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## Introduction

This qualitative research has been implemented thanks to a joint fellowship granted by Eurasia Partnership Foundation and Caucasus Research Resource Centers. It examines contemporary youth gender and intergenerational relations and their impact on the process of democratization in Azerbaijan.

The Republic of Azerbaijan following its independence in 1991 has taken the pledge of democracy and market economy. To this end, democratization, modernization and economic development are officially declared policy of the current Azerbaijani Administration. However, the devastating war in Upper Garabagh and surrounding regions with Armenia (1988-1994), the ongoing conflict situation since the 1994 ceasefire as well as intense geopolitical struggle over Baku oil have blurred and distracted attentions from democratic development from the start. Nevertheless, socio-cultural dimension is very important to consider in promoting, or hindering democracy along with political and geopolitical factors.

The *research hypothesis* involved in this study contends that inequality in youth gender and intergenerational relations is one of crucial hindrances in the building of democratization in Azerbaijan. Socialization of the youth into conformity with a system of male dominance and gender inequality within the family and in the society at large promotes the authoritarian social and political system in the country, and hinders attempts at evolving democratic values and building democratic institutions.

## 1. Background

### *Socio-cultural*

Azerbaijan is a post-Soviet-Muslim country. At present, it still bears Soviet legacies, on the one hand and on the other hand, faces the revival and reinvention of Muslim traditions. About 100 years of Russian colonialism followed by over 70 years of Soviet regime repressed and eliminated generations of progressive Azeri intellectuals and leaders, and produced dependant and indifferent citizens easily manipulable by the ruling class. Though the post-Soviet period is often referred to as a transitional period it has in fact degenerated into a state of stagnation and inefficient governance. This arises from the older and middle generations' experience of the state interference and control, which inhibited individual initiative. This research examines the contemporary Azeri youth and their relations with opposite sex in the newly democratizing society. But, it is impossible to examine youth gender relations and ignore intergenerational relationships since they are closely related and often bear a symbiotic character in the patriarchal-hierarchical social context.

In the ethnic Azeri culture, respect for the elders and obedience by the young are important features.<sup>1</sup> This in practice leads to the rule of the elders. It continues to be valid as long as kinship ties and family dependence (familialism) are very strong in the society.<sup>2</sup> The Azeri youth mostly live with their parents and sometimes the extended family, which is a Muslim-Soviet legacy and contributes to authoritarian-patriarchal characteristics of the society.<sup>3</sup> As discussed for the Spanish society with its similarity of traditional family relations, living with the family serves as a means of survival strategy in the absence of a welfare state and benefit.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, economic and emotional dependence on the family and elders disempowers the Azeri youth. Elders often make life decisions such as choice of profession, friends, marriage partner and travel on behalf of young people, especially the females. In the presence of controlling and protective parents younger people lack privacy, fail to develop independent agency, dedicate their life to meet elder's expectations and live in the world of their unfulfilled needs and wishes.<sup>5</sup>

Another feature of Azeri culture is the strictly separated gender roles at home and in the public that perpetuate inequality among sexes.<sup>6</sup> Hierarchical power relations exist between male and female on the one hand, and between elders and youth on the other hand. It is not a social phenomenon unique to Azerbaijan, but also observed in Central Asia, Middle East, Mediterranean countries and Latin America.<sup>7</sup> As argued by Colette Harris, it is the honour-and-shame system that bears the chief responsibility for the similarity of social norms affecting women's conduct, and gender roles and relations across a wide geographic region.<sup>8</sup> The notions of *namus* (female sexual honour), *qeyrət* (male honour or manliness) and *ayıb* (shame) control individual freedom and restrict personal goals not only for females but also males. They put the burden of the protection of female honour on male's shoulders. A minor deviance from publicly

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<sup>1</sup> Heyat, Farideh. 2005. Azeri Women in Transition: Women in Soviet and Post-Soviet Azerbaijan. Baku, Chashioglu. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. p.8

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.8,146

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 33-34, 105, 233-34

<sup>4</sup> Minguez, Almudena M. 2003. The Late Emancipation of Spanish Youth: Keys for Understanding. *Electronic Journal of Sociology*. Found in: <http://www.sociology.org/content/vol7.1/minguez.html>

<sup>5</sup> Heyat, Farideh. September, 2006. Globalization and Changing Gender Norms in Azerbaijan. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*. p.401-402

<sup>6</sup> Report on Implementation of the CEDAW in Azerbaijan. 2005. Found in: <http://scfwca.gov.az/docs/hesabat.doc> p.25-26 (in Azeri, translation by this researcher)

<sup>7</sup> Harris, Colette. 2004. Control and Subversion: Gender Relations in Tajikistan. London. Pluto Press. p. 88-89

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p.73

expected behavioral patterns threatens female's reputation and sometimes life and makes young male vulnerable to peer and elder's pressure. Male supremacy manifests itself in female obedience which leads to the lack of individual initiative and political and public activism among young females. As in the example of elections, male heads of family dictate whether and how female members should join election campaigns, and whom to favor and vote for.<sup>9</sup> The traditional gender norms hinder female participants as both electorate and election candidate. According to the 2008 Human Right Report on Azerbaijan, there were 14 women in the 125-seat parliament. "Several women held senior government positions, including deputy speaker of parliament, several deputy ministers, and deputy chair of the Central Election Commission. There were no legal restrictions on the participation of women in politics, although traditional social norms limited women's political roles, and they were underrepresented in elective offices."<sup>10</sup>

One's age and gender along with social status and locality determines one's place in the Azeri society.<sup>11</sup> Deterministic and authoritarian-patriarchal character of Azeri societal norms is explicitly reflected in samples of folklore known as *atalar sözü* (literally translated as fathers' words, equivalent of proverb). Fathers' words are often applied both by elders and youth as well as males and females for the reasons of justification and validation of one's actions and of comparison of other's degree of conformity to norms. Apparently, as a conventional-regulatory means for communal as well as interpersonal relations fathers' words came about in different times and regions, because they are often in contradiction with each other and sound out-dated. For instance, the one who ignores elder's advice will be left hollering (*böyüyün sözüne baxmayan böyürə-böyürə qalar*) or wisdom is not with age but in personality (*ağıl yaşda deyil, başdadır*), or lion is lion whether it is a male or female (*aslanın erkəyi-dişisi olmaz*), or cover in a carpet and creep with the countrymen (*palaza bürün, el ilə sürün*), or the one who learns in his 40 will play in his grave (*qırxında öyrənən gorunda çalar*). But, newly emerging liberal-democratic part of Azeri youth has started to question so-called mandate of fathers' words and juxtaposed them with sons' words (*oğullar sözü*)<sup>12</sup>. It predicates an aspect of the shift from traditionalism to liberalism among younger generation and reflects a widening intergenerational gap.

At present, small numbers of the Azeri youth are highly exposed to Western culture through study and travel abroad. Differences between Azeri and Western cultures are so radical that interaction produces the effect of culture shock and becomes a challenge for an already formed traditional-national identity. However, internalization of Western/European values by Azeri youth depends on the length of interaction and degree of exposure as well as their age group. By 2007 a few dozens of Azeri youth studied abroad at the expense of foreign, mainly Western and American fellowships/scholarships as a part of international development policy of those countries. That sector of Azeri youth either partly stayed abroad for better life choices or upon their return have been co-opted or assimilated in the society. In 2007 the Azeri Government launched the 2007-2015 State Program to support Azeri youth study abroad in response to increasing demand for Western-trained specialists. It will take some years for those students to return and make their contributions to the society, and it will also depend on the involvement of international community at a given time.

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<sup>9</sup> During my employment with OSCE/ODIHR Long Term Observations teams (2005, 2008) as an Assistant/Interpreter, I had chance to observe election preparations and this phenomenon in Shamakhi and five surrounding regions, but my views do not reflect that of this organization.

<sup>10</sup> 2008 Human Rights Report: Azerbaijan. Feb. 25, 2009. Found in:

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/eur/119068.htm>

<sup>11</sup> A similarity is observed in the post-Soviet-Muslim Tajikistan. (Harris, 2004)

<sup>12</sup> Official website of the OL youth movement. Found in: <http://ol-az.blogspot.com>

Azerbaijan has been arena for activities of many Western and pro-Western international organizations, non-government organizations (NGOs) and embassies since 1991. They influence and contribute to development directions and strategies in the country. United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), United Nations agencies including United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) have emphasized human rights including gender and women's issues in Azerbaijan. Even though international and foreign projects or programs did not translate into a significant enhancement of human rights, they have to some extent laid a ground for civil society and democratization, and acted as an arbiter between authorities and citizens as well as local NGOs.

