is responsible for suggesting exchange or relocation after the Sumgait events. According to R. Martirosyan, in the difficult times after the war, A. Avagyan became the director of their collective farm right after he had finished his military service. His educational background also did not go beyond the seventh grade, but he managed the collective farm's economic organization brilliantly, and then he worked as a foreman. When the construction of the monument began, R. Martirosyan and A. Avagyan served as the state farm's foremen but nevertheless they had to settle various issues in Yerevan, in Baku, in Shamakhi district and even in Stepanakert, which supplied the marble for the monument. They made agreements, bargained, negotiated, solved numerous problems with the authorities and with sculptors, and they even discussed and evaluated projects and creative proposals. Kerkenj residents' discipline and organization enabled them to succeed in erecting the monument in their village. The idea, the required funds, the organization of the process and its orchestrators – these key elements all resulted from the public initiative. The community clearly set an objective and achieved it together via self-organization.

Village residents drew on this experience in self-organization in 1988-1989 when the circumstances dictated the necessity to take urgent measures for self-preservation and to make vital decisions regarding how to deal with the

situation. A. Avagyan and R. Martirosyan again played key roles. According to our informants, after the Sumgait events villagers did not at first support A. Avagyan's idea of an exchange or compact relocation to Armenia or Russia. In Kerkenj the leadership was not authoritarian or stringent; on crucial issues directly related to community life villagers would make decisions in a democratic manner¹. Their leaders were representatives of their community who made decisions regarding those issues, but they were not autocratic leaders.

In 1988-1989 R. Martirosyan actively participated in the commune's self-organization. He participated in the search parties, negotiated exchange-related matters on different levels, and served as the main orchestrator of the exchange with Kyzyl-Shafag, a member of the negotiations, and one of the authors of the agreement.

After the exchange, R. Martirosyan also influenced the establishment of the new power structure in the village. He tells the story of a man who wanted to become the head of the village. Residents already knew this man through work in the village, and as a result they had opposed his candidature. He had to explain this at the district committee and argue in favour of his fellow villagers' position. In the long run, the villagers' wishes were honoured.

An eighty-year-old man, R. Martirosyan is still actively interested in the public life. For example, he reads a newspaper of the opposition, provided to this remote village only by subscription.

If R. Martirosyan was a leader representing the older generation (Kerkenj residents perceive him precisely as "senior" or "veteran"), then Avag Vardanyan² became a representative of the younger generation. He stepped forward in the alarming environment of 1988-1989. A. Vardanyan was born in Kerkenj in 1950. He completed eighth grade at the village's standard school and then graduated from a vocational training school in Armenia. He served in the military and until 1988 he worked as a mason at a workshop near Shamakhi with his brother and nephews. Vardanyan's uncle Shirvan Vardanyan was a khachkar³ sculptor well known in Armenia. The Vardanyans were one of the oldest families in Kerkenj; some of them lived in Baku as well.

¹ The history of the exchange also provides telling evidence of that.

² Avag Vardanyan's life came to a tragic end in 2005. The author represents him here based on the stories of other informants.

³ Armenian cross-stone – a carved memorial steel bearing a cross.

As Kerkenj residents recall, even in his youth Vardanyan showed much courage and determination; he was an authority figure among his peers. He would take extreme measures if honour was at stake. The events of 1988 found him in the workshop near the town of Shamakhi, where his brother, nephews and he barely escaped the mob¹. That year marked a turning point in Vardanyan's biography also in the sense that his best personal qualities were revealed in the commune's self-organization, in the situation when in one informant's words, "the young people took power into their own hands." At that time 38-year-old Vadanian, who became one of the main leaders of Kerkenj's self-organization and self-defense, was among those young people.

As R. Martirosyan recalls, Vardanyan was a brave man, and when the situation took a turn for the worse he said, "Let them attack, we'll stand our ground." "He had his weapon over the shoulder day and night...Wherever you went [in the village, self-defense posts of Kerkenj residents], Avag was there." During the self-defense of Kerkenj, Vardanyan organized procurement of ammunition, firearms, etc. He was among the search parties that travelled looking for a village suitable for the exchange, and he was also involved in developing the proposal to exchange with Bakhar village in Armenia's Vardenis district (Kerkenj residents did not support that project). He was also very active in the exchange with Kyzyl-Shafag. For instance, when the exchange was in progress and Armenians and Azerbaijani co-resided in both Kerkenj and Kyzyl-Shafag villages, he helped to ensure the protection of Azerbaijani in Kyzyl-Shafag, as per the agreement.

Upon relocating to Kyzyl-Shafag, Vardanyan first worked at the state farm's warehouse and then as an electrician. In 1996 he was elected chief of the Dzunashogh village, and he led the village until 2005 without intermission. He showcased his exceptional organizational skills in that job as well. According to the new village chief of Dzunashogh, when he took over that position he was asked at the regional administration whether he could work as well as Vardanyan did. In the words of Dzunashogh residents, Vardanyan was an authority figure well known not only in the nearby Azerbaijani village of Irganchai but in other Georgian villages as well. In this context the following story appears rather interesting: According to our informant, some horses were once stolen from the village. Vardanyan suspected one Azerbaijani who lived in one of the villages of

² Refer to Chapter 2.

Dmanisi district in Georgia. He and a companion took firearms to that village. There, in the presence of about 30 people, he put his weapons on the table and started to sort out the situation.

Vardanyan fought for the future of Dzunashogh but he did not forget Kerkenj either. He knew very well that preserving the Azerbaijani cemetery guaranteed that the Armenian cemetery in Kerkenj would also be preserved, so he personally oversaw that everything was in order in that regard. Dzunashogh residents still remember Vardanyan with much sadness; sometimes they even differentiate between the time before and after him.

Vardanyan's biography is an example of the journey from an unofficial to an official leader. The situation of 1988 brought to the forefront the bravest, most committed people whose personal life histories were intertwined with that of their community. Vardanyan gained the most significance in the public eye at the time of Kerkenj's self-organization and self-defense. Being granted the status of the official leader, that is, the title of the head of the administration of Dzunashogh village where Kerkenj residents had relocated, completed his journey.

To summarize all of the above we could state that Kerkenj leaders followed the will of the people.

CHAPTER 7

THE EXCHANGE: CO-RESIDENCE

S. Huseynova, S. Rummyantsev

7.1. "They were even learning Armenian from me"

Throughout the 20th century, Armenian-Azerbaijani relations have not always exemplified friendship among peoples. However in the context of the present day discourse about violent confrontations in the beginning of the past century (1905-1908 or 1918-1920), the history of conflict resolution is diligently ignored. More often than not modern discourse in national republics refers to constructs designed in the spirit of a conspiracy theory, where the entire history of relations in the 20th century is depicted as a time of confrontation. This can be seen as either open or latent, depending on the circumstances. We believe that interethnic relations of years past, as well as current interethnic relations, are coloured brighter than just black and white and are of a much more complex and dynamic nature. Without a doubt, the 20th century did indeed mark a time of violent and bloody Armenian-Azerbaijani confrontations. But still the very same century also saw conflict resolution mechanisms emerging and proving to be effective.

One can claim that the system of civil agreements existed in the beginning of the past century as well. At that time, representatives of this or that settlement, who acted on behalf of the whole commune, could appeal for help to residents of another village. For instance, Kyzyl-Shafag residents' collective memory records a long past event in 1918 as a significant incident. According to the ancestors of present day villagers, particular relations seem to have been established after the events of that year between residents of Dzhudzhyakya (pre-Soviet name of Kyzyl-Shafag) and Armenians of the neighbouring village of Shakhnazar.

«In '18... Turkish troops were kicked out [Andranik's squad]... [Armenians] went over the Karakhach mountain pass and came to Kalinin district... [Andranik] was followed by Turkish military troops... [Andranik's squad] came to one village and killed one man and his daughter-in-law. Then Turkish troops came after them, there [not far from Kyzyl-Shafag] is this village up top, Gara Gala, and you can see everything from there. They were sitting there [the Ottoman military detachments established their quarters in that village]. The Turkish pasha, let's say, their commander, yes, he heard [the aforementioned story about the murder]... Shakhnazar residents and their Aqsaqal came to us, to our village. They asked our Aqsaqal, 'Go tell them, ask these Turkish troops not to go to our village, not to kill our people'. Three men, including my grandfather, three Aqsaqals (from Dzhudzhakyand) went there [where the Ottoman detachment was quartered]... Our elders went to the Turkish pasha to ask them not to hurt them [Armenians from Shakhnazar], to say that they had always helped us. But their pasha was very smart, too... He said, 'Go... and bring me their [Armenians] representatives here'... The next day they [Armenians from Shakhnazar] went there with our elders, our Aqsaqal to see the Turkish pasha. How they entered the room, when pasha received them... Pasha sat in one private house and they entered that house on their knees! Pasha ordered them from the inside of the house, 'Infidels... rise to your feet... Enter like men!' They entered, they were shown where to sit, and they sat there. 'I am listening'. They begged, and they cried. He said, 'Don't cry, and don't beg. We are...the Turkish people, the Turkish army; we are not enemies with other peoples. These are your enemies! If you are on good...terms with this neighbouring village, don't be afraid. I won't let a single soldier come to your village'» (Bayram Allazov).

This story of Dzhudzhakyand residents, future Kyzyl-Shafag residents, standing up for their neighbours, Armenians from Shakhnazar, seems to be a legend now. It represents a case of support on the part of people who apparently knew each other quite well. Residents of Shakhnazar had worked in Kyzyl-Shafag for a long time and under those circumstances close contacts were quite natural. In the time of crisis it was normal to support neighbours in their plea for help.

¹ Azerbaijani historiography, as well as public discourse, consider Andranik a cruel leader of Armenian combatant squadrons responsible for taking punitive actions against the peaceful Muslim/Turkic population of the region. For further reference, consult for instance: Mustafazadeh R., *The Two Republics. Azerbaijani-Russian relations in 1918-1922*. Moscow: Vozrozhdeniye, 2006, pp. 200-209.

When the Azerbaijani found themselves in crisis, Shakhnazar residents also provided support to their neighbours.

“In those days... in '88! That was in '18 [here the interviewee emphasizes that these events are interrelated], I sent our representatives, three men, to Shakhnazar... I sent them to Shakhnazar, they went and told them, ‘Remember in '18, you are still talking about it... Our elders protected you; they stopped Ottoman soldiers from coming to your village. You owe us now!’ Well, I’ve got to tell you, they are also there, in the farthest section of their village where the road begins, they had there...ah, I forgot his name. They were brothers, two or three of them. One day some... ‘beardies’, that’s what we used to call the Dashnaks¹, they were going, they came from the district center to that village [Shakhnazar] and wanted to come to our village to kill people. Those Armenians, they didn’t let that happen... Didn’t let that happen. So there you have it” (Bayram Allazov).

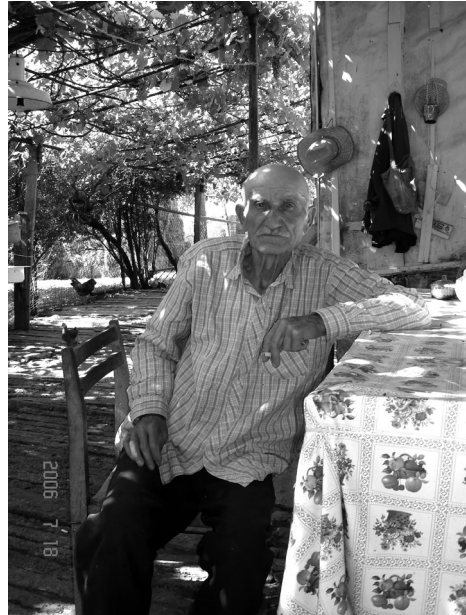
Therefore a certain history of support and mutual assistance has long existed. The memory of past events, passed on from generation to generation, created the tradition of long-standing neighbourly relations. The world was not divided strictly into enemies and friends based only on ethnicity or confession. Enemies existed, and some of them were indeed Armenians, but there were also those Armenian neighbours as well with whom one could and should make certain arrangements. He [the Aqsaqal, a member of the Dzhudzhyakya delegation to the Ottoman pasha] said, “No, we have always been on friendly terms with them, please don’t. Don’t touch them, they have never done anything wrong to us.” That’s what he said, our grandfather Aly-kishi [Authors’ note: when he was talking to those Turkish military men], “You will leave, you will come back to your homeland, and we are going to stay here.” He put it figuratively, “The water will flow, and the sand will remain. You are the water – you will go back, and we are the sand – we will remain here with them.” Since then and until our relocation their elders told their grandchildren that story that was passed down from generation to generation, how Aly-kishi had helped them or otherwise the Turks would have killed them all and that they had to always live in friendship, peace and consent with that neighbouring village. And that’s how it was” (Avdy-mu’allim, 69 years old). Another simple reason prevented them

¹ This term is widely used to define Armenian nationalists regardless of their affiliation to the Dashnaksutyun party.

from moving apart over different sides of the border – there was no such border in the current sense of the word. The only option left was to live together, side by side. While that life has not always been completely free of issues, they always had a place and opportunity for dialogue. The Andraniks and Turkish pashas would come and go while the people stayed; therefore they were responsible for finding ways to co-exist, and they were successful in this endeavor.

In the spring of 1987, when Kyzyl-Shafag officially celebrated Novruz Bayram [the festival of spring, one of the most favourite holidays among Azerbaijani] many Armenians

attended the celebrations – neighbours, district officials or just acquaintances. “When our village was celebrating Novruz, e-e-eh (!), so many people would flow in, the Azerbaijani and Armenians, from all districts” (Zakhid-kishi, 58 years old). These were still familiar relations of friendship and good neighbourship, which would very soon crumble in the course of the conflict. However, up to the completion of the village exchange process, habitual neighbourly and oftentimes friendly relations remained strong. Even though Armenians from the nearby village could not provide their neighbours in Kyzyl-Shafag any substantial support, the disintegration of friendly ties was often perceived as a sudden stroke of bad luck. “No, we didn’t have any help from them. But what could they do? They could only curse those who had started the whole thing, they would say, ‘We want to do this and that to them, they are mean, terrible people; we used to live like brothers and now they are separating us just like that’” (Aly-kishi, 72 years old). At the same time their neighbours from the village of Shakhnazar could demonstrate their attitude towards Kyzyl-Shafag residents, which had not changed even in the environment of the escalating confrontation.



Photograph 33. Ramazan-kishi, the only long-standing inhabitant of the village of Kerkenj. Azerbaijan, 2006.

Photo by S. Huseynova.

“Almost everyone had acquaintances there, friends, this has been going on for hundreds of years. They didn’t even come to ask us whether we had anything to sell, a cow or something. They said they were acting like that because they didn’t want to offend our people. They thought they didn’t want our people to take offence, they didn’t want us to think they were forcing us to sell, that they were glad we were leaving” (Avdy-mu’allim, 69 years old).

At the same time co-workers could support each other, and when necessary, more often than not assistance was provided.

“I called the director [of the driving school in the district center where he worked]. And we had no fuel left at our house, no coal, no firewood; he sent us a car, half of which was loaded with coal and the other half – with firewood. He sent us the fuel by our car with one Armenian expeditor and a driver, a Russian who worked at the school. Then I asked him over the phone about my workbook and my salary. He said, ‘Don’t worry. We will calculate everything you are owed; I will send you everything’. One evening, no, one morning we were at home and a boy came by saying somebody was asking for me. And we had a barrier on the outskirts of the village, you know, the lifting gate, usually installed by the police, something like that. I came there and they had already been waiting for me... They asked me at the block post whether I was carrying anything on me, a gun or a knife. I said, ‘You may search me, I don’t have anything’. I even took off my clothes. So he gave me, and I remember that as if it were yesterday, 350 rubles, my workbook, the record of my working days, in fact all the documents I had. All in all, he delivered everything to me. I said, ‘Come to my house for a cup of tea, we’ll sit at the table together. Haven’t we sat at the table together before? What is that, how could that be?’ They said no, they couldn’t come. They left and I went back home” (Aly-kishi, 72 years old).