### *Theoretical*

On democracy Robert A. Dahl wrote: "It was the Greeks-probably the Athenians-who coined the term democracy, or *demokratia*, from the Greek words *demos*, the people, and *kratos*, to rule."<sup>13</sup> As criteria for democratic process, Dahl defined at least five standards including effective participation, voting equality, enlightened understanding, control of the agenda, and inclusion of adults.

According to Samuel P. Huntington, three waves of democratization have occurred in the modern world and the third wave is on the way since 1974. Huntington suggests: "At the simplest level, democratization involves: (1) the end of an authoritarian regime; (2) the installation of a democratic regime; and (3) the consolidation of the democratic regime."<sup>14</sup>

Azerbaijan joined the third wave of democratization after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The status of democracy and level of democratization has been relatively studied by both foreign and local academia. Juviler (1998) concludes that Azerbaijan is a pseudo-democracy; maintaining the façade of democratic institutions and practices which are in fact powerless, while ignoring the law and citizen rights.<sup>15</sup> Cornell (2001) asserts that Azerbaijan is neither a democracy nor a clear-cut authoritarian state.<sup>16</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski (2001) classifies the fifteen post-Soviet states into three categories such as (1) moving toward sustainable democracy (Baltic States); (2) nominal democracy (Central Asian states, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Moldova, Belarus); and (3) regimes with ambiguous nature (the rest of the post-Soviet republics).<sup>17</sup> Marina Ottaway (2003) argues that Azerbaijan is a semiauthoritarianism of decay, meaning that it moves through a more institutionalized semiauthoritarianism (like Egypt's) toward a greater authoritarianism.<sup>18</sup> David Mastro and Kyle Christensen (2006) suggest that Azerbaijan cannot be classified as a full-fledged democracy, and Azerbaijan's political system is still in the early stages of

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<sup>13</sup> Dahl, Robert A. On Democracy. Found in: [http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Democracy/On\\_Democracy\\_Dahl.html](http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Democracy/On_Democracy_Dahl.html)

<sup>14</sup> Huntington, Samuel P. 1991. *The Third Wave. Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman. p. 15, 16, 35

<sup>15</sup> Mastro, David. Christensen, Kyle. 2006. *Power and Policy Making: The Case of Azerbaijan*. Found in: <http://www.cpsa-acsp.ca/papers-2006/Mastro.pdf> p.4

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Guliyev, Farid. 2005. *Post-Soviet Azerbaijan: Transition to Sultanistic Semi-Authoritarianism? An Attempt at Conceptualization*. *Demokratizatsiya* 13(3): p. 397

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p.413

democratization with elements of both authoritarianism and democracy present.<sup>19</sup> Farid Guliyev (2005) posits that post-Soviet Azerbaijan belongs to the semiauthoritarian type of political regime with strong sultanistic tendencies having two important peculiarities: dynasticism (institutionalized corruption and nepotism) and the dominance of informal politics (family, cronies, clans, ad patronage are more influential social constructions than formal legal institutions).<sup>20</sup>

A number of scholars have attached a special importance to the role of history and culture in the development of democracy. For instance, according to Rein Muellerson, democracy, democratic institutions and values are more intimately related to and dependent on the history and culture of society than economic and financial institutions.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, Azerbaijani academia makes more efforts in preserving inherent cultural norms in the wake of globalization. Academician Ramiz Mehdiyev argues: “How is the modernization of Azerbaijan to take place within the context of globalization and westernization? Can we reject westernization and become modernized while preserving our national “Me”? The answer is both simple and complicated. Indeed all countries of South-East Asia have gone through this historical path. Modernization concept of Japanese intellectuals was “Western technology and Japanese spirit.”<sup>22</sup> Such arguments may derive from a nationalist position indicating post-modern/post-colonial approach to the authority of the West. However, it may also be argued that the level of Japanese technological development and industrial self-sufficiency is well beyond comparison with that of a country such as Azerbaijan. At the same time, one could argue that Japanese political relations, also to a great extent its human relations, conform to Western democratic principles. Maintaining Japanese customs and traditions, its “spirit”, has not conflicted with adopting democratic principles of governance by the Japanese authorities.

Mehdiyev is a leading figure within the current government and his stance exemplifies the attitude of the older generation in terms of maintenance of Azeri traditions and national identity. It is often assumed by the conservative elements within the Azeri society that the development in Western technology can be acquired without adopting related features of Western culture that promoted this development, such as promotion of democratic institutions and merit-based recruitment and promotion into public office.

Moreover, cultural historians, who work on complex and dynamic societies, have generally assumed that cultures are quite changeable, and even relatively “simple” societies are also found by anthropologists to be remarkably mutable.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, Ronald Inglehart underscores: “Cultural theory implies that a culture *cannot* be changed overnight. One may change the rulers and the laws, but to change basic aspects of the underlying culture generally takes many years.... Furthermore, when basic cultural change does occur, it will take place more rapidly among younger groups (where it does not need to overcome the resistance of inconsistent early learning) than among older ones, resulting in intergenerational differences.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Mastro, David. Christensen, Kyle. 2006. Power and Policy Making: The Case of Azerbaijan. Found in: <http://www.cpsa-acsp.ca/papers-2006/Mastro.pdf> p.8

<sup>20</sup> Guliyev, Farid. 2005. Post-Soviet Azerbaijan: Transition to Sultanistic Semi-Authoritarianism? An Attempt at Conceptualization. *Demokratizatsiya* 13(3): p. 416, 423-24

<sup>21</sup> Mullerson, Rein. Democracy: history not destiny. 2008. Found in:

<http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/idea/democratisation-history-policy-destiny>

<sup>22</sup> Mehdiyev, Ramiz. 2007. Globalization and National Values. *Journal of Philosophy and Socio-political Studies*, 3: p.73 (in Azeri, translation by this researcher)

<sup>23</sup> Bonnell, Victoria E., Hunt, Lynn. Eds. 1999. Beyond the Cultural Turn. London. p.54

<sup>24</sup> Inglehart, Ronald. 1997. Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies. Princeton University Press. p.19

Today traditional-patriarchal Azeri society faces democratic and culturally alien Western ideas and values. Such a confrontation causes numerous challenges and reactions among the populace. According to Inglehart, a phenomenon called the authoritarian reflex has been observed in societies when rapid change leads to severe insecurity, giving rise to a powerful need for predictability in the form (1) fundamentalist or nativist reactions, and (2) adulation of strong secular leaders.<sup>25</sup> It is also true for Azerbaijan though there can be overlapping legacies of the old systems both Azeri ethnic (rule of the khans, beys, etc.) and the Soviet authoritarian political system.

The shift toward modernization is not a new phenomenon in Azerbaijan. The first wave of modernization was pushed by a great generation of Azeri enlighteners such as M. F. Akhundzade, H. Zerdabi, J. Mammadguluzade, N. Vezirli, M. A. Sabir, U. Hajibeyli and flourished during the oil boom of Baku in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and lasted till Soviet usurpation of the first secular government of Azerbaijan – Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in 1920. The second wave of Azeri modernization continued under the Soviet agenda and because of the Soviet propaganda it was presented as the very first wave. Farideh Heyat reveals the common fallacy, propagated by Soviet writers, that Azeri women (along with Muslim Central Asian women) were liberated from the veil for the first time by the Soviet government and given the opportunity of a modern education.<sup>26</sup> The third wave of Azeri modernization has started since the 1991 independence. However, Mehdiyev considers that ideology of modernization started in 1993 and main task of its current third wave was to carry out technological changes, as well as ensure the preservation of originality of national culture, provide with reliable social protection and certainly ensure individual freedom, and thus combine economic efficiency with social justice.<sup>27</sup>

According to Inglehart, modernization is, above all, a process that increases the economic and political capabilities of a society through industrialization and bureaucratization accordingly, and therefore the core process of modernization is industrialization; and the transition from preindustrial society to industrial society brings a shift from traditional, usually religious values, to rational-legal values in economic, political, and social life.<sup>28</sup> Azerbaijan went through this kind of modernization under the Soviet system even though industrialization and the consequent urbanization were inadequate, and far short of what took place in the West.

Furthermore, Inglehart argues: “While modernization was not necessarily linked with democratization, Postmodernization *does* seem to be inherently conducive to the emergence of democratic political institutions.”<sup>29</sup> The author defines postmodernism as the rejection of modernity, the revalorization of tradition and the rise of new values and lifestyles, with greater tolerance for ethnic, cultural, and sexual diversity and individual choice concerning the kind of life one wants to lead. However, the revalorization of tradition is sharply selective; for example, the norm that “women’s place is in the home” and the stern prohibition of extramarital sex is not among the aspects of premodern tradition.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Inglehart, Ronald. 1997. *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies*. Princeton University Press. p. 38

<sup>26</sup> Heyat, Farideh. 2005. *Azeri Women in Transition: Women in Soviet and Post-Soviet Azerbaijan*. Baku, Chashioglu. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. p.76

<sup>27</sup> Mehdiyev, Ramiz. 2007. Globalization and National Values. *Journal of Philosophy and Socio-political Studies*, 3: p.74 (in Azeri, translation by this researcher)

<sup>28</sup> Inglehart, Ronald. 1997. *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies*. Princeton University Press. p.5

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* p.14

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* p.23, 25

Given the inadequate background of industrialization and urbanization in Azerbaijan, the revival and reinvention of Islam may hinder the process of democratization in the country. Muslim countries such as Iran and Egypt did also go through modernization, but the rise of Islam and the revival of its traditions such as re-veiling, did not necessarily lead to the consolidation of democracy.<sup>31</sup>

## 2. Methodology

Qualitative research methods such as participatory observation and in-depth interviews were employed in this research to collect data. First, relevant local and Western literature was studied and referred to, comparing relevant countries such as Tajikistan, Tatarstan (Russian Federation), Turkey, Iran and Arab countries. Definitions by Robert A. Dahl for *democracy*, Samuel P. Huntington for *democratization*, Ronald Inglehart for *modernization* and *postmodernization* are used in the study.

Second, Baku and Lenkaran were selected as research sites: capital Baku as a relatively cosmopolitan city and the town of Lenkaran as a regional variety. Field work started with introduction and familiarization with the sites and took approximately half a month for each place. Then I participated in and observed respondents' social life in their domestic, public and work environments, and interviewed them for a month and a half.

In each research site, field work proceeded with participatory observation – observing target groups and participating in their life activities as well as attending local meetings, social gatherings, such as public holidays; social visits, such as dinners, parties; attending work places, such as factories, shops, and visits to bazaars. This period also served to identify potential respondents and gain their confidence. Interviewing included fifteen structured questions, with follow up semi-structured and open-ended questions.

A sample of target group was selected at each research site from among, first, university students including Baku State University, Economic University and Azerbaijan Technical University in Baku, and Lenkaran State University in Lenkaran; and, second, employed and unemployed young people. The youth age in this research ranged from 18 to 34. The main selection criterion was to identify relatively typical and atypical samples in order to cover the whole spectrum of the youth through local contacts and networks. Respondents were selected according to “snowball sampling strategy by identifying cases of interest from people who know what cases is information rich”.<sup>32</sup> In each site ten (10) young males and ten (10) young females, overall forty (40) young people were interviewed. Selection categories included employment or professional and unemployment or nonprofessional; the first half of the male and female respondents in each site had complete higher education and the second half had either secondary school education or still were students at university.

For Baku distinction can be made among native inhabitants (1 male and 2 females), the first generation (4 males and 4 females), second generation (1 male) and newcomers (4 males and 4 females). For Lenkaran distinction can be made among native inhabitants (6 males and 8 females) and newcomers (4 males and 2 females).

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<sup>31</sup> The recent events surrounding the presidential elections in Iran is the latest example of the difficulty of establishing democracy in this country.

<sup>32</sup> McDavid. 2005. Applying Qualitative Evaluation Methods. Found in: [http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/6195\\_Chapter\\_5\\_McDavid\\_I\\_Proof\\_3.pdf](http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/6195_Chapter_5_McDavid_I_Proof_3.pdf) p.183

Official statistics does not provide with the exact number of the youth living with parental family, extended family and alone. Among my respondents in Baku twelve (12) out of twenty (20) lived with parents, three (3) with extended family, two (2) with own nuclear family, two (2) with siblings and one (1) alone. In Lenkaran, thirteen (13) out of twenty (20) respondents lived with parents, three (3) with own nuclear family, two (2) with extended family and two (2) with roommates.

Table 01 at pages 34-35 provides with broader information on my interviewees' background. Throughout this research their real names are replaced with code names such as Ba-01 or Le-01 for Baku and Lenkaran respondents, accordingly.

Secondary data on youth migration, employment, education and related programs was obtained from the State Statistics Offices, youth movements, women's organizations and a number of relevant reports and websites. Moreover, one (1) elderly and three (3) young foreigners including three American females and one Canadian male living in the research sites for a considerable period of time were interviewed to find out and compare their observations and experiences.

Finally, the research reflects my life observations and local knowledge as an insider. I was born in 1976 in Kabirli village of Beylagan in a Soviet-Muslim family.<sup>33</sup> At the age of 17, I moved to Baku for study and employment reasons. Since graduating from university I have worked with a number of national and international organizations around the country, and extensively traveled and lived across Azerbaijan from Zagatala to Lenkaran, as well as abroad including Germany and Czech Republic.

### 3. Early Socialization and Gender Norms

#### *Attitudes towards Females*

The gendered patterns of behavior and social attitudes that are dominant in the Azeri culture are promoted in early childhood and reinforced by toys, textbooks and school programs.<sup>34</sup> According to the prevailing stereotypes, girls are supposed to be quiet, shy, docile and naïve; and boys – assertive, bold and aggressive. When the opposite of the expected features are observed in an individual, they face criticism and are discouraged by peers and the community. For instance, a quiet boy or an aggressive girl is disapproved of and mocked. Growing up in these conditions contributes to gender segregated plays, places of entertainment and association from the early childhood and further deepens in teenage and youth period. For example, Le-17, 27 year old female volunteer of a Women's Organization in Lenkaran town observes:

“This opinion is formed in us from our childhood like: “Do not play with boys! Girls should not play with boys!”, even though as a child I do not comprehend what is bad with this. Only an idea is penetrated in my brain that it is bad to play with boys.”

Strong distinction in gender values and expectations culminates in spoiling the boys (by not teaching them discipline, giving into their demands easily, etc.) and encourage meekness and obedience in the girls. “Since early childhood girls are taught that it is not a woman's job to deal with politics and make responsible decisions. Their major responsibilities include being a model

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<sup>33</sup> Beylagan is a south-west region situated on the border with Iran, 265 km from Baku.

<sup>34</sup> These have been discussed in the works of Western scholars (Heyat, 2006, 2005; Tohidi, 1998, 1996) studying women and gender in Azerbaijan. It is confirmed by my own observations, as an insider, and my life experience in the country.



wife, mother and housekeeper, and men (father/brother/husband) should solve all the remaining problems for them.”<sup>35</sup> The consequent gender behavior of this kind of upbringing reinforces authoritarian system in a way that it produces authoritarian male and obedient female citizens that could be perfect for the totalitarian Soviet system or authoritarian Muslim societies. Scholars (Heyat, 2006; Harris, 2004) observe that this is subverted by the influence mothers have over their sons or sometimes older sisters over their brother. Besides, one can argue that males are also subject to the authority of elders in the authoritarian society. In this regard, within such societies males’ subordination to authorities in public is compensated with exercising more power in the home, on the womenfolk and children.

The existing features of Azeri femininity require “women’s appropriate comportment in observing gender and generational deference (*kişiyə və böyüyə hörmət*), acting with modesty and shame (*həyalı*) and most of all observing *namus* (sexual honour)”.<sup>36</sup> Since marriage and procreation in early years of married life are regarded as the greatest accomplishments for females, parents make efforts for their daughters to meet “requirements” of marriageability (such as being a domesticated and submissive girl, and getting married before the age of 25, not necessarily having higher education) rather than preparing them as a full-fledged citizen. In the country, average marriage age consists 23.5 for females and 28.1 for males.<sup>37</sup> Expectations such as “a girl should be modest (look down)” (*qız uşağı başısağı olar*) or “a girl should not talk much” (*qız uşağı çox danışmaz*) discourage girls from active communication and hinder development of their ideas and ability to articulate. These restrictions disempower girls and young females, and hinder their mobility and social development (acquiring social skills and access to education and vocational training). In this regard, 24 year old US citizen Julie, who has taught English at one of the Lenkarani town schools for 2 years, observes:

“It is very difficult, especially when girls want to go to America; they have to write an essay about themselves and they simply cannot be modest in this; the modesty will not pass, will not be chosen, the program do not want modest people; they want active people, who will easily fit in American culture. Boys do not have so much trouble because they do whatever they want; they have opinion, they have experiences but to work with girls on their essays is very, very difficult. Like when have you been a leader? They cannot think of a time when they are a leader. Why do you want to go to America? Like what would you like to learn? They always say they want to learn English whereas one boy wrote how he would go to an American jail and see how the criminal system works; another boy wanted to be a journalist and study how newspapers were prepared. But girls are very limited; they only talk about teaching because that is only kind of job.”