In the isolated universe of the village where everything was determined by personal friendship or neighbourhood, one could hold off for longer, but the outside tensions became clear more and more persistent. It had already become impossible to go on living in isolation from the outside world, and Kyzyl-Shafag residents left the village just as Armenians from Kerkenj left theirs.

The exchange itself did not happen completely and in the matter of a moment; it progressed gradually with a period of co-residence when Armenians

and Azerbaijani lived together in both villages. “Well, they arrived step by step, they were completing the paperwork, exchanging houses” (Ramazan-kishi, 79 years old). Those contacts were peaceful. Here is how one of the last to leave Kyzyl-Shafag residents recalls these days:

“I wasn’t at all scared, why shouldn’t I have lived there? Everybody knew me there. I shared bread and salt with everyone. As they say in Azerbaijan, the man you had a meal with the day before would (not) become your enemy the day after. Why not? We had meals together, we had drinks together, and we visited each other. So what? And that’s that” (Veysal-kishi, 78 years old).

Besides, as a rule all the remaining or already relocated Azerbaijani and Armenians would work together in the same state or collective farm for some time. “When I came [to Kerkenj], there were a lot of Armenians there, half the village. I found a job in Madrasa, the neighbouring village [which was also populated by Armenians] right away...Their collective farm director was Armenian, all higher-ups in the village were Armenian” (Nasib, 45 years old). The Azerbaijani state farm director – Bayram Allazov – also met Armenians relocating to Kyzyl-Shafag.

In fact the director was the last one to leave Kyzyl-Shafag, which by that time had been already almost completely populated by Armenians. Just as in Kerkenj, there were no serious conflicts there.

“No, they respected me very much. They did...Respected, respected. He [an Armenian] came from the village of Kelakhana to another, adjacent village of Ilmezli where I used to be the state farm director. He came to our village to raise hell. And here those Armenians who had come to us from there [Kerkenj], they did something to him, they wanted to kill him. They kicked him out of the village! You know they acted very politically. I managed to get along with them...so that they would not mess with our people. That was also a great responsibility, which I felt was mine. That I had kept them [the Azerbaijani in Armenia] there until that day. You know, those were people, if a single person had been killed...They would have been saying until the end of time that it was Bayram Allazov who had kept them there until then, that one of our people had been killed. That’s why I acted...very carefully, very carefully” (Bayram Allazov, 72 years old).

Ordinary villagers, armed with their notions of honour and justice, managed to discover a peaceful solution to their situation. In this regard personal contacts between people always played an important role. The majority of necessary agreements between politicians and government officials in that situation did not seem possible. But the civil agreement between the two communes, which is still functional and valid, was quite successful. People's concrete efforts stood behind its every paragraph, and they did not even need to be written down and formally certified. Mutual and, to a greater or lesser degree, personal interest existed, but every member of those communes had responsibility for the observation of the agreement, thus guaranteeing its successful implementation. It is precisely these personal contacts between those people who are represented as "irreconcilable sides of the conflict" in present official discourses, which are capable of facilitating the peacemaking process. As it turned out, ordinary villagers were capable of reaching an agreement among themselves, and the main role for authorities was at the very least not interfering, and, if possible, creating a favourable environment for those contacts.

"Armenians lived here, several remaining families. The elderly, no young people. Truth be told, there were young people there at some point, but they also left fast" (Mamed-kishi, 68 years old). "When they [the husband's family] only moved in there, there lived an Armenian woman, an elderly woman. They lived together [in the same house] for quite some time, almost two months, until she left. They helped her pack, sent her off" (Irina-khanum, 41 years old). All those people who were going through the exchange did not view interethnic relations as fatal. The process of ethnic separation was something out of the ordinary. In the world they were accustomed to, Armenians and the Azerbaijani were either good or bad but they were always neighbours, co-workers, friends and frequently sworn brothers (kirvya). They habitually co-existed and communicated with each other both in Kyzyl-Shafag and in Kerkenj, but the time allotted for their co-residence was quickly nearing its end.

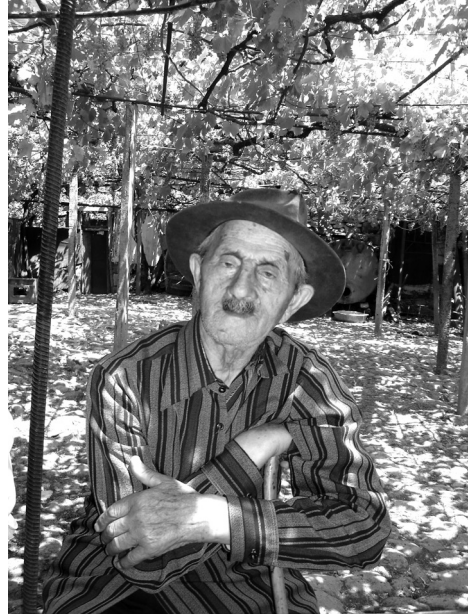
"When we moved there, there lived an Armenian family. We lived in the same house with them for twelve days. We lived on friendly terms. I slaughtered a ram to mark their departure. We were able to bring only two rams with us. I slaughtered one in their honour and decided to save one for Kurban Bayram¹. And then

¹ The "Festival of Sacrifice" is one of the most important holidays celebrated by Muslims. It has always been observed by Kyzyl-Shafag residents, even in Soviet times.

my son saw them off and came back home... We gave some money to the Armenian as we hadn't completed the construction of our house. He and my son, they calculated how much money was needed to complete the construction [and they supplied the necessary amount]" (Zakariy-kishi, 81 years old).

One way or another, Kyzyl-Shafag and Kerkenj residents, Armenians and Azerbaijani, felt they were in the same situation. Both had to leave their familiar environments, their motherlands, because of the conflict that none of them had wanted or incited. Customary pre-conflict neighbourly relations remained throughout the process of the exchange. Moreover, the Soviet Union still existed and none of them had the slightest idea that it would soon disintegrate. "Armenians still lived there, some had already relocated. We shared a house with an Armenian family for a whole week. They were waiting for a car, a KamAZ to transport their belongings. The car came, they packed their things and within a week they were gone" (Zakhid-kishi, 58 years old). Those days saw plenty of examples of regular mutual supportiveness of people brought together by the unfortunate turn of events. Practically in all reminiscences of that short period of co-residence, people brought up quite friendly relations with Armenians awaiting relocation. Even now after the war and many years of confrontation none of the informants remembers the period of co-residence as anything out of the ordinary.

Together they lived on "very friendly terms. They [Armenians, former owners of the house] even cooked themselves, went to the market, bought groceries, and didn't allow her [his wife] to cook. We had little children" (Zakhid-kishi, 58 years old). Memories of that situation are filled with sincere gratitude, along with solidarity in the face of trouble. This was still before the terrible war broke



Photograph 34. Veyis-kishi, 91 y.o., currently a prosperous farmer. Spent his last two months in Kyzyl-Shafag together with Kerkenj residents who had already relocated there. The village of Kerkenj, Azerbaijan, 2006. Photo by S. Rummyantsev.

out, the story of which continues to leave the experience of peaceful conflict resolution and co-residence unaddressed. Those Armenians who stayed in the village for some time helped Kyzyl-Shafag residents establish themselves economically.

“Yes, of course, I swear to God, his wife was such a (wonderful) person! She showed us everything, how to handle the bathhouse, the furnace, the garden, she showed us everything, taught us everything... Yes, she taught me everything, how to take care of the grapes, of the garden, showed me everything, explained everything” (Gyulshan-khanum, 52 years old).

Even when they had already arrived in Kyzyl-Shafag, “local Armenians there [in Kyzyl-Shafag after the relocation] told us that there was an old man (Ramazan-kishi) in the village and we were to talk to him if any issues arose” (Zemphira-khanum, 56 years old). Ethnic separation uncontrollably accelerated, and even the wife of Ramazan-kishi, the only one who remained in Kerkenj out of all former residents, left for Armenia, where she “died three months afterwards. Because she was worried, since she had left everything there: her children, her house. This is hard!.. Everybody told her, ‘Don’t leave, we’ll all help you.’ But she just couldn’t bring herself to agree” (Ramazan-kishi, 79 years old).

“I believe she went to Shamakhi and somebody said something to her there, frightened her... After that incident she didn’t go there anymore, they offended her there or something like that. But here in the village nobody ever lifted a hand against her. On the contrary, everybody was interested in her opinion; they asked her what to do and how to do this or that. She taught us how to bake bread. Her whole family stayed here and she left. Her children, her husband, they all stayed here” (Elmira, 37 years old).

But it just so happened that the context for the contact between Azerbaijani and Armenians, residents of two villages, was completely devoid of joy to anybody. Still that circumstance was not an impassable obstacle to everyday contacts. “We sat together with them every night, drank together, everything was ok. No, we didn’t have any problems. They were even learning Armenian from me. They knew the language but they had an accent, totally different from

ours. So they were sort of learning our accent” (Nasib, 45 years old). Every one of them had to leave his or her accustomed world, and everyone was eager to share their knowledge that could be useful in the new environment.

The situation of the exchange when, in their everyday contacts, they could communicate with each other in two languages still brings up in Kyzyl-Shafag residents warm memories coloured with just a touch of irony and a some surprise.

“That Armenian [with whom he had exchanged houses] had four daughters. He had no son. They came to look at my house, came inside. And I had a first-rate house, thanks to Bayram-mu’allim; he helped me with the wood! And his daughters were talking among themselves in their mother tongue, and their Armenian was rather rough, so they were saying mine was a good house and they wanted to exchange. And I was standing aside and I asked them, ‘Have you got any education?’ They said yes. Two of the sisters graduated from an institute in Yerevan, the other two had no education. So when I was speaking pure Armenian to them they told me, ‘Hey uncle, you speak our language purely and our people [Kerkenj residents] can’t speak like that. Their language is rough; you can’t understand a thing’. I told them I had been to Yerevan on numerous occasions. And how they spoke Azeri! One could never tell! Oh-oh! How those Muslim ladies spoke! So properly, so correctly!” (Veyis-kishi, 91 years old).

The period of co-residence did not last very long. Beyond the bounds of the village, when personal relations were not always as effective, clashes became unavoidable.

“Yes, we lived together and we went to the district on the same bus. And then they beat up one Armenian in the district, in Shamakhi and after that all remaining Armenians left, nobody stayed, they got scared... But Armenians lived here. Many of them exchanged houses and those who didn’t, they sold their houses for money... sold them and left.”

There was always a peaceful co-existence within the boundaries of the village:

“We had nothing, nothing of the kind. No misunderstandings. That someone would have a fistfight or say anything, no, we didn’t have any of that. They

wouldn't have stayed here anyway, how could have they stayed? I swear to Allah, they taught us how to bake bread in a tandoor [a particular type of oven used primarily for making bread]. We didn't have tandoors, we didn't even know what to do with them and how could we have known. Our ways were different. We baked bread in ovens. And Ramazan-kishi's wife, an Armenian, she taught us how to bake bread in a tandoor. She taught us all. And we didn't know anything about tandoor" (Elmira, 37 years old).

If the last Azerbaijani to leave Kyzyl-Shafag left on August 15, 1989, then it seems that Armenians stayed in Kerkenj somewhat longer. Apparently for some the very idea of moving to Armenia was unappealing.

"In the fall [some returned to the village from Russia]. They had already... exchanged. She [an Armenian woman, the owner of his current house] was still living here; she even worked at the store here. I came and told her, 'Let's exchange'. Her sons lived somewhere in...Stavropol or I don't know, at least that's what she told me. She even gave me the address...said, 'Let me give you the address so that you... and I was due to go to Ganja the next day. She said, 'Let me give you 10 rubles'. And one other (Armenian) woman also gave me 10 rubles, they each gave me 10 rubles so I would telegraph Stavropol or wherever, well, in the Northern Caucasus. So anyway, told me to send a telegram there that she would soon come and sell the apartment. So I went and wrote a telegram and you had to put your last name at the end... Avekenian was her last name! Or something like that [he doesn't remember the exact last name]. So I thought to myself that they would definitely kill me. I tore up the telegram, threw it away. The next day I came back and they were already gone. They had packed up their stuff and left. I didn't see where... She didn't want to exchange, she said so herself, she said, 'I am not going to Armenia. Do you have any money?' I gave her 8000 at once and she left" (Mustafa, 40 years old).

The period of co-residence in the process of the exchange ended in the fall of 1989. According to Ramazan-kishi's recollections, the few Armenians still remaining in Kerkenj

"Were let out of here by a narrow squeak, as they didn't want to leave. They said it was their motherland. They didn't want to leave. They barely managed to

get them out...of the state. Buses came and moved them out. At that time there were 10 people in the village who didn't want to leave. They put them on the buses and sent off [through Dagestan]" (Ramazan-kishi, 79 years old).

Somebody else remembered,

"When we came here almost all of them had already been gone. One or two people remained. There lived a guy nearby, his name was Vanya, and one other woman, a teacher. But they left in a hurry, didn't even have time to sell their houses... The village council took the houses. Then the houses went to those who hadn't been able to exchange" (Leyla-khanum, 67 years old).

In the environment of the ever-escalating confrontation, the state took it upon itself to send off the few Armenians remaining in the village and from that moment on, Azerbaijani from Kyzyl-Shafag comprised the residents of Kerkenj¹.

A. Hakobyan

7.2. The first days following the exchange: Armenians and Azerbaijani in Kyzyl-Shafag

For Armenians from Kerkenj and other parts of Azerbaijan, life in their new home, in the village of Kyzyl-Shafag, improved gradually. Changes in their cultural, social and physical spheres significantly impacted this process. The period of co-residence, from May to Spetember 1989, when Armenians and Azerbaijani lived together, seemed an extraordinary occurrence in the context of the general conflict situation.

Since the relocation did not occur overnight, the Armenians who had already relocated and the Azerbaijani who remained in the village lived side by side for several months. As already mentioned, the first Armenian families from Kerkenj arrived in Kyzyl-Shafag in May 1989 and the last remaining Azerbaijani left the village only in September. According to our informants, the state farm director of Kyzyl-Shafag was among the last to leave, and he left in his brand new "Zhiguli"².

¹ It must be said that besides Ramazan-kishi, the only remaining former resident, several Azerbaijani families from the village of Irganchai (Georgia) live in Kerkenj as well.

² A car model.



Photograph 35. Kitchenware for communal events, brought from the village of Kerkenj. The village of Dzunashogh (Kyzyl-Shafag), Armenia, 2006. *Photo by A. Hakobyan.*

But until September 1989, the Azerbaijani residents continued to live in the village with the relocated Armenians, and the state farm director accepted the Azerbaijanis' resignation and hired new Kerkenj residents to fill their positions. They tried to maintain the status of the workers, that is, villagers would have the same jobs in Kyzyl-Shafag that they had had in Kerkenj. But in some cases that new job differed in certain ways, determined by the new realities. Our Aqsaqal and one of the leaders and orchestrators of the exchange, R. Martirosyan, was also among the first Kerkenj residents who settled in the village and found a new job, working at the farm. This was an important decision in those dark times as it was crucial that the state-owned

cattle remain intact. The district authorities even encouraged people to relocate as fast as possible, for this reason. Even before the move, while the negotiations in regards to the exchange were still in progress, the district authorities offered R. Martirosyan the opportunity to relocate quickly and get a job at the farm, as the neighbouring village of Mikhailovka was populated by Azerbaijani who had already begun to leave. As the informant recalls, he was approached by a representative of the district executive committee who said, "We hear you have arrived. You should go to Mikhailovka, take on the farm there. We will give you a car, you will transport your belongings." But he did not even want to hear about this option, as it was more important for him to live with his fellow villagers. After he had finally moved to Kyzyl-Shafag, R. Martirosyan was called to the administration right away and they told him to take on the farm. Overall it was no coincidence that one of the leaders and orchestrators of the exchange assumed responsibility for the farm, which was the village's primary economic unit. As already noted, in the process of the exchange, both parties also came to an agreement regarding

state-owned economic enterprises (the farm, the winery), machinery, etc. The agreement stated that during the relocation, the parties would take on and maintain that state-owned property.

According to informants, much to their surprise, the Azerbaijanis' houses were empty since they had long ago transferred their belongings to the nearby Azerbaijani village of Irganchai in Georgia. Our informant, who permanently relocated to Kyzyl-Shafag in May 1989, recalls: "I came to stay in that house. Here I see that they are making a bed for me, and they don't have a bed for themselves. They had moved their things to Georgian settlements."

As already stated, until September 1989 the Azerbaijani of Kyzyl-Shafag and the relocated Armenians of Kerkenj continued to live in the village together. Our informant (male, born in 1926), who was among the first Kerkenj Armenians who settled in Kyzyl-Shafag, recalls about that period:

"[The Azerbaijani] talked about me among themselves, saying I was a good Aqsaqal... For example after I had moved in, a woman [an Azerbaijani] worked at the store there, her father-in-law was...an Aqsaqal [who also participated in the negotiations]. The first time she saw me she asked, 'If I move to your village, they will kill me, won't they?' Her father-in-law told her, 'Don't talk nonsense'. After that whenever I went to the store (my children hadn't arrived yet), even if there were a thousand people there she would say, 'Dai [uncle], what do you need? You should go. Tell me what you need and I will send it to your house'. So that's that."

Our interlocutor even escorted one of the last remaining Azerbaijani families to the border because, according to the informant, the head of the family was afraid to go alone since by that time Armenians exclusively populated the village.

N., originally from Baku, was one of the first Armenian residents of the village. When she moved into the village, she says, there were only a few Kerkenj families and the rest were Azerbaijani. There she heard that the village had been exchanged with another village and that Armenians from Kerkenj would be arriving there soon. She was not afraid of the Azerbaijani because despite the fact that they outnumbered Armenians in the village at the time, all the same, in her own words, "we were already 'local' here and they were 'alien.'"

Kerkenj families who had long lived in Baku or in Central Asia settled in Kyzyl-Shafag as well. Among them were such families in which the husband,

for instance, was originally from Kerkenj and the wife was from another region in Azerbaijan. Such families moved out of Kyzyl-Shafag out of kinship.

Kerkenj residents made the new place their home in parallel with the exchange. As they moved in, Azerbaijani families left. During that period, sometimes even after the relocation people had to return to take care of unfinished business, e.g., to pick up pension papers, collect things they left behind, and so on. For example, the wife of one of our informants, an elderly woman, stayed in Kerkenj even after her husband had already relocated to Kyzyl-Shafag. She was a schoolteacher and had to stay until the academic year was completed. When the Azerbaijani family with which they had exchanged settled in their house, she acquainted the new owner with the “right” people in Shamakhi who could help them if they needed to fix their TV, for example. She also told them where to go for necessary goods, groceries, and so on.

In the process of the exchange, a special place was assigned to those objects and symbols that characterized villagers’ unity, memory and history. This process evidences the tendencies of transformation of their cultural landscape. In August 1989 our informant escorted a car with Azerbaijanis’ belongings from Kyzyl-Shafag to Kerkenj. According to him, the Azerbaijani state farm director asked him to do so. Among other things, there was a tent in that car that Kyzyl-Shafag residents used for communal events (such as weddings, funeral feasts). Our informant brought communal dishes and kitchenware from Kerkenj which Armenian residents used for similar purposes. But he was not able to bring back his brother-in-law’s car from Kerkenj, which he had left in the garage of his house (and about which he had told the new owner of the house). He did not find the car where he had left it, and the new owner of the house had hidden away from him. As a result, he refused to sit at the table in that house and spend the night there. Our informant told the new owner’s wife, “Your bread is inedible, and you are not people.” As our interlocutor recalls, “There was a good man [an Azerbaijani] there named Vasyl. I spent the night at his place.”

One of the symbols of Kerkenj, a bust of Simeon Zakyan, was kept on display at the school. Zakyan was a native of Kerkenj and the first commander of the 89th Rifle Division – Tamanskaya Division, compiled of ethnic Armenians. He was killed in action during the World War II. The war hero is the pride for Kerkenj residents. Until recently the monument had been kept in the house of M.M. in Dzunashogh. However after the house was resold, the bust was buried under the ruins when the house was torn down¹.

¹ During my trip to Dzunashogh in June 2007 the destroyed bust was found under the ruins of a house.

It should be noted that Kerkenj residents who settled in Kyzyl-Shafag/Dzunashogh at first faced challenges with cattle farming, since wine growing had been their primary occupation in Kerkenj. Cattle farming, however, was the primary occupation in the new village, as well as vegetable farming (mainly potatoes), albeit to a lesser degree. As a result, at first the newcomers actively learned new skills and adapted to their new economic environment. Since the Azerbaijani and the newly relocated Armenians co-resided in Kyzyl-Shafag at that time, Azerbaijanis were also “involved” in the active process of exchanging experience and knowledge. New residents mainly received advice from those with whom they had exchanged houses.

“We relocated in the summertime but they had already planted potatoes, they [the Azerbaijani] showed us and taught us how to tend the potatoes. The next year residents of Metsavan [the neighbouring Armenian village] came to help us; they had settled nearby, so they shared some finer points with us about that trade. We learned a lot from them... how to sow wheat.”

Many women, mostly urbanites from Baku, did not know how to milk cows. “I milked cows together with them [Azerbaijani women], with tears in my eyes,” one woman said. Kerkenj residents also adopted and preserved Azerbaijani knowledge and experience, including key details about how to process milk. An informant says, “well, we also knew how to make butter, we did it our way but their way was more convenient and the butter turned out better. We would make butter in clay pots that we would roll across the floor from side to side, and they had their pots suspended from the ceiling as if it were a swing.”¹ In the words of another informant, she “milked cows together with them [the Azerbaijani], yes, we milked together. I learned how to make cheese from him [an Azerbaijani].”

According to Kerkenj residents, they in turn gave Kyzyl-Shafag residents some recommendations regarding wine growing so that they could tend the grapes in Kerkenj. But as our informants note, the Azerbaijanis could not grasp all of the finer points and subtleties of wine growing. Instead, they chose to uproot all vineyards and sow wheat on this land.

¹ Both ways of making butter are known in traditional Armenian culture and throughout the region. For further reference, consult: Armenian Folk Arts, Culture, and Identity. Edited by L. Abrahamyan and N. Sweezy. Indiana University Press, 2001, pp. 113-125.

CHAPTER 8

LIVING IN A NEW PLACE

A. Hakobyan

8.1. Dzunashogh

After Kerkenj Armenians had relocated to Kyzyl-Shafag, adaptation to the new environment and living conditions became paramount. Settlers found themselves in Armenia, their “ethnic motherland,” in a village that had been Azerbaijani at the time of the 1988-1989 conflict. Moreover, they moved to this new place not voluntarily but out of necessity. All of those factors shaped the specific nature of the transformation of social and cultural spaces after the relocation. The issue of establishing the new power structure in Kyzyl-Shafag gained priority. According to our data, Kerkenj residents showed their initiative and self-organization in this process as well. For instance as we already mentioned, they had refused the candidate suggested for the position of the state farm director due to his bad reputation, despite the support he had from the district authorities.

Armenian refugees ran the village. According to the residents, the district authorities did not interfere with the election process and human resources management, leaving these matters for the villagers to handle. For example, D. Davtyan, one of the village’s patriarchs, became the chairman of the village council. Then they would elect Avag Vardanyan the head of the administration for three terms in a row. As we already know, A. Vardanyan as the authority figure not only in the village, but also in the entire district. According to our informants, he was sort of a “guardian” of the village, and he fought for its future. He was also the “guarantor” of the preservation of the Azerbaijani cemetery in the village and played an important role in the commune’s self-organization in 1988. He had already been the de-facto leader before he became elected and assumed official responsibility. But that role entailed another responsibility as well: it involved responsibility to honour both the “memory” of and the “present” villagers’ culture, and A. Vardanyan successfully accomplished his mission. He



Photograph 36. Sacred stone on the hill near Vank. The village of Dzunashogh (Kyzyl-Shafag), Armenia, 2006. Photo by A. Hakobyan.

in some ways seemed to embody Kerkenj and its residents' traditions, memory and the present state. In the words of one of our informants, had anything happened to any of Kerkenj residents in Russia or anywhere else, A. Vardanyan would have notified the entire village within half an hour.

By the fall of 1989, reports and articles about the life of Armenian refugees in former Azerbaijani villages had started to appear in the district press. In that context Kyzyl-Shafag and its problems were also mentioned. D. Davtyan, the acting Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Kyzyl-Shafag Village Council, described the situation in Kyzyl-Shafag in the fall of 1989 for the district newspaper *The Arevatsag* ("Dawn"). According to him, about 700 people had come to the village. Former heads and managers of the village and the state farm had been failing to make efforts to solve various domestic problems. The roads were terrible; there were only three phones in the whole village. There were problems with finding the necessary workforce for the state farm. The article noted that there were 180 pensioners among Kyzyl-Shafag residents, and Baku Armenians who had relocated to Kyzyl-Shafag were working at industrial enterprises of Kalinino (the district center) and the village of Metsavan. The author highlighted that the people had already received 200 tons of coal and 150 cubic meters of water but

another 200 tons of coal were necessary. According to the author's data, just a few people owned cattle for personal use. In addition, the village school needed teachers for chemistry and Armenian. As the district authorities explained in the article, the shortage of fuel and building materials were due to the blockade of the republic on the part of Azerbaijan, which delayed their delivery¹.

As noted above, the transformation of the cultural space had already begun during the relocation process when Kerkenj residents brought with them their significant possessions and symbols. While kitchen and houseware served as material manifestations characterizing their community and continuity of tradition, the bust of Simon Zakyan acquired its symbolic meaning in the new place. With the help of that symbol, they worked to construct the new Kerkenj reality (by renaming the village and the school).

Renaming of the village was one of the most important elements in the transformation of the cultural space. Kerkenj residents began working to preserve the memory of their native village immediately after their relocation to Kyzyl-Shafag. As the first step towards that preservation, they proposed to rename their settlement Kerkenj. According to one of our informants, they even made a sign for "Kerkenj" to be put up near the entrance to the village. But the district authorities denied their proposal since they thought "Kerkenj" was not an Armenian word². We are not aware of the scientific etymology of the name "Kerkenj", but the Kerkenj residents interpret this word to mean "the settlement of stern and strong people."

It is noteworthy that already in 1989, the district press became home to the discussion about renaming the district (Kalinin) and a number of settlements, which had Soviet or Turkic-Azeri names (the same goes for Kalinino, Kyzyl-Shafag, etc.). In that context it was proposed to rename Kyzyl-Shafag "Karmir Arshaluis" (Red Dawn), that is, to simply translate the Azerbaijani name Kyzyl-Shafag into Armenian. It is interesting that originally the village had been called Dzhudzhakyand. One of newspaper articles mentioned that in the 1950s, the Soviet state farm was renamed Karmir Arshaluis, but since Azerbaijani residents of the village found that new name difficult to pronounce, it was translated as Kyzyl-Shafag³.

¹ The Arevatsag, official newspaper of Kalinin district Communist Party committee of Armenia and the Council of People's Deputies, 1989, N 136.

² Field notes, the village of Dzunashogh, 2006. Also for reference: Avetyan Narine, Armenia: from motherland to motherland. IWPR N 318, December 9, 2005.

³ The Arevatsag, 1989, N 116.

Other versions were proposed as well, for instance, “Talvorik”¹ – in memory of a settlement in Western Armenia², “Noramut”, “Noravan”³ (that is, New Settlement), and “Novyi Vardashen” – in memory of the Armenian populated Vardashen district in the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic⁴. Locals, including officials of the district executive committee, schoolteachers, Kalinino knitwear factory workers, proposed all of these names. In this context, we find very interesting the group letter of Kerkenj residents, published by The Arevatsag, in which they ask to rename the village of Kyzyl-Shafag by “Zakyan” – in honour of their fellow villager, the World War II hero Simon Zakyan.

The letter says that due to well-known events,

“We were forced to abandon our village and we are now in our native land... The majority of Kyzyl-Shafag residents relocated from the village of Kerkenj in Shamakhi district of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. There have been many different proposals in your newspaper as to how best rename the village. But we would like to name it Zakyan in memory of Colonel Simon Zakyan who was born in the village of Kerkenj. In 1918 S. Zakyan took part in the defensive of the Baku commune; he then actively fought for the establishment of the Soviet regime in Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. Having received military education, he became the first commander of the 89th Armenian Division [Tamanskaya Division, compiled of ethnic Armenians]. In early 1942 he was appointed the commander of the 390th Armenian Rifle Division formed in the Crimea, and he fought the enemy in Kerch. He died from severe wounds received in an unequal confrontation. He is buried in the Kirov Park in Yerevan where there is a monument in his honour. He was posthumously awarded the Order of Lenin.”

Kerkenj residents then go on to say that by renaming the village in Zakyan’s name, they want to commemorate the cherished memory of the war hero. The letter is signed “The group of Kyzyl-Shafag residents.”⁵

¹ The Arevatsag, 1989, N 112, 116.

² Western Armenia is a historical and cultural term, which is used to refer to formerly Armenian-inhabited eastern regions of present-day Turkey (until 1915-1920). Armenians of Kalinin district are settlers returning from Western Armenia; they settled in the district primarily in the 19th century.

³ The Arevatsag, 1989, N 116.

⁴ The Arevatsag, 1989, N 127.

⁵ In the name of colonel Zakyan. The Arevatsag, 1989, N 127 (in Armenian).

The district authorities didn't support that proposal either. According to one of our informants, a government official from the district hinted then that the times were changing too fast to be naming anything after anyone, since nobody was able to predict what was going to come next. The event in question occurred in the last years of the USSR and that official apparently had the shifting political situation in mind. It is noteworthy that the villagers called a meeting specifically to address this issue, with representatives of the district authorities in attendance as well. Kerkenj residents had an idea to name the village school after S. Zakyan but that idea did not come to fruition either. According to the data from the village administration, the school currently has only 48 students.

A short time after that, the village of Kyzyl-Shafag was renamed Dzunashogh (which could be translated from Armenian as "shining snow"). But the villagers learned about it from the decree of the authorities; there had been no special public forum regarding the name change. This is how the Communist "Red Dawn" (Kyzyl-Shafag) was replaced by the post-Communist "Shining Snow" (Dzunashogh). This renaming signifies not only the change of citizens but also the change of eras.

Soon, with the start of the land reform and agricultural privatization in Armenia in 1991, Dzunashogh residents also found themselves involved in that process, privatizing the cattle, agricultural lands and pastures. Private farms superseded state farms and collective farms, and those changes affected everybody. Today, the villagers are private owners and they have their own cattle, pastures, etc.

Since 1993, Kerkenj residents have actively left the village. Various economic and social issues, as well as the energy and food crisis that unfolded in the republic during that time, caused their migration. Former Kerkenj residents settled primarily in the town of Georgiyevsk in the Northern Caucasus (Stavropol Krai, the Russian Federation) where they had relatives and acquaintances. Some Kerkenj families had already settled in Georgiyevsk during Soviet years. Later on, starting in 1988, many Kerkenj families from Azerbaijan also found shelter in that Northern Caucasian town. Besides Georgiyevsk, Kerkenj families also live in Dnepropetrovsk (Ukraine), and some families live as far as France.

As already noted, after the relocation, Kerkenj residents found themselves in a new social environment, both in the sense of surrounding villages and the village itself. The village also became a home to Baku Armenians, several families from the neighbouring village of Madrasa, and so on. As informants recall, arguments occurred during the first years, for instance, with "Karabakh"



Photograph 37. Vank: the Chapel of St. Gevork on the hill. The village of Dzunashogh (Kyzyl-Shafag), Armenia, 2006. *Photo by A. Hakobyan.*

Armenians, that is, Baku Armenians who were originally from Karabakh¹, regarding proper ways to organize a wedding or a funeral and whose tradition to follow, for example.