In married life such a gender role ends up with passing of the control of female from her parents to her husband and the latter dominates in the wife’s making life decisions from her social mobility to her appearance, to academic or employment issues, etc. “However, females themselves rarely protest against the stereotypes, which are considered to be “true” gender roles and have been instilled in them from childhood like “women should deal with household and bring up children”, “final decision is made by the husband in the family”, “woman is not incomplete only if there is a man next to her”, “man is always stronger than woman and he is

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<sup>35</sup> Mustafayev, Dilsuz. 2001. The Report on Status of Gender Education. United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). Baku. p.3

<sup>36</sup> Heyat, Farideh. September, 2006. Globalization and Changing Gender Norms in Azerbaijan. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*. p.397

<sup>37</sup> Women and Men in Azerbaijan. 2008. State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Baku. p.192

more adapted to life, especially to social life". Therefore, even today, when the situation is being changed, the husband uses autocracy".<sup>38</sup>

In an effort to meet requirements of the expected Azeri femininity, the females give up their academic and work plans, and adjust themselves to the restrictions put by their elders and menfolk. For example, at the beginning of 2008, gender ratio of candidate of science students (aspirantura) in philology were 60.9% females and 39.1% males; for the same period, gender ratio of students enrolled for doctorate (doktorantura) in the same field were 36.4% females and 63.6% males.<sup>39</sup> Here is an example of how women may lose the sight of their ambitions for gaining higher education and career development in order to fit into a domestic role that is acceptable for them. 31 year old Le-03 works a psychology teacher at one of Lenkarani town schools and remembers how her dream of becoming a PhD student vanished:

"I had a dream of earning PhD by the age of 26. I calculated that if I finished my bachelor and master in 1999 and 2001 accordingly, I would complete PhD at age 26 or 27. But then I got married and lost my eagerness."

Furthermore, there is a clear distinction between female and male jobs in Azerbaijan due to the gender stereotypes. Teacher is one of the widespread female jobs, which does not "harm" female's reputation. For the beginning of 2007/2008 academic years, women mostly gave preference to the specialities related to humanities and social sciences, education and natural sciences, health as well as culture and art specialities.<sup>40</sup>

Generally, uneducated urban and provincial females demonstrate similar degree of obedience to menfolk, whereas educated provincial females exercise more power in their gender relations. Ba-14, female, 25, was born and lives in the center of Baku; she works as a ticket seller at one of the theaters. When I asked her about this interview, she said she would let me know after getting her husband's permission, as she put it, the head of the family, and agreed to interview her only in their home. When I asked her opinion about the referendum (March 18, 2009) she replied:

"I do not want to think anything. It is not my business. Let my husband answer this question."

On the contrary, Le-03's broader knowledge provides her with the leverage for manipulation of the situation in her favor, and she relates this to one's worldview:

"I do not ask my husband like 'shall I go somewhere or shall I do this?' I do not put this question, nor ask permission. I behave as if it is an accepted variant like I am invited to a certain place and I will attend, and here is my notice."

One can notice that unmarried females have to make more efforts to conform to the expected features of Azeri femininity. As marriage continues, females gain more flexibility, while the unmarried ones are more protected by family and lack space in the society. This contributes to restricting unmarried females' chances of social mobility, be it travel within Azerbaijan or abroad, or attending social events. It can be one of reasons why the percentage of never married female migrants is considerably less than that of married ones and males: in 2007, distribution of

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<sup>38</sup> Report on Implementation of the CEDAW in Azerbaijan. 2005. Found in: <http://scfwca.gov.az/docs/hesabat.doc>  
p.26 (in Azeri, translation by this researcher)

<sup>39</sup> Women and Men in Azerbaijan. 2008. State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Baku. p.231,233

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. p.225

migrants (departures) by marital status consisted 35.5% females and 64.5% males among never married, and 57.4% females and 42.2% males among married people.<sup>41</sup>

Here is an apt example of young single female lacking freedom of social mobility. 20 year old Le-06 works as a primary school teacher and lives with her parents and brother in Lenkaran town. As a number of my female respondents alluded, she normally asks permission from her mother when she goes out:

“There are places where I know if I insist mum will allow going; however there are places I even do not need to ask and tire myself. For example, last year there was a seminar at the Women’s Organization in Lenkaran. Other two seminars were planned to hold in Sheki and Baku. The organizers selected those who were active in the seminar to join the next events. I was among the four selected. I simply did not tell at home. The responsible person kept calling for 3 days and told whether he should talk to my mum. I knew that whether he talked or not mother would not allow anyway. When I was in the 11<sup>th</sup> form there was an exam for one year study in the US. In order to prevent me from applying, mum hid my birth card. She had done it so diligently that we could hardly find it later to get my identification card issued.”

The roles of mother and wife as “the custodians of custom and tradition, *adət və ənənə*” are highly respected and they enjoy considerable power in the society than unmarried or single females.<sup>42</sup> For example, Leyla, female, 27, from Lenkaran town lives and works with an international organization based in Baku; her mother is the head of the Women’s Organization in Lenkaran. Leyla notices how her mother’s status of being a married woman has empowered the latter:

“Here in Lenkaran many women are able to join events organized in the Women’s Organization. It is because its chairperson is my mum (Natavan). Everyone knows who she is. For example, they know she has normal family, children and husband. One of mum’s assistants says “My husband’s character is very strict, but he allows me to work here since Mrs. Natavan is the chairwoman”. Recently another woman launched a woman center in the town but it did not work, because she was a kind of *alverçi* (dealer).”

Heyat endorses this as one of the paradoxes of the Soviet gender ideology. “...Neither would many foreign visitors gain a clue to the influence and agency of women as wives and mothers, leading to a sense of empowerment. It was clear to me that women’s primary involvement with the home and the education of the children in addition to being breadwinners, equal in the eyes of the law, greatly enhanced their authority over their menfolk and especially the sons, whom they could control and call to account.”<sup>43</sup>

Meanwhile, recent studies (Heyat, 2008; Gureyeva, 2003) show that in the past few years young Azeri females have empowered themselves through re-veiling. This is no return to old traditions of veiling, but voluntarily adopting a form of dress that signals respectability through an image of modesty and chastity.<sup>44</sup> However, one can observe that the image of alternative modern femininity is diminishing in Baku and regions since the government encourages secularisation (recent closing of some mosques in Baku), and tendency for Western style casual dress is growing among young Azeri females in the wake of the proliferation of Western clothing shops such as Mango, Mexx, United Colors of Benetton in Baku.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid. p.197

<sup>42</sup> Heyat, Farideh. September, 2006. Globalization and Changing Gender Norms in Azerbaijan. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*. p.397

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p.398

<sup>44</sup> Heyat, Farideh. 2008. New Veiling in Azerbaijan: Gender and Globalized Islam. *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 15(4): p. 366

According to the accounts of my respondents, the contemporary young Azeri females are captured in the situation, where they have to either conform to the gender expectations of the society whether this coincide with their individual preferences or not, or prove enough wisdom to manipulate the situation in their favor. Gender inequality instilled in them from early childhood often discourages them to take full responsibility for their life decisions and act as an independent member in the society. Consequently, females face various discriminations/obstacles (e.g. lack of social mobility, ageism) to develop individual autonomy, though these are not always realized, but internalized by them.

A sense of social responsibility is not cultivated in Azeri females, since their primary responsibility is supposed to be the care of family and the home, and first of all bearers of *namus*, which as discussed earlier entails numerous restrictions on female's individual freedom. "A culture may assign disparate weights to the value of male and female life, as in much of the Muslim world. In such cultures, democracy is far less likely to take root".<sup>45</sup> For example; the number of females drops out at schools and universities (growing number of early marriages is the main reason for dropouts);<sup>46</sup> they enjoy little freedoms of mobility and association; they have less access to entertainment and relaxation, which directly contributes to spiritual relief and refreshes one's mind and body; their involvement is reduced in social events and public life (given that they cannot attend social events without accompaniment of their menfolk or elders, and evening curfew is a must); they become unaware of their social rights and ignorant of their responsibilities; their modest upbringing and given opportunities prevent them from taking initiative, joining active decision making and taking accountable measures; they are rare in higher positions. Nayereh Tohidi writes that many factors, including the strain of the "double burden" (meaning female's official employment and housework in the home), gender role socialization and lower self-esteem, lack of experience, traditional gender stereotypes and sexist discrimination in society at large, and finally the state's policy have all contributed to the small numbers of women in public office and low levels of women's participation in politics.<sup>47</sup>

Specifically, three of the fundamental democratic rights: freedom of expression, freedom of association and equal participation (Dahl, 1998) are violated throughout life of the majority of Azeri females at an individual level, and this retards democracy in a larger extent in the society. It is a catch-22 situation: in general, it is assumed that female accomplishment is the responsibility of males; at the same time, the society expects the female to be involved in a productive life and bear social responsibility.