Exploration of the new space occurred not only on the communal-collective level (e.g., renaming the village), but on the individual level as well. Naturally, Armenian families settled in the houses where Azerbaijani used to live. That determined the common patterns of the transformation of their direct living environment. The first thing to be changed was the colour of the walls, since the previous colours were called the colors of the “Turks.” Azerbaijani typically used bright colours in interior design – navy blue, green, red. Returning settlers found those colors tasteless and depressing, and so they tried to hide them – some repainted the walls in a new colour, while others pasted over them with any available materials. This was characteristic of other Armenian refugees, settlers who inhabited former Azerbaijani villages².

As our data show, those Armenians who relocated to the village from other

¹ Those Baku Armenians who are originally from Kerkenj are considered Kerkenj residents.

² Kharatyan L., “New” Images of the “Old” Space (Models of cultural exploration of the “foreign” space – evidence from Armenian refugees living in Vardenis district of Armenia). Essay for the collection of works by the Heinrich Boell Foundation fellows.

locations (mainly the neighbouring village of Metsavan in Georgia), symbolically sanctified their new homes before moving in to Azerbaijani houses, which they had bought in Dzunashogh. They lit candles, inviting a priest to conduct the ritual of sanctifying a house. Often Armenian newcomers would change the façade of a house. Typically Azerbaijani houses had a open porch veranda. Kerkenj residents, who considered the local winter to be too harsh after the hot climate they were used to, would rebuild and put up a stonewall in the place of a veranda.

When the Azerbaijani lived in the village, they had one oven per yard, which five or six families used. There were several ovens around the village, used primarily for baking bread. After the relocation the culture of baking bread changed as well. This in turn led to transformations of individual's spaces, along with modification and rearrangement of houses. Traditionally Kerkenj households each had their own oven, known as a tonir, in the house. After they had settled in the village they immediately began to build individual tonirs. In the words of our informant, "We were not able to adapt to their ovens; we started to build our own tonirs the very next year." The making of a tonir involved a unique process, but there were a few elderly women in the village who knew those secrets, so Kerkenj residents' endeavors were not met with any noticeable difficulties. Currently just one elderly woman who remembers all the finer points of that craft lives in the village. By changing the colour scheme and by modifying the houses, Kerkenj residents transformed the Azerbaijani houses to make them their "own."

In the physical space of the village, the "monuments", that is, sanctuaries or cemeteries, hold a special place, as they also organize the cultural and social space and offer an opportunity for tracing the transformation of the cultural landscape. In this context it is rather interesting to follow the functional and conceptual changes of the monuments and the landscape related to them. As we already mentioned, mutual preservation of cemeteries was one of the extraordinary terms of the exchange between the two communes. The Azerbaijani cemetery is still being preserved in the former Kyzyl-Shafag, that is, present-day Dzunashogh. In addition to the cemetery, the surrounding gates, fences, and trees, are being preserved as well. "At the Azerbaijani cemetery, one can find inscriptions in Arabic and inscriptions in Cyrillic, made much later, close to the photos of the deceased."¹ It is understood, of course, that

¹ Avetyan Narine, Armenia: from motherland to motherland. IWPR N 318, December 9, 2005.



Photograph 38. Azerbaijani cemetery in the village of Dzunashogh (Kyzyl-Shafag), Armenia, 2006. Photo by A. Hakobyan



Photograph 39. Azerbaijani cemetery in the village of Dzunashogh (Kyzyl-Shafag), Armenia, 2006. Photo by A. Hakobyan

the cemetery is not in operation, and it is as if it has turned into a historical monument, at least in the eyes of the villagers.

But the cemetery also has a very important and special function. Kerkenj residents are perfectly aware of the twenty-year-old agreement. At the same time, they are also conscious of the fact that preserving this cemetery guarantees the protection of their cemetery as well, even despite the fact that compared to the Azerbaijani of Kyzyl-Shafag, who can visit the borderline village of Dzunashogh much more easily, they have limited opportunities to learn about the actual state of their cemetery. As a result, it seems that the Azerbaijani cemetery in Dzunashogh reminds them of the cemetery in Kerkenj, and thus about the history of the exchange and Kerkenj itself. Therefore it is an active factor that keeps the memory alive; active because they constantly recall the agreement, the exchange, Kerkenj and its Armenian cemetery.

Oral histories serve as the mechanism for passing on the terms regarding the preservation of the cemeteries. According to one young informant, he learned about this when he was still a teenager. People told the story and the memory stayed with him, in addition to the understanding of why the cemetery needs to be preserved. According to other informants, several years ago one of the local

Armenians who did not know about the agreement wanted to cut down a tree at the cemetery, but Kerkenj residents did not allow him to do so. In another incident, 74-year-old Nazik Arutunyan told us, “Last year a few stones fell out of the external fence of the cemetery. The entire village gathered together and fixed the fence. And when a portrait fell off one gravestone the director himself stirred the matrix and put the portrait back.”¹ It should be noted that preservation of the cemetery does not require any extra efforts since local Armenians treat it with respect². The Armenian cemetery in Dzunashogh is located opposite the Azerbaijani cemetery, somewhat further.

Due to obvious reasons³ an 11-year-old videotape⁴, as well as contacts with Kyzyl-Shafag and Irganchai residents⁵ are the main sources of information for Kerkenj residents about their village and cemetery. Sometimes during those meetings with Kyzyl-Shafag and Irganchai residents, an Azerbaijani acquaintance would tell them that the cemetery in Kerkenj is in order. For instance, Kerkenj residents know that Azerbaijanis who had demolished the metal fence around the village’s sanctuary died right away, and the fence was replaced⁶.

It is noteworthy that Azerbaijani former residents started visiting Dzunashogh for various reasons (to get papers and things they had forgotten to take with them, etc.) right after the relocation. For example, according to our informant (male, born in 1935), one night somebody knocked on his gate. He came out and saw the son of the previous owner of the house. The informant offered him to come in but the night guest said he was afraid of Armenians and did not enter. The reason he came was to take the dog they had left behind. The night guest did indeed have reasons to be afraid of Armenians, as he had participated in the Sumgait Pogroms in 1988. The man’s father, with whom our informant had exchanged houses, had shared this information with our informant. During their

¹ Avetyan Narine, Armenia: from motherland to motherland. IWPR N 318, December 9, 2005.

² In twenty years that have passed since the exchange, two or three headstones perished from the cemetery. According to Kerkenj residents, that was ordinary larceny that happened right after the relocation. Kerkenj residents handled the investigation themselves and they found out that it was most likely the work of out-of-district thieves.

³ Dzunashogh is located near the border between Armenia and Georgia, and Kerkenj – in the midst of Azerbaijan.

⁴ On the request of Kerkenj residents Azerbaijani taped a video about the village cemetery. They sent the videotape to Kerkenj residents.

⁵ In the Azerbaijani village of Irganchai. Since Dzunashogh residents communicate with Irganchai residents on a regular basis as neighbours, it is not that difficult to maintain personal relations with Kyzyl-Shafag residents. The village of Irganchai is in fact the link between Kerkenj and Dzunashogh.

⁶ This sanctuary is not the grave of B. Ayrapetov, whose name is inscribed on the stone near the sanctuary. According to Kerkenj residents, his family and he had been taking care of the sanctuary, and so the stone with his name on it was put up there still in Soviet times.

last meeting he presented a dagger as a gift to our informant, perhaps as the father's effort to atone for his son's guilt.

The sanctuary – the chapel (vank)¹, which bears significant symbolic and functional value in the social and cultural space of the village – is one of the most important memory sites. The order of the words “sanctuary” and “vank” are not coincidental since they offer an opportunity to trace the physical and cultural “development” and transformation of the monument as well as the process of “exploration” in the post-relocation period. We should mention that the sacred stone has stood on the hill at the entrance to the village since “year one”². The Azerbaijani of Kyzyl-Shafag, the neighbouring village of Irganchai, as well as Armenians of Metsavan and Kalinino worshipped that sanctuary. There is also a “house of mullah” slightly down the hill, which is sometimes called “the mosque”, which is the house of worship for the Muslims.

After the exchange, a small chapel – “vank” – was built near the sacred stone on the hill, but still it was the stone that became the symbolic and conceptual “axis” for its construction. How did this all occur? Unfortunately the man who had built the chapel had passed away. He was an Armenian from the neighbouring village of Metsavan. By some twist of fate he, already a rather elderly man, married an Armenian refugee [also of considerable age] from Baku who found herself alone after her daughters had gotten married. His wife told us, “My girls had gotten married and so I was alone... I met my future husband. He is a frank³, by the way... And he relocated here. He used to live in Metsavan [prior to relocation]. He liked that village.” She recalls that when they lived there in 1993-1994 and 1996 even people from Irganchai and from Metsavan would visit that sacred ground and perform rituals, lighting candles, bringing offerings, etc. According to our informant, even the Azerbaijani from Irganchai came here and said it was a very powerful sanctuary. The informant's husband, a local, said that a very long time ago there used to be a “vank” there, but then, even before Soviet times, it got destroyed; still, the sacred stone remained.

¹ “Vank” (Armenian for “monastery”). That's what our informants called that sanctuary. It was a simple small rectangular building, rather typical of Christian Armenians' religious traditions. Such sanctuaries are usually built because of some prophetic dreams or vows.

² Of note, during the negotiations process between the leaders of Kerkenj and Kyzyl-Shafag regarding the exchange, the feast of the patriarchs took place on that spot, on top of the hill near the sacred stone.

³ Among common people, Armenians who adopted Catholicism are called “franks.” Many Armenians do not know that “franks” are Catholic. Often even “franks” themselves don't know they are Catholic and attend religious services at parishes of the Armenian Apostolic Church. In many cases they christen their children at the Armenian Apostolic Church, but nevertheless in daily use they will still be called “franks.”

The informant suggested her husband built a “vank” in that location. He was reluctant at first but then he became quite enthused about the whole idea. He talked to his acquaintances, masons, and asked a priest for advice, having told him about the legend. Then all together (including even the Azerbaijani from Irganchai) they scouted the location and found a stone with a cross on it in the ruins of one building, specifically the “house of mullah” – they thought, “so the legend must be true!”

Construction commenced. At first they built as they used to in the “old times”, without cement, with clay only, but then a rainstorm hit, so strong that the unhardened clay could not hold the walls together, and so after that they had to use cement. They specifically used the stones they found in the ruins at the base of the hill because they were considered to be the stones from the old church. The villagers actively participated in the construction process. The grand opening was held in 1997. Of note, Azerbaijani musicians from the neighbouring village of Irganchai also took part in the opening ceremony. Interestingly enough, according to another informant, a church once sat on top of that hill, which was later destroyed, and the stones were used to build the “house of mullah.” So the church was restored with precisely those stones.

In some ways, the church became an argument to prove that Armenians had lived there before, in the “old times.” This goes along with the present-day context in the sense that the church legitimizes the “Armenianization” of the village. Thanks to Armenian settlers the “history” is being “restored” and thus “returning settlers” connect to the “general history” and the location, and they become important actors of the “modern times” and “history.”

“Vank” was sanctified and “christened” St. Gevork (George). It is noteworthy that the name of the building’s founding father was also Gevork and sometimes the villagers joke that he built that “vank” in order to atone for his sins. Gradually the new church acquired important symbolic and functional significance. Among other things, Dzunashogh couples began to hold their wedding ceremonies there. Over time it became the cultural center of the village. The Armenian traditional holiday Vartavar was one of the important events organized around the new symbol. The former village chief A. Vardanyan initiated the holiday. Interestingly enough, although Kerkenj residents had not celebrated that holiday before the relocation, the tradition of celebrating Vartavar was formed already in Kyzyl-Shafag, since many Dzunashogh residents participated in celebrations

held on that day in the neighbouring village of Metsavan. In the words of one of our informants, “usually on that day young people go to Metsavan but not adults.” Another elderly Kerkenj informant told us that he gladly participated in holiday celebrations in Metsavan.

Since A. Vardanyan’s death Vartavar has no longer been celebrated in Dzunashogh, and on the day of that holiday Dzunashogh residents now go to the village of Metsavan where there usually are fairs, circus shows, and so on. It is worth mentioning that in fact, joint celebration and other events were usually proposed by the village leaders as a way to overcome barriers between the locals and refugees¹, but in that case the mechanism was initiated from “below.”

The former head of administration also initiated observance of Trndez, another folk religious holiday celebrated in February which Kerkenj residents came to know in Armenia. These days young Kerkenj residents try to maintain the new tradition.

Before the relocation, Kerkenj residents celebrated Easter not on the day assigned by the Armenian Apostolic Church, but on the fixed date of May 2nd². This was a general holiday, and on that day all natives of the village would arrive from various locations to celebrate. “On that day we had a big holiday in our village; everybody would flock from different places; visiting the cemetery was a must.” Kerkenj residents have lost the tradition of colouring Easter eggs, however, “this is what has changed here, and since your neighbour, a frank, colours eggs on this day you just have to adjust.” The custom of visiting the cemetery on May 2nd, which is celebrated as Remembrance Day, has remained.

There is a big village, Metsavan (formerly Shakhnazar), not far from the village where refugees from Kerkenj have relocated. The road to the district center lies through Metsavan. At first former Kerkenj residents had rather conflictual relations with Metsavan residents, the kind of relations that often initially exist between “locals” and “newcomers.” They even had frequent small-scale confrontations with Metsavan residents: “they would come to our village for some wrangles.”

¹ Cultural dialogue in the name of harmonious coexistence, a project by NGOC/UNHCR, managed by G. Petrosyan. Also for reference: Marutyan A. The role of collective and historical memory in the dialogue of cultures: an opportunity or a barrier? (manuscript).

² In Soviet times, Armenians of Azerbaijan would go to cemeteries on May 2nd with painted eggs, thus mixing Easter and Soviet May Day (International Workers’ Day). Armenian refugees who left Azerbaijan still celebrate this holiday as Easter in the countries of their current residence.

When talking about Dzunashogh residents, Metsavan residents usually use the term “newcomers.” They have been known to even use the term “Turk” in conflict situations, which for Kerkenj residents constitutes a great insult. According to one Kerkenj informant, the word “newcomer” may sound rude in their dialect (that of Metsavan residents) but they (Metsavan residents) do not mean any insult by that.

The clash of the two communities often leads to disputes on historical subjects. Taking into consideration that Metsavan is populated by Catholic Armenians who call themselves “franks”, historical debates thus turn out to be rather heated and interesting. “History” becomes an actual part of substantiating and explaining the present. In response to being called “newcomers” or “outsiders”, Kerkenj residents say that it is Metsavan residents who are “newcomers” and “outsiders”, meaning that their ancestors relocated there from Western Armenia and Turkey. Interestingly, Metsavan residents taught them about their history: Metsavan residents “say they have moved in here from Turkey.”

For Kerkenj residents the term “frank” serves as a sound argument against accusations of their “un-Armenian” nature. Returning settlers say that Metsavan residents are not Armenian; they are “franks.” They also learned about “franks” here. It should be noted that neither settlers nor Metsavan residents realize the true meaning behind such terms as “frank”, “Catholicism”, etc. A few people know and can talk about Catholicism, while various legends and anecdotes surround the word “frank.”

We should also say that the above-mentioned discrepancies and animosities have begun to dissipate. Since Dzunashogh has bountiful pastures and hay lands and a much more favourable environment for cattle farming, many Metsavan residents have bought out houses in that village and settled there. Returning settlers have differing opinions about the residents of the neighbouring village. “Even if they call us “Turks” just once a year, it is still a devastating blow to us. They call us Turks while forgetting that they are franks; they don’t even know what that means, and they don’t know their own history, their origins. We only know that they are Catholic.” The family of the young village chief – also a “frank” – the elected head of the administration of Dzunashogh, was the example of a good villager; all villagers had only positive things to say about him.¹

It must also be said that at first, the establishment of kindred relationships between returning settlers and locals was met with considerable difficulties.

¹ During our stay in the village in 2006 the village chief died in a car crash.

Kerkenj residents are reluctant to allow their daughters marry Metsavan residents. As our female informants mentioned, “if you don’t agree to marry off your daughter, they will steal the bride, it’s a usual practice for them while for us it’s the lowest of the low... Things like this are completely foreign to us, and we have a hard time getting used to such things.” Truth be told, with the passage of time Kerkenj residents have gotten accustomed to the ritual of “stealing the bride” and have in their turn started to steal brides from Metsavan¹.

Marriages between inhabitants of the two villages have gradually become more common. “We have almost no young women left in our village; whom can I take as my daughter-in-law when my son comes back from his military service? Whether I want it or not, I will have to choose a future daughter-in-law from the neighbouring village of franks.” Of note, kindred relationships continue with former neighbours – residents of Armenian villages in Azerbaijan (Madrassa, Kelakhana) who now live in various parts of Armenia, rather far away.

Both Metsavan and Kerkenj residents have their own specific and pronounced dialect. The “un-Armenian” nature of Metsavan inhabitants manifests itself also in their reluctance to speak literary Armenian. “Even at school they would speak their own dialect; they don’t know Armenian as well as we do, though they have lived in Armenia.” “Our dialect has gone through significant transformations towards literary Armenian... I can speak their dialect clearly but I won’t; let them speak ours, there’s more of us in the village, let them learn our dialect.” In one informant’s opinion, Metsavan dialect has many Turkish words.

Russian-speaking returning settlers of Dzunashogh, mainly former Baku residents, upbraid Metsavan inhabitants also for not knowing Russian well enough. “They can’t speak Russian at all; they can’t pronounce a single word in Russian... Couldn’t they learn a couple of words?” Majority of adult Kerkenj residents know Azeri as well, and when communicating with the Azerbaijani from the neighbouring village, they speak their language.

The borderline Azerbaijani village of Irganchai in Georgia is another village with which settlers have active economic and trade relations. Some critical situations had arisen before those relations were established. For example, in the first years following the relocation, they used to set up block posts and keep watch, since they were afraid of potential attacks from Irganchai. Then slowly they started to trade with each other. While there was no reason to fear,

¹ The first incident of the kind occurred in 2006, and they told many funny stories about it in the village.

the villagers still would not go to Irganchai alone. We heard about a case of a Kerkenj resident, Aramais Grigoryan, who went to that village with his friend, was attacked, and died from the wounds he received.

Relations with Irganchai residents are most active at the time of hay harvest. Dzunashogh has plentiful pastures and hay lands while Irganchai residents lack such resources. However, they actively pursue cattle farming, and as a result, Dzunashogh and Irganchai have established mutually beneficial relations. Since there is not enough labour in Dzunashogh due to aggressive emigration, at the time of the hay harvest they make agreements with Irganchai residents so that the latter will come and cut the hay, which they will later split evenly. Crossing the border during the hay harvest period becomes official business, and border guards are shown the written permission of the region's leader.

Many Kerkenj residents maintain personal relations with Azerbaijani from the neighbouring village; they invite them to their houses, visit each other and attend each other's special events, celebrations and funerals alike. Crossing the border on foot is not difficult both because the villages are close, and border guards are quite loyal to residents of border villages.

Due to significant migration, Dzunashogh has a low population these days. According to the data from the village administration, there are only 241 people here. In addition to Kerkenj and Baku Armenians, there are also families from Georgia, the neighbouring village of Metsavan, and Yerevan. For economic and social reasons, houses for sale are mainly bought for building materials, and their new owners tear them down and sell the materials.

After the tragic death of the village chief in 2006, the village was for some time managed by the brother of the deceased. Then the new village chief was elected – a woman. Since the appropriate candidate did not have official residential registration in the village but lived in the district center, the agreement was made to formally elect the wife while in fact the actual manager would be her deputy – the husband. The young wife herself had official residential registration in the village; she was from a Baku family with Kerkenj roots, and the husband also had Kerkenj roots but was born in Baku. The new leadership essentially signified the new era for the village. The descendants of “real” Kerkenj residents who were born in other places came up to take their place. The previous village chief from Metsavan symbolized the end of the era of discrepancies and animosities between the two communities, between the “newcomers” and “locals.” Despite the fact that currently there are only a

few Kerkenj residents in the village, the “Kerkenj nature” continues to exist, undergoing various transformations.

Driven by the social and economic difficulties of 1992-1994, Kerkenj residents actively emigrated from the village. It could be placed on record that the village of Dzunashogh has not been successful as a compact and large settlement of former Kerkenj residents. In spite of this, however, traditions and ideas planted during the exchange, and its spirit, still perpetuate.

S. Huseynova, S. Rummyantsev

8.2. “We wanted to rename Kerkenj by Kyzyl-Shafag”

Once the collective exchange had been carried out, and life in the new village needed to be reorganized.

“They say if you don’t have a head, then your legs won’t do you any good. What can legs do without the head? Allazov Bayram was our head. He was the one who organized it all. If he hadn’t organized that who knows where we would have been today... Thanks to Allazov Bayram, the land is ours! When we just relocated almost no one had any cattle, except for me and few other men. Then Bayram-mu’allim said in front of the office, ‘Hey, Vasy! Gara, come, stand close to Veyis-kishi, you are three times bigger than him, why does he have a cow and you don’t?’ (laughs) [He] said, ‘I don’t know’. And now almost everyone has cattle, horses, and mules. We have pastures for the cattle, our own land, and one single man has organized all of this – Bayram-mu’allim! I didn’t organize any of that; I was just standing and watching to see what would happen to us. This is all his doing. He didn’t want to stay here; he wanted to live in Baku. We made him come back. Back there he was our leader for 30 years, and now he is our leader here” (Veyis-kishi, 91 years old).

This optimistic general evaluation of the changes brought on by the relocation always occurs alongside the pessimistic one. Not everyone is pleased with the changes:

“No, no such thing here, now everyone his own personal mullah in his house, well, those who understand. Those who don’t know... Anyway the money we were



Photograph 40. New Azerbaijani cemetery of the village of Kerkenj. In the background: Armenian cemetery. The village of Kerkenj, Azerbaijan, 2006. Photo by S. Rummyantsev.

making there, it's worse here. Yes, it was very good [there]. Richness, possessions! Nothing that was in the old times can be compared with the present day. Everything we've saved for a house was lost" (Mayga-khanum, 75 years old).

Certainly many things changed following the relocation, and Kyzyl-Shafag residents' witnessed the falling apart of the Soviet collective farm system. At the same time, the new private and voluntary economic system began to develop. In the beginning of the new life after the relocation when the USSR was still intact, "yes, everything operated, the store, the post office, the cottage hospital, too" (Zakhid-kishi, 58 years old). However the USSR collapse naturally led to a decrease in the visible presence of the state in every village. Monetary resources evaporated, and no motivation to pay for the maintenance of all those institutions existed. "No, they have ruined them all. But they say they will restore them" (Zakhid-kishi, 58 years old). This statement, "they have ruined", shows how Kyzyl-Shafag residents distance themselves from difficult situations that followed their relocation to Kerkenj. It was the government officials who have ruined it all, by no means the villagers themselves. True, not much did indeed depend on them.



Photograph 41. Monument to Kerkenj soldiers who died in World War II. The village of Kerkenj, Azerbaijan, 2006. *Photo by S. Rumyantsev.*

“We had very good conditions here. You won’t believe but we had an amazing fruit harvest that year in the village! I swear to Allah! We never had a harvest like that afterwards... This used to be a kind of regional center in winegrowing. But afterwards almost everything died due to drought and various ailments” (Gyulshankhanum, 52 years old).

It was already impossible then to reclaim the vineyards in their entirety, and the ways of farming they had been accustomed to drove them back towards cattle farming. “When we came here we didn’t have any cattle. We bought two calves here; two cows are enough for us” (Aly-kishi, 72 years old).

The changes in customary living conditions and the climate in many cases were accompanied by ailments, which, as they now remember, they did not experience in their native land. “The main thing was...the climate wasn’t good for us. Yeah, it wasn’t a good match. Well, how shall I put it, many people got sick, some had a rash, some had other things” (Elmira, 37 years old). Gradually they got accustomed to the climate and also to the new way of farming – horticulture. “My father and my mother worked at a vineyard, I didn’t. They taught them how to cut, how to cultivate the grapes, so they went to work



Photograph 42 (addendum to photograph 41). The nameplate on the monument: "In memory of Kerkenj soldiers." The village of Kerkenj, Azerbaijan, 2006. Photo by S. Rumyantsev.

there. There was a foreman from Shamakhi there... A Muslim. Eldar and others. They taught everybody how to work at a vineyard" (Elmira, 37 years old). The process of adapting to new modes of farming, when after the relocation the 60 hectare vineyard was reclaimed (previously the vineyard was about 170 hectares), occurred alongside the replenishment of the livestock population, which allowed villagers to slowly turn their life around.

At the same time Kyzyl-Shafag residents practically never asked for any aid as refugees. They were able to overcome tough challenges with honour and dignity. Just once, with no prior requests from the villagers, at the Committee on Refugees Bayram-mu'allim received rather substantial material assistance consisting of food supplies, housewares, etc. "One time, not long ago, about two years ago, they brought us some clothes, blankets, robes, plain trousers, groceries. That was all the assistance; we've never received anything else" (Veysal-kishi, 78 years old). Already as the head of Kerkenj, Bayram Allazov had managed to find resources to fix the water supply system and pipe the entire village for gas. One way or another, having carried out the exchange,

Kyzyl-Shafag residents were able to rebuild a successful farmstead in the new village.

Apparently there was a moment when the habit of cashing in on refugee status could have taken root in the village.

"I came here...placed everyone here, held a big all-out village meeting. Gathered the people... And said, 'Here you are... all settled in. Start working; start working so that you don't go around with hat in hand as 'dilyanchi' (paupers). So I settled them, came here myself, came here one more time. So I came and there was that..no, not 'gachkynkom', they weren't calling it 'gachkynkom' yet ['gachkynkom' – a habitual common name for the Committee on Refugees], the refugees society. I came here (to Kerkenj). And there I saw that a man had arrived... People love that. The villagers formed a queue, and (that man) gave out three rubles here, five rubles there. I...came in, closed the door behind me... And I said, 'Aren't you ashamed? Aren't you? You have...hands, eyes, healthy eyes, healthy hands, aren't you ashamed to queue for three rubles, five rubles?' I insulted that man as well, kicked him out to be more precise. And they started to work here" (Bayram Allazov, 72 years old).

Surely they would have started to work anyhow because it was not possible to live on the assistance provided to refugees. But that episode demonstrates that Kyzyl-Shafag residents found it in their hearts to completely refuse begging for help and put all their energy instead into rebuilding the farmstead.

Though their choice was largely determined by the circumstances, Kyzyl-Shafag residents were able to rise above those conditions. And they achieved their main goal – they preserved their community. They were not in need of refugee status because they did not seek to take advantage of this situation. They set an objective and worked towards achieving it. They lived as ordinary rural dwellers. They experienced loss and they worked to reconstruct what they had lost. And though the bitterness of their losses will apparently follow those who have lived through that to their grave, the spirit of their new life is gradually replacing those losses. They did not give up and surrender; they chose the life that seemed right to them. And they succeeded in making everyone take their will into account because no regime could resist this civic force.

Kyzyl-Shafag residents established their new lives in the physical space of the village where its previous inhabitants' memory sites remained. First

and foremost, the name of the village was an important issue. “At first we wanted to change the name, change it to ours. But they told us Kerkenj was not an Armenian name. We wanted to change it to Kyzyl-Shafag, we even wrote to the district authorities but they responded saying that the name wasn’t Armenian but Turkic. Still we called the collective farm Kyzyl-Shafag” (Mustafa Kurbanov, 46 years old). “We wanted to rename Kerkenj by Kyzyl-Shafag. We even appealed to the authorities but they told us it was a toponym, and that was why they were not allowing us to rename the village; although Armenians there have changed all Azerbaijani names” (Madar, 45 years old).

The presence of the Armenian cemetery in Kerkenj demonstrates the specific nature of the exploration of the village space after the relocation. This is not related only to the necessity of its preservation due to the terms of the agreement. The Armenian cemetery was not considered as a potential burial ground for the relocated Azerbaijani in principle. That cemetery has always been and will remain a space of “foreign” memory that is “not ours.” The cemetery’s territory was marked as the burial ground of Christians. That was another reason why the Azerbaijani who traditionally identified themselves as Muslim did not need a new graveyard¹. As a result, the new Azerbaijani cemetery emerged in close proximity to the Armenian cemetery.

At the same time, while the Armenian cemetery represents a sort of a taboo territory, it still is quite an important site in the collective memory of the Azerbaijani as well. On the one hand, the Armenian cemetery remains a rather functional symbolic space, which in the Azerbaijanis’ everyday life represents the very fact of their recent relocation and the agreement they have made. This graveyard becomes in fact an everyday representation of the guarantee of the preservation of “our” Azerbaijani cemetery in “our” village, in Kyzyl-Shafag. However, on the other hand the very existence of two cemeteries in one and the same village is a daily reenactment of the Kyzyl-Shafag’s commune’s specific

¹ It should be noted that even in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, which used to be considered, especially in Soviet times, the territory of “peoples’ friendship”, relatively Christian and Muslim cemeteries were rather strictly separated from each other. At the same time Armenian and Russian cemeteries were also separated, which was to a certain extent a demonstration of the borders between the three largest ethnic communities of the city, with borders that were quite stable even in Soviet times. But this didn’t interfere with the fact that the “atmosphere of friendliness, particular to Baku” reigned in the city. Badalov R. Baku: the city and the country. In: Azerbaijan and Russia: societies and states. Collection of essays edited by Furman D. E. Moscow: The Andrey Sakharov Foundation, 2001, pp. 256-277, 273.

history. The Armenian cemetery is also a symbolic memory space related to the history of relocating to a “foreign” village that is “not ours.” The memory of this relocation is constituted not only in collective memory of Kyzyl-Shafag residents but also in the presence of the Armenian cemetery, which they promised not to destroy on the territory of the Azerbaijani village.

The specific aspects of current inhabitants’ views of living in the space of the village, which is “ours” and “not ours” at the same time, is also reflected in perceptions of the new Azerbaijani cemetery. “Those who came from there [relocated from Kyzyl-Shafag], they changed the climate and eighty percent of people, they all died. They were dying here, and in Baku, everywhere. Here the thing is...it’s hot, they can’t handle it, and they die” (Mamed-kishi, 68 years old). This phrase takes us back to the new Muslim cemetery, which has grown quite a lot. In the context of residence in the village that is “not ours”, new graves take on a special meaning. Each of the relocated Kyzyl-Shafag residents can easily recall when the new cemetery was established. While the memory about establishing “our own” cemetery is still alive, this space, allocated just recently but already filled with dozens of new graves, represents the high mortality rate as a result of the hardships the forced migration has entailed.

At the same time, the new cemetery itself has not yet transformed into “our” cemetery in the minds of Kyzyl-Shafag residents. It still does not substitute the cemetery left behind in “our” village in Armenia. The latter still has a higher status in the hierarchy of these burial grounds. For Azerbaijani, as well, perhaps, as for Armenians who have carried out the exchange of the communes, the two previous “old” cemeteries, one of which has become in fact a taboo territory for the Azerbaijani and the other one – for Armenians, are the basis for associations which help bring to life recollections about the relocation and the exploration of the space of the new village that is “not ours.”

“Now the only living thing we have left in Armenia is our cemetery. We don’t touch their cemetery here; it is also alive. Here [meaning, in Kerkenj]. If you walk in the lower section of the village, you’ll see. They also don’t touch a thing there in our village. Several granite stones...have been taken away but the rest are there” (Mamed-kishi, 68 years old).