### *Azeri Masculinity*

The concept of masculinity in the Azeri culture incorporates Turkic-Muslim and Soviet features and puts enormous emphasis on the notion of *qeyrat* (male honour or manliness). *Qeyrat* is associated with defending one's women and the homeland (*vətən*).<sup>48</sup> Because Azeri women play the roles of "the ultimate symbol and signifier of the nation" as in the culturally similar

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<sup>45</sup> Fish, Steven M. 2003. Repressing Women, Repressing Democracy. Los Angeles Times. Found in: <http://articles.latimes.com/2003/oct/12/opinion/op-fish12>

<sup>46</sup> Roundtable "Violence against Women and Its Influence on Girls Education". 2006. Found in: [www.stopvaw.org/Round\\_Table\\_Violence\\_against\\_Women\\_and\\_Its\\_Influence\\_on\\_Girls\\_Education2.html](http://www.stopvaw.org/Round_Table_Violence_against_Women_and_Its_Influence_on_Girls_Education2.html)

<sup>47</sup> Tohidi, Nayereh. 2004. Women, Building Civil Society, and Democratization in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan, in Kathleen Kuehnast and Carol Nechemias (eds.) Nation Building, Economic Survival and Civic Activism. Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Washington, D.C. p.157

<sup>48</sup> Heyat, Farideh. 2005. Azeri Women in Transition: Women in Soviet and Post-Soviet Azerbaijan. Baku, Chashioglu. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. p.41

Tatarstan, Azeri men are obliged to “protect” females of their nation, whereas sexual purity or chastity of females is subject to this kind of protection.<sup>49</sup>

However, in practice it is often narrowed to the protection of own womenfolk or at most community females while violating chastity of other females. Harris mentions the same basic approach both in the Arab countries and Tajikistan, “where men aim to have (sexual) contact with as many women as they can, while simultaneously endeavoring to keep their own women pure”.<sup>50</sup> Such an approach prohibits the male and female from interacting as two individuals and not just members of opposite sex. For example, when I asked if Le-18 kept contact with females at work, he seemed to interpret this as intimate contact and rejected it at first. He is a 30 year old unemployed male, born in Lenkaran, who previously worked as a security administrator at a transportation agency in Baku:

“There is no such thing and I have not interest either. Sometimes, it happens but there are special places for that. I contacted the girls at my work place sincerely; I am sincere and hope that was also accepted sincerely. I did not have any bad intention to them either. However, it happens, we are young (*cavaniq*).<sup>51</sup> Someone calls and so on. Personally I came back to Lenkaran 4 months ago and I have nothing to do here. I usually do nothing at the place, where I work and live. Outside, many things happen; often in Baku, there are special places for that.”

Judith Butler (1999) suggests that the development of agency is intimately linked to the development of sexual desire.<sup>52</sup> However, the development of sexuality of both Azeri females and males in general is under question given traditional Muslim restrictions on gender relations further complicated with Soviet legacy of taboos on open discussion of sex. The situation is aggravated with the fact that sex education is practically non-existent in the schools.<sup>53</sup> “There are no sex education programs. The school curriculum includes two-hour lectures during biology classes that depict male and female genitalia and the process of conception. This lecture... does not incorporate issues of gender equality and mutual respect. Traditional stereotypes that prevail in society prevent open discussion about sex in school auditoriums”.<sup>54</sup> These factors stay at the root of the Azeri youth gender relations, and reinforce the lack of communication, friendship and interpersonal trust between sexes, and contribute to the prevalence of arranged marriages and divorces.

With regard to the Azeri youth gender relations, an Azeri proverb reads: “One cannot place fire and gun powder together”, or “one cannot place fire and cotton together”. Here “fire” symbolizes male and “gun powder” or “cotton” – female. Both my male and female respondents recalled this to validate the existing situation. For example, Le-15, a 27 year old adult education teacher from Lenkaran town justifies his lack of female friends with this belief:

“During the university years I had more female friends but now only males. They say fire and gun powder cannot be together. It is not my opinion. Simply, the majority favors this.”

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<sup>49</sup> Craney, Katherine E. 2004. Constructing Statehood, Nation, and Gender Regimes in Post-Soviet Tatarstan. In Kuehnast, Kathleen & Nechemias, Carol (Eds) *Post-Soviet Women Encountering Transition*. The Johns Hopkins University Press. p.48

<sup>50</sup> Harris, Colette. 2004. Control and Subversion: Gender Relations in Tajikistan. London. Pluto Press. p.89

<sup>51</sup> *Cavan olmaq* means to be young and have youthful enjoyment of life such as going out with opposite sex and having adventurous life, which are considered to be male prerogatives.

<sup>52</sup> Butler, Judith. 1999. Revisiting Bodies and Pleasures, in Vikki Bell (ed.) *Theory, Culture and Society*. 16 (2), p.11-20

<sup>53</sup> Gender Assessment for USAID/ Caucasus/ Azerbaijan. January 15, 2004. DevTech Systems, Inc. USAID Contract#: GEW-I-01-02-00019-00. The Women in Development (WID) IQC. p.14

<sup>54</sup> Violence Against Women: Does the Government Care in Azerbaijan? 2007. Open Society Institute, Network Women's Program, VAW Monitoring Program. Budapest, Hungary. p.48

Ironically, traditional approach to the youth gender relations refrains the youth from close contact with the opposite sex between the average marriage age – 23 and 28, which can be considered a crucial period for career development. It also contributes to the lack of neutral relations and friendship between young males and females. Some of my male and female respondents were aware of this, but did not know how to change the situation. For instance, Le-14, 20, was born and lives in Lenkaran town together with his parents, grandparents and sister. He is a student and one of the responsible members of Lenkaran branch of a European youth organization. He observes like many of the respondents:

“The existing relations put some restrictions on girls so that they cannot create normal relations with boys as human beings. If you say “I am friend with a girl”, the elders say “how a boy’s friendship can be with a girl?” Some girls do not accept this either. Even if you accept her as a friend and approach her she interprets it otherwise. I would like to change this, because one gets bored of monotony. How much you can talk/chat with boys? It is also necessary to find out girl’s opinion. Maybe this will change my attitude to her completely.”

Le-13, female, 21, is Lenkarani Russian. She compares the situation to that of Russia:

“Here girls and boys are not friends. If a boy approaches you in Lenkaran, there is an intention behind it. He does not approach to make friendship with you, but either “wants” you (*istəmək*, here meaning to love) or “wants to go out with you” (*gəzmək*, here meaning to go out). Friendship is totally a different thing, when you can sit and talk with your male friend. In Russia, I have seen, male says to female directly: “I approach you for this and that”. But here they do it by deceiving. I want this freedom. There is no reason to deceive each other.”

Considering the degree of higher anonymity and availability of broader possibilities in Baku youth gender relations are relatively more free and developed than in Lenkaran. Still one’s perspective relies on the combination of factors such as degree of exposure to Western culture, level of education, awareness of one’s rights and responsibilities, and family background. For example, Ba-06, male, 25, was born and lives in Yasamal district of Baku with his mother and sister. He is an uneducated and self-employed construction master with low income. He has never been to any of the theatres/cinemas, nor has he joined any events held by various youth organizations in the city. He adheres to strict gender relations, for instance, wants womenfolk to agree their actions with him as the head of the family and disapproves of young females laughing in public places; despite his low income he would feel ashamed if his mother and sister worked and brought money home.

On the other hand, Ba-09, male, 27, born in Jabrail and lives in Baku. His father and grandfather had a great pressure on his choice of career and course of study. He continued his study in Berlin, Germany for 8 years and now teaches at Baku State University. He admits that his typical Azeri male attitudes towards Azeri females underwent changes after 5 years living abroad, and dreams of liberal youth gender relations in Azerbaijan:

“When I was abroad for the first time I had a feeling that if the Azeri girls studying abroad were my sisters; I did not see them as a sexual object. If they went out with some guys, I used to disapprove of this, and even once I had conflict with one of the girls in this regard. However, I started changing my attitude gradually. I wish young Azeris from opposite sexes could live together and parents could accept their cohabitation; I wish they had child out of marriage; What if a woman wants to kiss her man in public – let it be. When I talk about feminism, I want to talk about sex with my students, majority of whom are females; at least once I have to use or write this word; but I have to refrain from doing so because the female students would feel bad, or they would think something else, or boys would ridicule me (*ələ salmaq*). I wish I could talk with my

parents about this without any problem. Sometimes, their argument is namely about sexual issue and I would like to use the same arguments and answer them. However, I cannot do this; if I express my opinion openly it would be understood as a swear-word (*söyüş*).”