Therefore “our village” is still understood as Kyzyl-Shafag. That’s where they have their “own”, “true”, “living” cemetery. Here in Kerkenj the Armenian cemetery still remains the “real”, “living” graveyard¹.

The “living” status, which these two practically abandoned cemeteries have, demonstrates how the currently occupied territory is perceived, that is as the space of primarily “foreign” memory that is “not ours.” This is still the territory of those who had lived here before the Azerbaijani moved in. The cemetery of former residents is “the only living thing.” The new Azerbaijani cemetery functions as a representation of the tragedy of their relocation and the loss of their small motherland, as well as of the temporary nature of their stay in Kerkenj. The cemetery as a commemorative site where their ancestors were buried was left in their previous village. As long as villagers still perceive the cemetery in Kyzyl-Shafag as “living”, they will not view the new cemetery as its full substitute.

The attitude towards the old Armenian cemetery is a constant presence of a taboo territory in the daily lives of Kyzyl-Shafag residents, the territory they had to protect during certain periods of their life in the new place.

“We even had an incident once... They came... Locals from villages of the district [Shamakhi district] to the Armenian cemetery [came] in order to take away the marble. So we chased one car of theirs out (made it leave) and it flew (that is, it fell) into the ravine. People jumped out of it... They ran away and we couldn’t catch them, as it was nighttime. But their car, it flew (into the ravine), ZIL², it was completely broken. Then we caught another car, took it to the cops... They are watching over our graves there and we are watching over theirs here” (Nasib, 45 years old).

“Our guys kicked them [those who came to steal the marble] out, wanted to catch them. They left their car, just abandoned it. The car fell directly into the ravine. And the car’s cabin, that cabin-shmabin lay in the ravine until recently” (Bayram Allazov).

¹ The “living cemetery” oxymoron is worthy of special attention. Olga Brednikova highlights the fact that while she was researching the subject she unwittingly employed the metaphors “living” and “dead” cemeteries, which are apparently widespread in the everyday perception of graveyards’ territories. To draw analogies with examples provided by O. Berdnikova, both cemeteries left behind by the Azerbaijani and Armenians in their abandoned former homes must transform from “living” into “dead.” However the specifics of the communes’ history in regards to the collective relocation have led to the fact that both abandoned cemeteries still preserve their functional significance, thus maintaining their “living” status. Therefore we can observe an interesting process of gradual transformation of meanings. One should suppose that the passing of generations of Kyzyl-Shafag residents will lead to the fact that in the long run the new cemetery in Kerkenj will remain the only “living” cemetery. For reference, consult: Brednikova O. Sociological walks at the cemetery. In: Boundless sociology. Reboot. St. Petersburg: Akros, 2006, pp. 64-65.

² Brand of cars manufactured by Zavod Imeni Likhachova, literally “Factory named after Likhachov” or Likhachov Factory.



Photograph 43. Pir, a hallowed spot, left by former residents of the village. The village of Kerkenj, Azerbaijan, 2006. Photo by S. Huseynova.



Photograph 44 (addendum to photograph 43). According to residents, pir is the grave of a local honourable person. The village of Kerkenj, Azerbaijan, 2006. Photo by S. Huseynova.

The lack of attention towards another memory site inherited from the village's former residents is another testament of the high status that the Armenian cemetery has for the Azerbaijani who have relocated to Kerkenj. There is a short alley adjacent to the Armenian cemetery, and it ends in a monument dedicated to the "Memory of Kerkench¹ soldiers" who died in World War II. There were also many male Kyzyl-Shafag Azerbaijanis who fought in the war. However the memorial never became any significant marker of the village space to the village current inhabitants, and it is practically not mentioned in descriptions of the territory. If we were to try and reconstruct the village based only on the descriptions by our informants, there would be no monument in it. Perhaps the monument has not turned into a memory site for the Azerbaijani due to the fact that it is erected not in honour of all who died in the war but is dedicated exclusively to the "sons of Armenian people" instead. At the same time

¹ "Kerkench" – apparently this was the grammatically correct term used to refer to the villagers at the time of the monument's establishment. However in the present-day variant, considering the way the name of the village sounds in Azeri, we have given preference to the term "Kerkenj."



Photograph 45. Inscription on the gates of a house in the village of Kerkenj – “Kyzyl-Shafag.” The village of Kerkenj, Azerbaijan, 2006. Photo by S. Huseynova.

practically all World War II veterans from Kyzyl-Shafag who are still alive currently reside in Baku, and this might constitute another, more significant reason behind the lack of attention to the monument.

On the other hand, the grave of Babken Khachaturovich Airapetov, the village former resident who died, according to the inscription, in 1970, which Kyzyl-Shafag residents consider to be a “pir” (a hallowed spot), has kept its status together with another relic brought from the previous place of residence, identified as “Saryg-Efendi” or “Papakh-Efendi” (literally “the headwear (turban) of Mullah Efendi”). According to the legend this relic belonged to the mullah who

is remembered as an extraordinarily positive person; it is kept in his grandson’s family. Respectively, the house where the artifact is kept acquires the status of a “pir.” As a result, contrary to the memorial and regardless of the same direct indication of its Armenian origin, the former hallowed spot was incorporated into the system of memory sites that are, to a greater or lesser degree, meaningful to practically all current villagers¹.

Despite the symbolic significance of the cemeteries, the houses in which they have relocated have a much higher significance for the collective memory of Kyzyl-Shafag residents. It is precisely within the space of the villagers’ houses where the memory of “our” village, left behind in Armenia, is reproduced. Preservation of the cemetery as the territory where the ancestors’ remains have been buried is the debt that Kyzyl-Shafag residents managed to pay off.

¹ The chapel, which used to be, according to some stories, adjacent to the cemetery, was not incorporated either. That building was destroyed either due to natural decay or villagers’ efforts. It is interesting that a small mosque in Kyzyl-Shafag perished as well, and our informants believe it was deliberately destroyed by returning Armenian settlers.

Even though the presence of the Armenian cemetery on the territory of the village serves as a constant reminder about the relocation, in the everyday life the houses in which Kyzyl-Shafag residents live are a much more important reminder.

A house becomes an object of emotional experiences in the context of which “our” village is viewed as place of a better and more successful life. Thus the houses that Kyzyl-Shafag residents occupy now after the relocation are perceived to be of a much lower quality than those that they had to leave behind in Kyzyl-Shafag. For many, the houses they had in their previous place of residence appear to represent the height of all of their personal accomplishments in life. They built those houses, and they had to abandon the fruits of their own efforts. They will never build houses as good as those were. Exactly this memory context about abandoned “good” houses forms the specificities of their life in the village that has not become “ours” and where they have to spend the remaining years of their life. The houses, which they have occupied for almost 20 years, have largely remained “alien” to them and have not become a space for their own family memory.

Only one house has been rebuilt during the time that has passed since the relocation. The reason for its complete reconstruction was the landslide, an extraordinary event. Some returning settlers have tried to renovate the houses to match their conceptions of comfort (for instance, by adding outdoor summer kitchens and the like), but overall, practically of all the houses maintain their initial appearance. One can find this contradictory. The houses are viewed as old and uncomfortable, while Kyzyl-Shafag residents view themselves as experienced builders. Yet they do not make any attempts to radically renovate the houses (or to rebuild them from scratch), and in the majority of cases, they just do some minor renovations¹.

However, viewing this situation in its broader context can explain this contradiction. Geographically the village is located not far from the capital of Azerbaijan, where the majority of Kyzyl-Shafag residents live these days. Young people especially are very much geared towards migrating to the city. Once they graduate from high school, the vast majority of young people prefer the city to the village. The big city is quite popular, and in the context of living in a “foreign” village, rather than renovating their houses in the village, families often

¹ The same can also be observed in other villages populated by refugees from Armenia.

chose to invest any extra money they might have in supporting their children in the capital or in projects that facilitate relocation to the city (e.g., buying land within city limits with an objective of building a house in the future).

“No, nobody builds anything major here... Well, you know how it goes. Everybody is trying to move to Baku, one way or another. Everybody is saving to move to Baku, living here is somehow not right or something... Sure, everybody wants to live in Baku. Well, I...my sisters, my brother, they all live in Baku” (Nasib, 45 years old).

However despite the fact that the basic quota of the villagers is comprised of middle-aged people (above 40 years old) and children, there are no obvious signs of potential depopulation in the village as of yet. As we have mentioned before, only 20 or 30 houses out of 157 remain empty at all times. In this regard Kerkenj is no different from many other villages in the republic. But the very fact of living in Kerkenj due to the forced collective migration still affects the way the social space of the village is understood. According to our observations, living in exile or relocation to the city for permanent residence do not become a hindrance to rebuilding old houses in the villages of the exile or even building new houses to serve as summer cottages. This is typical for the majority of villages in the republic. Attaching themselves to their “small” motherland remains an important self-identification marker to current city dwellers and emigrants, at the very least to the first and second generations. Quite often the local motherland maintains an emotional attachment. The situation with Kerkenj residents is different – Kyzyl-Shafag remains their small motherland, and all their emotional experiences are connected to it. This situation affects their attitude towards their current houses in Kerkenj, which are considered a forced or temporary refuge rather than “ancestral homes.”

This characterizes the present-day attitude of Kyzyl-Shafag residents to the houses that they occupy today, after the relocation. Recollections about the relocation demonstrate that they have been highly unsatisfied with the quality of houses in Kerkenj since the first days of occupying them. However it could be assumed that we are also dealing with a certain view in retrospect, with the events of the relocation viewed through the prism of current times. Apparently at the time of the relocation the village was considered a more suitable territory for residence than it is considered now. “When we were relocating, everything here was awash with grapes. The whole mountain was covered in vine. It was

also springtime so there was no such heat yet and none of those insects either” (Nasib, 45 years old). The low quality of the houses (compared to the ones they had left behind), the specific nature of local farming, unknown to Kyzyl-Shafag residents, together with an unfamiliar climate – these elements were discovered only in the process of actually living in the village and apparently contributed to a certain disappointment.

In the first days following the exchange they had to learn everything since Kerkenj had a completely different economic system and type of farming¹. As already mentioned, those local Armenian inhabitants who stayed in the village after Kyzyl-Shafag residents had moved in helped ease their adjustment period to a certain extent. After all Armenians had left, Ramazan-kishi, the only remaining former inhabitant, became a very important source of the local knowledge about agricultural methods for the Azerbaijani who replanted them. “Yes, there is one Lezgian here. He helped us and besides, folks from Shamakhi helped as well, the foreman and the agriculturalist. Of course they taught us, people are not cattle, they can learn” (Mamed-kishi, 68 years old). However, once old economic ties between the former Soviet republics had been severed, tending an enormous vineyard proved to be an almost hopeless affair. The pesticides had previously been delivered from Armenia, so when those deliveries stopped, the major part of the vineyard died. “Yes, after Armenians left, a lot of vineyards died, because we could not find special pesticides [they list necessary chemicals – geydash, literally from Azeri ‘blue stone’]. They (Armenians) used to bring those chemicals from Yerevan. After Armenians left, the vineyards died. No other chemicals could help” (Ramazan-kishi, 79 years old). After the relocation Kyzyl-Shafag residents managed to plant only a small vineyard (compared to the previous one). However the very fact of its preservation is a testament to how fast their familiar methods of economic management changed. They adapted rather quickly to cultivating an absolutely new agricultural crop in a new environmental niche. At the same time, they also quickly change their conceptions about the value of crops. Vineyards still hold an important place in the Kerkenj farmstead.

¹ James Scott provides a detailed description of the situation when due to involuntary relocation, a farmer loses the capital of local knowledge, which is not only the product of his personal experience but is “preserved in the collective memory of that particular location.” Depicting the situation of forced migration in Ethiopia, he arrives at a conclusion that can be viewed as relevant to our case: “As soon as the farmer was relocated (and he was frequently relocated to an environment considerably different from the previous one), his local knowledge practically lost all its value.” Scott J. *Ibid.*, p. 391.



Photograph 46. Restored vineyard, until recently communally owned by Kerkenj residents. The village of Kerkenj, Azerbaijan, 2007.
Photo by S. Huseynova.

Besides, they also quickly returned to familiar cattle farming. By the time of the relocation some villagers had “transferred the cattle to Georgia and sold on the cheap. What could we do? That’s the farmstead we had; it was a village. I’m telling you, no one would have ever believed that such a homestead could be destroyed, and in what way. Very hard, very!” (Gyulshan-khanum, 52 years old). Others recall that,

“No, they have treated us well, done us no harm. They gave us money for the cattle, too. Our own (personal) cattle, they weighed it and took it away, didn’t give us any money. The people said, ‘Well, looks like we’ve just lost our money, no way they are giving it to us’. But they sent us the money through the mail after some time” (Veysal-kishi, 78 years old).

In any case the livestock population had to be acquired anew since nobody had managed to bring the cattle with them. Kyzyl-Shafag residents were much more successful in this domain than in horticulture. “Livestock farming has developed really well here, very strong! Very strong! People are working. Rich...there is no other village in Shamakhi district where people live as [well] as our villagers.

No other. Shamakhi residents, they say so themselves, they acknowledge that” (Bayram Allazov). In the long run, the method of farming that they had been used to turned out to be in demand in the new settlement as well. It must be said that the whole process of adjusting to the new living conditions occurred in an environment where the familiar social structure of the commune was preserved.

In the collective relocation, the fact that familiar social ties were maintained facilitated Kyzyl-Shafag residents’ largely successful adaptation to their new space.

“But we were looking for a village to exchange our village with so that it had a collective farm, and a school, so that those who were teachers would also keep their positions in the new place and keep their jobs. Well, it so happened that we ended up here” (Sulyeman-mu’allim, 75 years old). This history teacher’s mention of the effort to preserve social titles and statuses after the relocation suggests that the very idea of the exchange was primarily aimed at preserving the unity and integrity of Kyzyl-Shafag community in Kerkenj. Preservation of unity and integrity by all means assumed reproducing the same vertical social structure in the new place of residence, which to a great extent cements the village commune. Since they had to abandon their village anyway, they nevertheless had a chance to transfer their familiar world to the new place. This world they were accustomed to suggested the presence of a common, unitary space for Kyzyl-Shafag residents, which could only come in the form of another village.

We should keep in mind that their move was carried out still in Soviet times. The Kyzyl-Shafag farmstead was officially transferred to returning Armenian settlers, and respectively the Azerbaijani took over the Kerkenj farmstead. Naturally, compliance with formalities led to the loss of some personal property. Besides, those farming units were not equal in scale. Still, in accordance with Soviet laws a collective farm was restored in the new place. After that the former state farm director who had assumed the leadership in Kerkenj used his connections to

“Find the machinery...find the means. How did I find all that? Through the Ministry of Agriculture, through personal connections. Twice 60,000, 60,000 rubles, 120,000 Soviet rubles they gave me here to help. There was one woman, a good person, the director of...the winery. She gave me 40,000 rubles, as a grant; she helped. I fixed the machinery, bought the equipment, and organized a collective farm” (Bayram Allazov).

After the disintegration of the USSR, Kyzyl-Shafag residents decided to keep the collective farm. The former state farm director remained as the leader; his authority and power are practically indisputable in the village.

“So when agrarian reform started, the people brought up this issue and said, ‘Let’s... all work together’. Everybody wanted that we were the only ones who knew what kind of land we had, how many hectares per each family, who knew their land, knew it... And so we are still working... E-e-eh, the vineyard... Everyone has his own share there, his own hectare so to speak. We are growing grapes. Here’s how we have been working until last year: plough, sow, cut... all grain goes to the warehouse. We have given it out to members of the collective, free of charge... Until last year. (!) Last year I...well, I started to feel... that it was becoming more difficult for me. I get tired and my age is also getting in the way. I said, ‘Comrades, please take the land... sow, plough and cut yourself’. Well, long story short, last year was the last time I distributed (collective produce from the warehouse)” (Bayram Allazov).

Reproducing the social structure in the new place allowed villagers to avoid to a great extent the risks entailed by exploring new farming methods. In addition to the very need to restore the required technical equipment and personal or individual homesteads also demanded certain financial infusions from the outside. The state farm director, who, with consent of the villagers, had kept his full power in the new place as well, was that person whose connections could attract the resources necessary for the farmstead’s further development.

The space of the new village has been understood in this way and the farmstead, reconstructed in parts and also built anew, in a sense, was collective until recently. Naturally the way they used to live could not fully be restored. Not only the factors directly affecting the everyday routines of every Kyzyl-Shafag resident have changed, but the state in the space of which the collective relocation occurred also has long since ceased to exist. Still in the Soviet times, immediately after the relocation “everything worked – the store, the post office, the cottage hospital.” However without government support all those services quickly disappeared as well, and therefore in the new environment, a part of the social infrastructure cannot be resurrected in principle.

Certain behaviors have inevitably changed in the new place as well. Oftentimes something in these changes still evokes unwitting irony.

“I can also say that when we were exchanging, they [Armenians from Kerkenj] also came and looked at our houses. A whole busload of people... Men, women came to look at our houses. We had a guy from Shakhnazar [the neighbouring village, populated by Armenians] who worked in our village... Ovanes, we called him kur Ovanes; he delivered livestock feed to our village. That was already in the refugee time, we would send him for livestock feed and so on. Well, so a whole busload of people came to our village, and he was there as well. Those who lived here, they had plenty of money themselves! And they had galoshes on! You are not going to believe this but until then we had no idea what galoshes were [they never wore galoshes]. So that Ovanes, he came to them and asked them in Armenian, ‘How (well) do you live there? [in Azerbaijan]’. They told him, ‘Very well!’ And Ovanes replied, ‘So I see. I can tell by your galoshes how well you live there!’ (laughs) I also told one of them, ‘Would it have hurt you to put on normal shoes before coming here? You could have put on your galoshes when you had returned, nothing bad would have happened if you did not have them on for just a day’ (laughs) And now here we have...a custom – galoshes is all we wear in our own yards, we have already gotten used to it. So there you go” (Suleyman-mu’allim, 75 years old).

They have grown accustomed to wearing galoshes and just as gradually they have adapted to using the new farming methods, sometimes successfully, sometimes not, learning the techniques of cultivating new agricultural crops in the new environment. However, while the change in their conceptions about appropriate shoes has apparently occurred smoothly, many returning settlers still have not managed to get used to the new houses, the climate, or the extent to which the feeling the loss of “our” cemetery was definitive and final. It seems as though returning settlers’ collective memory of their “small motherland” where everything was different and better will be lost forever only with its bearers. Only new generations of Kyzyl-Shafag residents, to whom wearing galoshes in their yard is as natural as the hot climate and the history of the relocation is just a story devoid of personal emotional experience, will lose that feeling of living in the space of a village that is simultaneously “ours” and “foreign.”

CHAPTER 9

MOTHERLAND, MOTHERLAND!

S. Huseynova, S. Rumyantsev

9.1. "When I look back on it, I swear to Allah,
I feel as if I am about to burst into flames!"

Informants' vivid recollections about the celebration of Novruz Bayram - the spring festival, a national Azerbaijani holiday, in the village they left behind in Armenia, lead to musings about the "motherland."

"Well, we had a progressive state farm. All in all, our village was different from other Azerbaijani villages in our district and was considered the most cultured among them... The people were cultured too, and the director was a highly cultured person. They even got to hear about us at the state level! Armenians weren't expecting anything like that! We sent a letter to Yerevan and they gave their response – to celebrate the holiday! Novruz Bayram! And this, while Novruz Bayram wasn't a national holiday... So there you go!" (Zakhid-kishi, 58 years old).

To the village residents, it was a special village. It was the motherland they had built with their own hands and then lost forever. In this context, collectively celebrating Novruz Bayram for the first time in years (the holiday had been banned in Soviet times and thus afterwards was celebrated only among families) demonstrates the entire unique nature of this community. Kyzyl-Shafag residents did this, no one else.

"In 1987 I organized Novruz Bayram...to mark the twentieth anniversary... This was in '67 when they decided here (in Azerbaijan) that Novruz was a national holiday. That it wasn't a religious holiday... So to mark the twentieth anniversary I organized a big celebration of Novruz Bayram there... There was a square in the center of the village, where our administrative building was

located and everything. We set the table (in the square in Kyzyl-Shafag). Just like here (in Azerbaijan) we had plenty of sweets for Novruz Bayram (there was traditional holiday food on the tables). I organized and I hosted the event... I invited officials from the district Party committee headed by the first secretary, members of the executive committee headed by the district executive committee chairman, heads of different enterprises and collective farms. I invited everybody and we had an excellent Novruz Bayram” (Bayram Allazov).

To them that was essentially the last large-scale group event, when they were having fun in their motherland, celebrating the holiday loved by all the Azerbaijani. Later on they would not have any reasons for group activities since ahead of them lay the exodus from their native village.

Nowadays as a rule, the memory of their native village, which was left in the currently inaccessible Armenia, is coloured with sadness. This sadness, which stems from the loss of their small motherland, the loss that now seems permanent, fills both the village verbal folklore and creative works of local poets.

*The time has passed; it's been quite long
Since we parted ways.
You're in my memories, and grief
And sadness fill my days.
I'm slowly dying, drop-by-drop,
I'm melting bit by bit
Just like a bitter lollipop.
And dreams, they just won't quit.
I do believe this life of mine
Might've had a better end.
But my village has been left behind,
It's in a foreign land.
Not everybody gets to know
A misery like that.
Armenian stallions...watch them go
Trample your sacred land.
But there is nothing I can do -
Can't walk the roads that I once knew
And cannot come back home to you.*

*I do believe this life of mine
Might've had a better end.
But my village has been left behind,
It's in a foreign land¹.*

The state of affairs in their former homes seems to be in stark contrast with the current situation here, especially for people of a certain age. The dominant view is that it was good there, and it is much worse here. And to a lot of people these “better” or “worse” conditions are determined by their recollections of the social welfare in Soviet times. One event overlaps with another. Daily life in Kyzyl-Shafag is defined not only by the familiar landscape of the mother village but by the Soviet regime as well. In villagers’ memory, the events of the exchange and those of the USSR collapse overlap one another. Therefore living conditions, which have worsened for many after the USSR dissolution, are viewed in memory as vividly related to the village exchange.

“Everything was ok with our family there, with us, too. Now look what has befallen us, where we ended up. I don't know if you are going to believe me but I swear to Allah, there we lived as if... we were in heaven... It wasn't as hot, and the prices weren't as high. There we could sell a sheep for a thousand rubles, that is, for a hundred rubles in old money, and support seven or eight families with that money for a month. These days here a kilogram of meat costs, I believe, two and a half shirvans [five dollars].”

In the same context we once again hear the already familiar tune – the loss of their own houses, which were much better than their present one:

“What a fine house I left there, when I look back on it, I swear to Allah, I feel as if I am about to burst into flames! I am not going to lie to anybody; you can ask anyone you want about that (house)... I had sixty trees in my backyard, and such fine apples! Two apples – (weighed) one kilogram! A two-storied house and in the fall one couldn't take a single step in the basement because it was full of apples. That's how we lived!”

¹ An excerpt from the poem “My village has been left behind in a foreign land”, by Muhammad Meydanogly. Meydanogly M., My village has been left behind in a foreign land. Collection of poems. Baku: Invest MMS, 2004. pp. 10-11. Translated from Azeri into Russian by S. Huseynova.



Photograph 47. A village woman goes to the spring to get water. The village of Kerkenj, Azerbaijan. Photo by S. Huseynova.

However humility before fate in some cases accompanies memories about losses spurred on by the exile from their native land.

“It is not right for us to be praising what we used to have there, that is all a lie. God give them (the Aqsaqal) health for bringing us here; we have a living here, of sorts, we are making it work. What is that word the Russians have – exist, e-e-eh, exist (in Russian). To exist is to be neither living nor dying, it’s as if you are not walking straight but you are sometimes falling down and sometimes you are getting back up on your feet. So, what else can I tell you? I used to have my own car there... I was a schoolteacher there. For eighteen years... Overall we had a good life there, it was great there. Three hundred rubles! Three hundred rubles – that was my salary at the school! The atmosphere there was definitely very, very good” (Aly-kishi, 72 years old).

“The atmosphere there” means habitual, smoothly running way of life in the space of first of all, the Soviet Union and only then, Armenia.

This overlap of changes makes it hard for current inhabitants of Kerkenj to evaluate the life they used to have and the life they have now.



Photograph 48. Daily trips to the spring for water have become a household chore for many children. The village of Kerkenj, Azerbaijan, 2006. *Photo by S.Huseynova.*

“We can’t compare the way we lived then and the way we live now, as these are two different regimes. That regime was called people’s power – you work, you get, you live. Nowadays you want to work – but there is no work. Regarding the issue of land...there was nothing on that in Soviet laws and everybody obeyed the law. And it couldn’t even cross anyone’s mind, whether it was possible (!) in Soviet times to show disrespect to the law and raise the issue of territorial claims. Give us the land! What land? The land is yours, the state is yours, the government is yours, and the welfare is yours! How could anyone have predicted anything like that? I swear to Allah, I personally didn’t believe it at first; it just couldn’t be happening. They want the land...Armenians are demanding the land! A-ah, what is that, how could this be? What a state! That’s not the way we were brought up, that...that here’s your land, and that here’s mine. What kind of talk is that? The land was everybody’s and the state was everybody’s, too!” (Suleymanmu’allim, 75 years old).

However the land ceased to be everybody’s, and quite often the transformation of the all-Soviet space into national houses does not allow for measuring the entire depth of the changes. Everything changed when the USSR ceased to



Photograph 49. Aly-kishi and his wife. The village of Kerkenj, Azerbaijan, 2006. Photo by S.Huseynova.

exist; they even had to change their native village. And in this case it is not important that the exchange took place in Soviet times, and at the time nobody assumed the USSR would collapse in just a couple of years.

Everyday feelings about life in a foreign space present another, equally significant source of sadness for the loss of the native village. Even the climate is different.

“This village doesn’t mean anything to us! That village, our village of Dzhudzhakyand [the name of Kyzyl-Shafag before the establishment of the Soviet power], Kyzyl-Shafag. The climate was different there, the way of life was completely different there, there was a river there. There were...springs, pure spring water. Before the hay harvest, there were millions of various flowers, like a carpet of them. I would sit and think that it’s as if they had poured some kind of aroma around me...some kind of perfume. That’s the kind of nature we had! Well, sure, in Soviet times we all lived somewhat evenly. Rich people were those who were in positions of power. (laughs) The rest of us, we all lived the same” (Avdy-mu’allim, 69 years old).

Daily life lost its recognizable features. Many people lost their regular jobs, which could insure their steady income. These days villagers are not



Photograph 50. New generation of Kerkenj villagers also visit the old pir. The village of Kerkenj, Azerbaijan, 2006.
Photo by S.Huseynova.

surrounded by familiar smells and views. The very walls of their houses have become different, and it will take a lot of time to restore at least a fraction of their former welfare. The homestead they had was lost and there is a strong feeling that it will never be rebuilt. “It was good there... Everything we’ve earned there was lost. We built houses (there), we had cattle” (Zakhid-kishi, 58 years old).

“Still, it’s our motherland. Nobody could imagine that we would lose such a farmstead, such houses. I swear to Allah, we haven’t had enough time to fully enjoy all of that. That’s the way Armenians had set things up so that we would be forced to leave our houses. Who could believe that, we left years worth of earnings there, we built everything with our own hands, we set up our houses, our barns were filled with cattle. And what a yard we had, if you had only known! I say, yarabi, turns out it was possible to ruin all that in a matter of days. Everything was lost and we came here” (Gyulshan-khanum, 52 years old).

It is the everyday feelings and impressions that make up the bulk of emotional associations with the motherland they lost. Nothing in Kerkenj is the same as it used to be in Kyzyl-Shafag; the constant ever-present comparison is definitely

not in favour of the current place of residence. The changed landscape and climate have become a permanent reminder of the loss.

“There, it was better there. It’s like a health resort there, the Azerbaijani lived there (!), and Armenians, they...lived up there in the mountains, whereas we were in the valley. We had water, very beautiful nature. Here, what do we have? We have come here to die. Here it is as if we are living in hell. It’s extremely hot here, no air to breathe, no water, and we used to have a river there [in our village]... We had everything one could want. What do we have here now? And where were we to go, here, to the motherland...” (Mamed-kishi, 68 years old).

Living in the environment where they, used to the abundance of rivers and springs, had to face the basic shortage even of drinking water proved to be a severe test.

“When we just moved in, there was water here...the water flowed, but there weren’t so many people, they would go and queue for water. Now we also go to the lower outskirts of the village to get water; we carry it using mules. The rest of the wells have all dried up; and here if you spit, your spit dries up in the air. Is there anything good about this place? I swear to Allah, if you had only seen how we used to live there! We lived as if in heaven, there was a wide river flowing right in front of our house, and we had so many wells in the village!... They say there are frogs in drought-ridden places. That’s what we are, these frogs, we’re just puttering about here... And here, what do we have?” (Aly-kishi, 72 years old).

For Kyzyl-Shafag residents the torrid climate of the Shamakhi region simply cannot become the heaven on earth to substitute what they lost.

“What are you saying? Winters are severe there... Winters are severe there, and local winters are wet. Those severe winters are much better than these wet winters. Much better, much. Any time...in the field you could lay your clothes under your head and take a nap – no insects around to bother you. And here every...inch (is full of insects). When I was the state farm director I always had a yapynjy (Azeri for “burka”) in my car. I would say to my driver, ‘Go get some food from your house’, and we would come to the riverbank, stop the car, and sleep...

Would have something to eat and take a nap. The river was flowing, the water bubbling...What a spot. And here, what do we have?" (Bayram Allazov).

The negative perception of changes in all areas – from weather conditions to the taste of the water – is emphasized in the context of memories about the rich and prosperous farmstead that they had to abandon. Though this was a state farm, a villager, especially an assiduous manager, considers the state farm's property his own. And here is where recollections about the special place, wonderful climate and also achievements associated with their own labours, overlap. These are the stories about the familiar landscape filled not only with the fruits of nature but with the fruits of their labour as well.

"We had great hay lands there (in Kyzyl-Shafag), gorgeous views. Simply gorgeous! Now it's like, now it's like heaven there! Just imagine, in the Transcaucasia in the Soviet Union there were only two places where they were producing Swiss cheese. One was Bogdanovskiy district (Georgia)...one district there, and the other one was our district. We were producing Swiss cheese... That cheese was for export. One cheese, one head of cheese cost from sixty dollars per one kilogram. Specifically. Where are they usually making that kind of cheese? In environmentally pristine locations. Let's say...the cattle, which are fed livestock feed, hay or silage, their milk is unsuitable for making this kind of cheese. And if a cow drinks water from a small lake, the cheese (from its milk) won't turn out good either. That cow must graze on a mountainous pasture and drink water from a mountainous river. Just like (the one we had)...We had that" (Bayram Allazov).

It becomes more difficult to define their feelings towards Kyzyl-Shafag, where they will never return. "I honestly don't know... It was good there, not bad. Well, there I was used to everything, I liked it there... Here it is also good, not bad. We had no sorrow there, we had everything, everything we wanted" (Elmira, 37 years old). This "everything we wanted" is a direct association with a happy childhood. And now when her son asks her about the old times, the life in Armenia, she tells him about a merry and carefree life.

"Ay, mama how was life in Armenia? I say, 'It was very good there'. He says, 'Tell me, what was your life like there, tell me about your childhood, what did you do there, which games did you play?' I tell him, 'We played hide-and-peek, Khoruz-baba (a

children's game)', I tell him everything. (laughs) Like we used to swim in the river, us girls. We worked in the fields, planted beets, and the river was close, so we would go there to swim after the daily work had been done... We harvested tons of potatoes. We pickled cabbage in barrels. We had a good life there."