One of the expected features of Azeri masculinity is deference to *ağsaqqal* (literally “the white beards” – elderly men) and *ağbirçək* (“the white fringes/hairs” – elderly women), which are among “fundamental institutions of the ethnic Azeri culture”.<sup>55</sup> It can be shown in the forms of etiquettes such as making way for the elders and not smoking in their presence, or listening to their advice (*öyüd-nəsihət*) in all aspects of one’s life, not talking back (*söz qaytarmamaq*) and especially, not conversing like peers (*tay-tuş kimi danışmamaq*), but by preserving a certain distance, etc. An Azeri proverb states that you better sit at a place without God, but not without the elder (*Allahsız yerdə otur, böyüksüz yerdə oturma*). However, a closer examination of the intergenerational relations can reveal that youth employment in the professions and economic empowerment have relatively decreased the deference to the elders to the level of a mere symbolism. Among some of my male respondents such as professional and self-employed youth with independent means of income I observed criticism and rejection of different aspects of the rule of the elders. At the same time, the youth who were economically dependent on their elders and shared housing with them, they displayed more obedience towards their elders.

Moreover, there exist male stereotypes such as having authority over wife/daughter/sisters that reinforce male supremacy and authoritarianism in the society. Elements of this culture are embedded in children from early childhood, for instance, through labor division among siblings. Sons are not asked for help in doing domestic work by their mother and even to help themselves, whereas daughters are prepared to do housework accurately (clean, wash, cook, etc.) and serve their brothers and father (iron their dress, serve tea and food, etc.). Female obedience to male authority in the parental home is replicated to the wife’s subordination to her husband and his elders in married life, and female workers subordination to male boss and elderly employees at work, and female citizens’ submissiveness to authorities in public. Conformity to these gender norms associated with maintaining tradition, and the identity politics in the country. It is controlled and reinforced by the elders through psychological pressure tools such as reproach and mockery. For instance, 31 year old Ba-20 lives in his father’s house in Yasamal; he is a shoemaker, married and has a daughter; his 26 year old wife reminds:

“My husband’s parents exert influence over him. Once, two years ago, he helped me with housework; we cleaned the bedroom together, took out heavy blankets and mattresses, etc. In that evening he said in presence of his father: “I am tired”; father mocked: “You have done female job, that’s why you are tired (*arvad işi görmüsən, ona görə yorulmuşsan*).” I mean he just helped me take heavy things out. After that, my husband said: “No, I will not do it again.”

Females do all the domestic chores and males should avoid it. Mothers under the “double burden” (Tohidi, 1998) prefer accomplishing all housework alone rather than dividing related responsibilities among her husband and sons. Feminist Azeri scholar Alov Eyvazova gave an example of this<sup>56</sup>:

“I had neighbors with three adult sons in Baku. The wife used to work 8 hours outside like her husband. After work she continued doing housework, while her husband was stretching himself in front of TV and the sons shouting like “mum, have not you ironed my shirt yet?” or “mum, isn’t

<sup>55</sup> Heyat, Farideh. 2005. Azeri Women in Transition: Women in Soviet and Post-Soviet Azerbaijan. Baku, Chashioglu. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. p.105

<sup>56</sup> From the lecture by Dr. Alov Eyvazova from the Institute of Philosophy of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences delivered at the Woman’s Club of OL Youth Movement on June 21, 2009, Baku.

food ready yet?” One day I asked her: “Why don’t you instruct your sons to help you?” She protested: “Oh, no! I do not want them to grow up like *arvadağız*”.

*Arvadağız* or *ağabacı* are the characteristics of males who are considered to be effeminate and are condemned by “true Azeri masculinity”. In this regard, an Azeri proverb reads: “Keep away from an effeminate man and from a masculine woman” (*Arvad üzli kişidən, kişi üzli arvaddan əlhəzər*). The following section examines how the existing family relations contribute to the perpetuation of the traditional Azeri femininity and masculinity.

#### 4. Family Relations

##### *Parents and children*

The current generation of parents of the Azeri youth grew up under the Soviet system. Family relations are often patriarchal and hierarchal which can be observed in the type of upbringing of children. Obedience to elders by children are expected and taken for granted. Parents and children are not friends and open with each other. However, children are more relaxed with their mothers. Children, especially girls are expected to contact their father through the mediation of mothers in order to maintain distance from the father and thus preserve his authority as the head of the family who plays the role of arbiter in the family. Daughters cannot communicate with fathers directly, though there are exceptions among intelligentsia and elites. It is a situation that prepares them for segregated gender roles. For instance, Ba-18, female, 23, born and lives in Baku, she has master degree in physics and works as a laboratory assistant at a steel factory. Her parents are from Shemkir region and she is raised traditionally. She is obedient and her views are conservative.

“Once with group mates we returned very late from Guba.<sup>57</sup> First, father did not tell anything to me directly, but from his behavior I understood that he did not approve that our teachers did not go with us. Father told: “Why you go alone to such a place? You do not know those people (group mates) and you do not know the roads.” Usually father says to mum and she extends to me like “father does not want to see this and that from you”. Sometimes mother gets angry with father like “if you want to tell anything, tell her directly; like this you make me bad in her eyes”. But I think it has to be like this. There must be a “curtain” (*pərdə*) between father and daughter. Father can tell anything to son but if he tells the daughter “why you come home at this time?” and I argue with him on this, it would “remove the curtain”. If father told me every small detail then respect would be lost between us.”

Maintaining distance is an element of enforcing male authority and supremacy. Parents are more concerned about their daughter’s conformity with cultural gender norms, given that they are carriers of *namus* and it ends up with preventing them from achieving their goals, withdrawing them from schools, discouraging them from study and active citizenry whereas sons are treated more with *laissez-a-faire* attitude and enjoy greater freedom. Fulfillment of parents’ and in large the community’s expectations hinder youth from developing an individual agenda and fulfilling personal goals.

Azeri parents are very protective of their children and the psychological “umbilical chord” is not cut till adult ages. Eyvazova considers that because the rule of law is weak in the country, Azerbaijanis are more reliant on familial network.<sup>58</sup> “The strength of the matrilineal bond among

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<sup>57</sup> Guba is a north-west region situated in 168 km from Baku.

<sup>58</sup> From the lecture by Dr. Alov Eyvazova from the Institute of Philosophy of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences delivered at the Woman’s Club of OL Youth Movement on June 21, 2009, Baku.



Azeris (despite an overarching patriarchal system of gender and family relations) is still evident today in the emphasis given to relations with the *khala* (mother's sister) and *dai* (mother's brother)".<sup>59</sup> Probably therefore another informal Azeri expression for having a good contact is "to have uncle" (*dayısı olmaq*). It is considered parents' duty to make decisions on behalf of their children from education to marriage to travel to selection of friends and so on. Parental web of love and support traps and disempowers young people. For example, Ba-15, female, 29, born and lives in Baku with her parents, has a master degree in Math and works for the Ministry of Communication and Technology. She represents a typical educated young Azeri female who lacks freedom despite of a reasonable income. Like many of my female respondents Ba-15 says:

"I would live alone if I had opportunity; I would like to live alone. But within Azerbaijan I cannot go and live separate from my parents. I know this very well, because the society will not accept it well. But I would like to go away to any foreign country, at least for living alone. And lately I have been preoccupied with shopping. Indeed I do not need to buy anything new, but it is just to bring a change to my life, since I have nothing to do except from going to work and coming back home. I cannot join any events after work, because it is considered to be late and my mum cannot accompany me because of her illness."

Respect for elders and traditional-cultural norms further disempower youth. The notion of respect turns into a mechanism of control and suppression. It translates into emotional distance (*ciddi olmaq* – being serious /formal) and leads to a lack of communication between older and younger generations. Respect is a multi-faceted word used in social relations in Azeri culture. *Hörmət* meaning respect in Azeri Turkish is also a word borrowed from Arabic probably in the early Middle Ages as the abovementioned *namus*, *qeyrət* and *ayıb*. This factor, namely semantics of these words governing the present traditional-cultural Azeri norms demonstrates the strong Muslim influence on Azeri culture. To pay respect (*hörmət etmək*) relates to corruption and means giving presents or offering favours.<sup>60</sup> It is essential when interacting with one's elders, the *ağsaqqal* or *ağbirçək*; in the case of those in authority, this includes offering presents, paying one's due.<sup>61</sup>

Nevertheless, it is also a hard situation for parents. They have to produce a legacy of good name for their children's future. Parents' clean name is important for children, especially mother's name for daughters. In this regard, an Azeri proverb says: First look at the mother, then marry the daughter (*anasına bax, qızını al*). However, elder's advice is accepted by youth selectively not absolutely. A distinction can be made between the Azeri youth who studied or traveled abroad and those who never enjoyed this opportunity. The part of Azeri youth that have not studied or traveled abroad, remain more attached to the existing traditions, show a great deal of conformity, though they are not always happy with them; besides, they are aware the changing attitudes, but do not and/or cannot accept them personally. Younger generation opened up to Europe has started to show disobedience. For example, Ba-09 has a German girlfriend, who is not accepted by his parents since the whole idea of being boy/girl friend is not socially approved. Ba-09 reminds:

"My father often says "How it happens that you make decision by yourself? You are a member of this family!" I answer that I am independent and want to decide by myself. Father says "How it can be? We brought you up!" I mean I have a feeling that my parents see me as a property. Though I am adult now, they treat me as a child. When I go somewhere I do not want to tell them

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<sup>59</sup> Heyat, Farideh. 2005. Azeri Women in Transition: Women in Soviet and Post-Soviet Azerbaijan. Baku, Chashioglu. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. p.78

<sup>60</sup> Heyat, Farideh. 2005. Azeri Women in Transition: Women in Soviet and Post-Soviet Azerbaijan. Baku, Chashioglu. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. p.185

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

## How Youth Gender and Intergenerational Relations Affect Democratization in Azerbaijan

because I know that there will be a conflict, and then they find out and ask like why you did not tell us, you have to tell us!”

Ba-09 lives with his parents as with most other Azeri youth. Living with parents till the age of marriage even afterwards is common in Azerbaijan. Collectivism versus individualism prevents youth from being independent and making free decisions. Living with parents and siblings make it difficult to separate oneself from the rest of the family and youth lack privacy. Following his study abroad the respondent has changed his perceptions. He is discontent with the elders' domination and does not want to be treated as a child by his parents who try to impose control and discipline. The parents do not want to accept these changes observed in their son either. This signals an intergenerational conflict in the family and a crisis of familial authority with further implications in the society. The tradition of respect for elders reinforces the elders' position at work and thus diminishes youth competitiveness. Ba-09 remarks:

“Elderliness in many cases functions as a social status. At the academic level, being an elder is associated with a certain position; for example, at university usually majority of elder teachers are professors, scholars or teachers. Elderliness means experience and this experience itself gives a status according to which they feel themselves superior.”

The social/intergenerational change happens slowly among educated and professional younger generation, when they are aware of the difference between the old and new systems and want to keep up with the time. Furthermore, the fact of being abroad alone cannot guarantee for the change in young people's views and attitudes. The number of Azeri work emigrants in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) obviously exceeds that of studying in western countries. In struggle for survival the former tends to maintain their cultural norms, while the latter develops alternative approach in an academic environment conducive to critical thinking.

Nowadays, the presence of international community in the country, such as international NGOs offers alternative cultural patterns to the youth. For instance, Le-12, male, 27, born in a village of Astara (adjacent region to Lenkaran), now lives and works in Lenkaran town. He has worked in public sector since 2005, collaborated with branches of various international NGOs and now heads a local NGO on tourism. He says:

“Frankly, before entering the university and working with the public sector for 2 years I had very little experience in this field. At that time I really thought woman had to be closed, because I kept my sister like that. But now I regret very much. I hate myself. Really! I did not grant freedom to my sister. But no, this should not be like this. For example, today I keep my life partner (*həyat yoldaşı*, a synonym of wife) completely independent; I agree with whatever she wants: let it be either visiting her mother's house or going out. However, I would consider negatively if she went out alone, without asking my permission. Let her inform me and go together with me, again according to her wish. I do not protest against her clothes either, though she does not wear openly. Here they regard the females wearing trousers negatively and some females are not allowed to wear trousers at all, but my wife wears it. Trousers are really a very civil dress. It is more practical and decent.”

Le-12 exemplifies the youth accepting liberal and rational attitudes though very slowly. In an indirect contact with Western culture, he has discovered new features in himself, opened up and become more pragmatic in his gender views as well as relations with the elders.

“After entering the university and NGO sector I did not agree with my father absolutely. When I started working with NGO in 2003 my father's attitude was very positive, but later when I started heading the NGO my father started distracting me from this by all means. He did not want to see me as his son any more. I lived in Lenkaran for 2 years without any support by parents. He even

organized a job for me at the technical school in Astara when I was in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of my part-time study at the university. I even went there and worked for a while but I did not like it. I realized the difference between two jobs. In NGO sector I was boss, I could gain more reputation but at the technical school any teacher would bring a list to me to type. I also observed that if I finished my job in time I had to idle there before any other teacher would bring something to type. It was just waste of time. I thought by myself with such work I would never hold a place in the society. But in order to return to Lenkaran I used an excuse for my father that I had to go back to the university (in Lenkaran) for winter sessions. He agreed. I left and never turned back.”

The respondent has rejected father’s type of approach and is an independent self-made man. In this regard, NGOs play the role of agents of social change and permeate Western attitudes. They place alternative management patterns at the disposal of the youth who are more eager to acquire them given their access to computer technology, internet and language skills. Furthermore, the presence of influential international organizations helps the youth have more confidence in their power than their elders in relationship with authorities.

Le-12 emphasizes: “I myself would never dare to act independently. It is good that we have foreign organizations here! For example, when I had to be restored to the university they said it would be impossible without bribe, but I was restored without any bribe. Nobody could believe. Because they (local authorities) know me and they know that I have contacts.”

Le-12 is an apt example of social change from authoritarian-patriarchal to more democratic norms in the provincial places. He is partly free from his father’s generation of Soviet legacies such as conformity, obedience to and the strong fear of authority. This change is very marginal and fragile, and heavily dependent on the existence of foreign actors. In addition, the existing gender norms and intergenerational relations are maintained through hierarchal power relations between siblings.

### *Siblings*

In Azeri families fathers pass authority of control of womenfolk to sons in the hierarchy. The older fathers get and the more adult sons become the more power the latter will gather to command over their sisters. Parents prepare siblings for segregated gender roles from their childhood. Some of the mainly encouraged features in girls, which will form their understanding of femininity later, are shyness, quietness and non-communication with boys; in boys they are on the contrary boldness, aggressiveness and communicability. For instance, Julie reminds:

“We used to play at the schoolyard so that students could watch. It is a kind of football, the ball is lighter and it is easier to play than baseball. Sometimes you also saw girls watching. I tried to get girls to play. One of the girls who actually came out to the field was the sister of one of the boys who was playing and she would bring her friend. The brother and sister were in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> forms accordingly. I tried to get her to play and he did not like the idea. I kept saying like she should come. Finally, one day she agreed to come. When she came out he called his mum and told her that her sister was trying to play and that she should not play, only boys were playing. So, the mother told the sister not to play.”

In the provinces gender roles and relations continue to remain more traditional, puritanical and stricter. Under peer and elder’s pressure, young males are obsessed with protecting their sisters which ends up with restricting them from a broad range of activities. Peer pressure especially reinforces and perpetuates gender attitudes and patterns of behavior. In this regard, Ba-09 remarks:

“Such a tradition is transferred (from the older to the younger generations) like “you have to protect your mother and sister” and this gives the boy a justification (to act) that does not come from his nature (per se), but from the society. At school years, there were boys who were ready to stab anyone who swore a bad language against their sister. And it was not only accepted positively but that young boy was expected to behave like this! The point is that he is made to act like this; he has to!”

Furthermore, younger females also expect such a protection and interference in their personal business from their brothers as a sign of their interest and brotherly care. It is to show the others, mainly community members and especially males that they have elders or “owners” to take care of them. This is to discourage strange males to seek unauthorized communication with females which is highly disgraceful given puritanical character of gender relations. Hence, even not brothers’ age but their name/existence is often more important for sisters. For instance, Ba-01, female, 31, was born in Gazakh, lives in Baku and teaches at the University of Foreign Languages; her parents live in the region and she stays at her only youngest brother who is uneducated and works in one of the Baku bazaars. She says:

“When I look at our society I feel envy those girls who say like “my father does not allow me to go this and that places” or “I have older brother than me and he does not allow me this and that”. I observe how people around listen carefully to those girls when they talk like this and afterwards, their respect for those girls increases threefold. At that moment, I think to myself: “Oh, I am so without control” (*necə də başlı-başınayam*) and then “why my father has given so much willpower to me?!” or “probably if my brother were elder than me it would be the same with me” or “if my brother were elder than me and acted like this then we would argue all day”.