The inevitability of dealing with the reality and adjustment to the new environment are placed in the context of the political motherland, one way or another. Proper upbringing of "Homo Sovieticus" suggested firm orientation towards the Soviet motherland. Yes, all of it was Soviet territory but political unity did not deny the variety of national motherlands. The subsequent dissolution of the USSR occurred in the context of habitual, for an Azerbaijani, notions about national hearth and home, since by then Soviet Azerbaijan had existed for many years.

As a result, from a different perspective, the village exchange as a symbol of the loss of the motherland becomes a metaphor of coming back home, to their national home and hearth. So their political motherland is not as wonderful as the village of the exodus. But motherland is motherland.

"Sure, every man is better off there where he was born. But right now to me this land (Kerkenj) is three hundred times better... It's Azerbaijan. It would have been good if we had come here earlier, if we had come here earlier it would have been much better. We came here late – that's why it turned out so bad. (laughs). In '48 they told us we would be relocated. I personally wanted to relocate very much" (Veysal-kishi, 78 years old).

Since returning to their motherland was inevitable, it would have been better to do so earlier, not under the pressure of the escalating confrontation. One way or another, these thoughts about proper life in the space of their political motherland – where else were they to run to? – appease them with the loss of their habitual daily life.

Still they are always eager to get news from their mother village left in Armenia. "It is still our motherland, so whether you want it or not, when you travel to Georgia you start asking if they know our district, if they saw our village, what's new, what's happening there, what's the situation, you ask about these things" (Aly-kishi, 72 years old). Changes in their native village pain them. "The houses are being taken apart and sold as building materials" (Aly-kishi, 72 years old). It is as if this destruction of their mother village destroys the last illusions they had about returning one day.

9.2. “We have been here eighteen years but we still dream about our land, our water”: Motherland lost and found

Eighteen years have passed since the time of the village exchange and since Armenians from Kerkenj took residence in the village of Dzunashogh. Kerkenj residents positively evaluate the exchange, as at the time of crisis, it provided them with an opportunity to organize relocation without material losses and casualties. The very fact of the exchange allowed them to find a solution with dignity. In the words of one of our informants they didn't just leave the village, they stood up for it and defended it first, and then they organized the exchange. The exchange also meant that they in some ways transferred their village and their houses to new owners and did not just abandon them. The following fact should be regarded as evidence of the “transfer”: Kerkenj Armenians gave the new owners the map of the village, thus emphasizing the “legitimacy” of new owners with whom they had been negotiating for several months, getting to know them better, exchanging houses with them. The exchange guaranteed that the cemeteries would be preserved, which was considered especially important.



Photograph 51. A woman from Kerkenj. The village of Dzunashogh (Kyzyl-Shafag), Armenia, 2006. *Photo by A. Hakobyan.*

But in a broader context, the loss of their small motherland, Kerkenj, is contested. It is a loss indeed, since despite the exchange, they were forced to leave, to lose the world created by their ancestors. In the words of one informant, “there is nothing worse than eviction.” This world includes the village, the environment, as well as memory sites – the cemetery, the monument to Kerkenj soldiers who died in World War II: “We built the monument and then left it (to the Azerbaijanis)...”

The feeling of loss only intensifies with time. In the years that have passed since the exchange, none of the Kerkenj residents was able to, due to obvious reasons, visit their previous village, the cemetery, despite the fact that mutual



Photograph 52. Residents of the village of Dzunashogh (Kyzyl-Shafag), Armenia, 2006. Photo by A. Hakobyan.

visits were part of the agreement. In the long run, in the words of an informant, they had no idea that everything would come to these extremes. The general context of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations (the war, the unsettled conflict and so on) also aggravates the sense of loss.

The process of the exchange, forced migration, life in a new place – all of this have affected the way they perceive their motherland, along with new forms and manifestations of memory. The song of Kerkenj, which sort of summarizes these feelings, is noteworthy in this regard. It is interesting that the song originated with those Kerkenj residents who live in Russia, in the city of Georgiyevsk. It is usually performed at various feasts, for instance, at weddings.

The song of Kerkenj

I will bring water from Mandahun,

I will bring wine from Kerkenj

For you to know, people,

That I love you dearly.

(Chorus):

Hey, Kerkenj-djan, hey, Kerkenj,

I will give you my soul,

I will wait a thousand years



Photograph 53. Residents of the village of Dzunashogh (Kyzyl-Shafag), Armenia, 2006. Photo by A. Hakobyan.

Just to walk back to Kerkenj.

I remember our mountains,

Tall trees of Alpud,

The waters of Mandahun,

Great big vineyards.

(Chorus)

We have built our house lovingly,

We have planted flowers and trees,

We have set it up and decorated it,

And then we have left it all to the Turks.

(Chorus)

We live in Armenia

As a big family – gerdastan.

We are travelling to Russia and back...

And we are dreaming about you, Kerkenj¹.

(Chorus)

The song talks about grief, memory, and loss, and about the fact that Kerkenj residents currently live in Russia and Armenia, but they dream about Kerkenj, which they have been forced to leave. Interestingly enough, although currently Kerkenj residents live in Russia, in the song they perceive Armenia as their motherland, the country where they live, the country where their hearth and home – gerdastan – are, so in this regard Armenia is identified with family. Russia is not perceived as the motherland, as a place of permanent residence, despite the fact that as we have already noted, the majority live in Russia. Therefore the song constructs an ideal view of reality – Kerkenj residents must live in Armenia, in their native environment where their families are.

Yearning for Kerkenj, for their small motherland is the song's leitmotif; it describes the village, the location, and mentions grapes and wine as well. As we remember, horticulture was the primary occupation of Kerkenj residents, and together with the landscape, it becomes a symbol of their small motherland and local identity.

Memory of Kerkenj as their small motherland is associated with the love for

¹ The song was translated from Armenian into Russian by Gayane Shagoyan.



Photograph 54. Residents of the village of Dzunashogh (Kyzyl-Shafag), Armenia, 2006. Photo by A. Hakobyan.

people, that is the small motherland – Kerkenj – is not only an ideal place for Kerkenj residents, but it also constructs an attitude towards the people around, an attitude based on love.

The houses constitute another layer of the small motherland, as they are viewed as new, in perfect condition, surrounded by gardens, flowers and trees. But the small motherland – its imagined, ideal condition, the houses – is lost. The loss is connected with the “Turks.”

One other important aspect of the song lies in that it seeks to preserve the memory of Kerkenj, which is discussed directly, as well as the dream of Kerkenj, of its ideal condition, of coming back.

Perception of the new location and memory of Kerkenj have manifest interestingly at the individual level as well. Our informants have already dealt with the relocation, the life in the new place, etc. That process was facilitated by their perception of Armenia as their ethnic and political motherland. In the words of one of the informants, “now you know that you are on your native land.” The “native land” should also be understood as political space, and in this context it is not contrasted with Kerkenj, the small motherland. It does not require forgetting Kerkenj, but in fact it is contrasted with Azerbaijan, the country

where they used to live. Individually the memory of Kerkenj manifests itself even subconsciously. According to one of our informants, he dreams about Kerkenj all the time, while he has never dreamt about the new village, Dzunashogh. Other informants mentioned dreams as a form of remembering, too. This is not only the memory, this is also their wish to visit their second motherland, and since that wish cannot materialize in reality, it comes true in their dreams.

CONCLUSION

A. Hakobyan

Civil initiative – a gateway to dialogue and peace

To summarize all of the above, we can conclude that the conflict situation of 1988-1989 led to new forms of self-organization of the village of Kerkenj in Azerbaijan. Ethnic persecutions and perils determined the commune's life under extraordinary circumstances. That period started with the Sumgait Pogroms of February 1988. The community consolidated in crisis, developing mechanisms of self-organization. This led to the emergence of the new power spearheaded by the people's leaders.

Resistance to authorities that wanted to initiate forced migration of the village residents to Armenia became one of the most important manifestations of self-organization. Collective self-defense guaranteed them unity and survival, while the authorities either could not or did not want to withstand the persecutions and violence. As far as Kerkenj residents were concerned, the Soviet regime had "died." In that environment, in addition to organizing self-defense, Kerkenj residents proposed and carried out their own escape strategies, which led to the exchange with the village of Kyzyl-Shafag in Armenia. The exchange occurred as per the joint agreement made by the two communes. The agreement guaranteed preservation of cemeteries in both villages, observation of individual agreements concerning houses exchange, as well as mutual visits, visits to cemeteries, etc.

This is a brilliant example of the fact that even in a conflict situation, people can make arrangements and reach agreements among themselves and thus, in fact, overcome or mitigate the conflict on the community, individual level, as far as possible, of course: from peaceful communication to houses exchange and preservation of "foreign" monuments.

The history of the exchange demonstrates concrete mechanisms (individual, communal) of dealing with conflicts and specific forms of self-organization. In the long run, the whole process was organized by people who were able to negotiate and come to an agreement and single-handedly settle the issues, a process still beyond politicians' power.

From a modern perspective, could one consider this process evidence of the existence of a “civil society”? It is a complex and debatable question¹. But we can say for sure that these manifestations of self-organization represent those qualities, forms and mechanisms, which to a certain extent facilitate development of a civil society. Those were the qualities that created an opportunity for dialogue and opened up the gate for peaceful exchange at the time of conflict.

The transformations brought on by life in the new village have made themselves felt both in the local and global contexts. Globally there have been changes in political, social and economic systems, meaning the collapse of the Soviet regime; locally after the relocation, certain transformation in the cultural and social life of the village occurred. It is also obvious that global transformations can be traced on the local level, and in this sense they often intertwine.

S. Huseynova, S. Rumyantsev

The burden of war and the time of peace

Social experts in the South Caucasus have almost completely fixed their attention on interethnic conflict as a subject of research and, moreover, of various speculations. In this particular context there is often no call for research that explores interethnic relations in communities that are at peace. As a result the picture of interethnic relations in the South Caucasus that specialists construct represents communities that have essentially lost their intrinsic variety of peaceful contacts and intergroup relations. Ethnic groups are increasingly more often viewed as real homogenous societies that unite actors who share the same ethno-historical myths. In the context of these myths embodiments of different ethnic identities clash with each other, wage wars against each other, but they do not communicate and cooperate with each other. We believe the following point of view that holds that on the contrary, precisely “the state of peace and cooperation is a norm for intergroup and interpersonal relations based on ethnicity.”²

¹ For more on the subject, refer to, e.g.: Iskandaryan A., The outline of the non-government sector and civil society in the Caucasus. Tradition of conflict resolution in the Caucasus and methods of civil society institutions. Caucasian forum of non-government organizations. 2003, pp. 149-166.

² Tishkov V.A., Requiem for Ethnos. Research in Social and Cultural Anthropology. Moscow: Nauka, 2003, p. 127.

It was the situation of peaceful contacts and cooperation that we tried to demonstrate through the example of Kyzyl-Shafag community. In the situation of the rapid actualization of the key principle of nationalism, “the essence of which is in the overlap of political and national entities”¹ according to Ernest Gellner, as well as of the escalating interethnic conflict which resulted in their involuntary exodus from the “small motherland”, the Azerbaijanis of Kyzyl-Shafag were nevertheless able to carry out the village exchange project. That was their voluntary collective civil project, for which peaceful cooperation with the Armenian commune served as the principal condition that enabled its realization. While contacts between Kyzyl-Shafag and Kerkenj residents occurred out of necessity, they were still peaceful, which had been customary for Azerbaijanis throughout many years of being neighbours with Armenians.

It is common knowledge that in pre-Soviet times (1905-1908, 1918-1920) as well as in the times of the USSR, Armenian-Azerbaijani² relations were often of a conflictual nature. Indeed, bloody clashes between representatives of these two societies did occur. However, cases of quite peaceful neighbourly co-existence and cooperation were not rare either. For over a century relations between the Azerbaijani of Kyzyl-Shafag and Armenians of the nearby village of Shakhnazar were primarily of a latter kind despite the fact that various conflicts happening in history affected their everyday lives as well.

Good neighbourly relations between Kyzyl-Shafag and Shakhnazar residents stayed that way in the beginning of the latest Karabakh conflict as well. For many people such relations are still the norm. The realization of the village exchange project itself proves that interethnic cooperation was common. The exchange was a measure taken under necessity. But nobody forced Kyzyl-Shafag Azerbaijani and Kerkenj Armenians to cooperate with each other peacefully and provide as much support to each other as possible in the situation of co-residence during the exchange. Those peaceful contacts were the norm, and it is rather the practically total ethnic separation, first ever in the whole history of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations, that should be viewed as the “non-norm.”

Bayram Allazov, the leader of Kyzyl-Shafag commune, remembers very well

¹ Gellner E., Nations and nationalism. Moscow: Progress. 1991, p. 23.

² We by all means understand that ethnonym “the Azerbaijani” was introduced in Soviet times. For further reference: Gadji-zade H. New identity for new Azerbaijan. In: Azerbaijan in the World. No 1 (3), March 2006, pp. 15-32, 15-16. However for the sake of simplicity of our narration we use it when we mention the situation of the early 20th century as well to refer to the society, which was referred to as “the Muslim”, “the Tatar” or “the Turks” at the time.

when, as the conflict was escalating, during one of the meetings in his office with Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and representatives of the mother country in attendance, he fastened his eyes on the beautiful view outside his window. He looked at a field awash with many different wildflowers. That very variety was precisely the secret behind its beauty, too deep for words. He then said that they were just as those flowers, they lived in one world but they stayed different, unique. And that is what determined the richness of their culture. Now this richness is gone.

As far as the village residents and their families can remember, they have always lived side by side. Habitual everyday contacts allowed them to deal with the tragic situation they had found themselves in with dignity and honour. They are glad that they have succeeded with their main project – to preserve the unity and integrity of the commune. The exchange, albeit peaceful and the product of their own civil initiative, was still involuntary and its successful realization could not prevent a certain collective image of Armenians from turning into a stereotypical enemy image as well. But having experienced the burden of forced exodus in the situation, as Rogers Brubaker would have put it, of post-Soviet processes of ethnic separation, they have still preserved the memory of the age of peace. This memory has not yet been lost, and it trumps the memory of conflicts and wars. For them peaceful contacts and cooperation were the norm. The “historical enemy” image has not become their standard mode of thinking. Their personal and collective memory is still alive, preventing this perspective from taking root. This memory that accumulates the experience of communities at peace and not war should be the first to be solicited.

Somebody still wants

“[Conflicts] to be resolved peacefully. War...you know...There once was a great war...with Germany. You didn't know, but your father must have told you about it. But your father must have been a child himself at the time. Anyhow, from that war... A hundred lads from our village didn't come back from that war. A hundred lads! Among them were those who had just gotten married, who hadn't had kids yet. There were also those who had one or two kids. My uncle had nine sons, seven of who went to war and only two of them came back, and the rest had died. Those were such wonderful young men; no words could describe them. Our 'myakhlya' (a section of the village) was on the mountain. There were many houses on the mountain. They called us 'dyamirchilyar' (Azeri for 'blacksmiths').

Three or four people from every house didn't come back from that great war. So much suffering from that war. Why must there be a war in Karabakh now? One of my grandkids has already completed his military service but the other one is still in service. So every day, day and night, I do nothing but pray to Allah so that there is no war, so that nobody's children are dying. So many villages died in Karabakh, the big Khojali village and other villages, too! So...during the Great War, it so happened that all the young men from our village and from the district center as well, they died. We don't need another war. War...it is difficult...It will be more successful [to act] peacefully. Peacefully is good" (Mayga-khanum, 75 years old).

Only Allah knows whether these thoughts of an old woman, who has known both the burden of war and the age of peace, thoughts no doubt shared by many and maybe by the most of us, will save us from another slaughter. However it is not He, who is to decide that, but us. And it is in our power to prefer the age of peace to the burden of war.

■■■ HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG
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