Ba-01 represents a conflicting type of young Azeri females who have gained relatively more power than their fathers and brothers thanks to their education and successful career in the city but are eager to show obedience to menfolk and thus conformity to the existing traditions. Females living without male authority (father/older brother/husband), who happen to be mainly unmarried, divorced and widow persons, lack respect in the community since they lack the authority to claim respect themselves. While Ba-01 struggles between her partly emancipated identity and “true Azeri femininity”, 20 year old Le-02 sincerely believes that her brothers are right in making decisions on her behalf. She lives in Lenkaran town and works as an assistant in a photo shop. When I asked her opinion about the referendum (March 18, 2009), she said she did not have so much information about it and if she had information she would think of it. Le-02’s elder brothers (22 and 24 year old, uneducated), as in the cases of some of my urban and provincial respondents, did not find it necessary for her to have tertiary education:

“My brothers considered it badly to study in Baku or in any other region. I think this is normal. Let them put restrictions because they know something and do so for the sake of my future. They are my brothers and would not wish anything bad to me.”

This is a typical/classic Azeri sibling relation where we observe delegation of power from sister to brother. Young females like Le-02 and males like her brothers without higher education compose of the majority among the Azeri youth. For the beginning of 2006/2007 academic year, 129.000 or 5.1% young people aged 18-34 years got tertiary education, out of the current Azeri youth, who is estimated to be 2.525.000 or 29.6% of the population on January 1, 2007 (1.257.000 of them were males and 1.268.000 females accordingly).<sup>62</sup> Besides, the education system is of low efficiency, though official literacy rate is very high (99.5% in 2007) in the

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<sup>62</sup> Youth of Azerbaijan. 2007. Statistical Publication. State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan Republic; Ministry of Youth and Sports of Azerbaijan Republic. Baku. p.18, 123

country.<sup>63</sup> Corruption, the ineffectiveness of existing methods of managing and administering the educational system, the low quality of text books, the low salaries paid to teachers and the lack of fund for the training and re-training of teachers are among the main factors generating low efficiency of the education system.<sup>64</sup>

The undemocratic nature of the existing sibling relations bring about the lack of civic activism among the broader layer of the youth. They are neither socially active, nor able to contribute to the building of civil society since they are unaware of ongoing socio-public events or when there is awareness they display ignorance deriving from unquestioning submissiveness to menfolk and elders.

### 5. Compatibility of Azeri Cultural Norms with Civic-democratic Norms

#### *Mentalitet*

The establishment of open and democratic society is the development priority of Azerbaijani Government.<sup>65</sup> According to Dahl, democracy produces desirable consequences including essential rights, general freedom, moral autonomy, human development, protecting essential personal interests, etc.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, according to Huntington, democratization stems from a number of independent variables such as the absence of feudalism in the society; social pluralism and strong intermediate groups; low levels of civil violence; traditions of tolerance and compromise; traditions of respect for law and individual rights that contribute to democracy and democratization.<sup>67</sup> As examined in the other sections of this research paper, some features of Azeri youth gender norms and intergenerational relations contradict civic-democratic norms. The youth do not enjoy personal freedom and moral autonomy to exercise their rights, which are often even not realized and wanted as in the case of young females. Instead, they are trapped in the traditional/cultural systems of respect for elders, and obedience to strict gender norms, though “a democratic culture is almost certain to emphasize the value of personal freedom and thus to provide support for additional rights and liberties.”<sup>68</sup>

A common discourse concerning tradition and identity among Azeris is the question of “*our mentalite*”. This has become popularized among the elders and youth. On the one hand, it is referred to as the source of national pride; on the other hand, it is blamed as the source of backwardness and ignorance in the society. Mentality means “the particular attitude or way of thinking of a person or group”.<sup>69</sup> Losing its original meaning, it has become an expression to define Azeri identity and morality, and measure any Azeri’s conformity with a set of conventional rules regulating social relations including gender and intergenerational. For example, Le-18 (male, 30, Lenkaran town) rejects the idea of cohabitation (living together before marriage) and states:

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<sup>63</sup> Women and Men in Azerbaijan. 2008. State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Baku. p.217

<sup>64</sup> UNDP: Azerbaijan Human Development Report 2007. Gender Attitudes in Azerbaijan: Trends and Challenges. p.34

<sup>65</sup> Mehdiyev, Ramiz. 2008. Modernization is again on Agenda. *Journal of Philosophy and Socio-political Studies*, 3: p. 44 (in Azeri, translation by this researcher)

<sup>66</sup> Dahl, Robert A. 1998. On Democracy. Yale University Press, New Haven & London. p.55

<sup>67</sup> Huntington, Samuel P. 1991. The Third Wave. Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman. p. 37-38

<sup>68</sup> Dahl, Robert A. 1998. On Democracy. Yale University Press, New Haven & London. p.62

<sup>69</sup> Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary. Ed. 2002. Oxford University Press.

“Their (Europeans) and our *mentalitets* are totally different. We have history of so many thousand years and our *mentalitet* has not changed. As far as I know, it is passed by heredity.”

Similarly, Le-16, a 25 year old salesman in a small shoe shop, was born and lives in Lenkaran town. In the past he also lived and worked in Moscow and Baku for a few years. He tells about his attitude of the girls who go to bars:

“Very bad. I have seen it on TV; there are bars where girls sit and drink, and things like this. I disapprove of it; it is not compatible with our *mentalitet*. I would not become a friend with those kinds of girls. As to the boys going to bar, if you look at them, they are human beings, they go there and relax.”

The term “*our mentalitet*” as used by my respondents usually refers to a measure of conformity to the Azeri norms and traditions. Despite their chances of travel, Le-18 and Le-16 have remained very much attached to the rigid, conservative gender norms, with which they were brought up. It can be partly explained by the fact that they are of lower income and social status groups, and have less access to academic discourse and/or Western media. These respondents are very resistant to the idea of change of the existing cultural norms, and critical about Western values. Some part of professional Azeri youth also displays strong dedication to the conservative cultural norms and *mentalitet*. For instance, concerning the youth studying abroad, like the majority of the respondents, Le-15 (male, 27) assumes:

“It is not bad to study abroad, but not always good news reaches our ears about the boys and girls studying abroad. To say openly, if we go abroad, leave our positive features there and bring back their negatives, then we do not need this; it is better not to go abroad then. What should we acquire from Europe? These are honesty, correctness and freedom of expression, and accuracy in their works. As to morality, our morality and *mentalitet* are very high. There is no necessity to acquire and bring their morality here.”

The respondents’ worries about *mentalitet* regardless of their professionalism and locality reminds Inglehart’s authoritarian reflex. Here it is observed in the form of “fundamentalist or nativist reactions” – “the reaction to change takes the form of a rejection of the new, and a compulsive insistence on the infallibility of old, familiar cultural patterns”.<sup>70</sup> Obstacles to eradicating the gender stereotypes are assumed to relate to the ethno-psychology and mentality of the Azeri society.<sup>71</sup>

In the meantime, the ruling party YAP maintains the status-quo of *our mentalitet* in practice through its members’ attitudes. For instance, Le-11, male, 34, was born in Yardimli, lives and works in Lenkaran town. He holds PhD in agriculture and is a YAP member. Thanks to his employment with a foreign NGO based in Lenkaran, he traveled a great deal to Western and Eastern Europe. He is critical about Europeanization, and supports the existing gender attitudes and rule of elders, even though it is not explicit whether he really means all this or is just confirming the “official” voice:

“No, no, I would not call them (confines imposed on womenfolk by males) restrictions. Unfortunately, some things are misrepresented in our country. If anyone sees something in Europe s/he wants us to be like that. A European cannot be like us even if s/he wants today. Every nation has own peculiarities as well as high features. Of course every tradition should be evolving

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<sup>70</sup> Inglehart, Ronald. 1997. *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies*. Princeton University Press. p.38

<sup>71</sup> Report on Implementation of the CEDAW in Azerbaijan. 2005. Found in: <http://scfwca.gov.az/docs/hesabat.doc> p.29 (in Azeri, translation by this researcher)

too. Our Azerbaijan, in general Turkic world has traditions such as the elder has elder's place and the younger has younger's place (*böyüyün böyük yeri var, kiçiyin kiçik*); we have always learned from the elders, they have always given advice to the youth".

Traditional/ethnic Azeri cultural norms are strongly adhered to and referred to as *mentalitet*, which is also a Soviet legacy, among young and elder people. In general, there is a perception that they are coming from our "blood", and therefore are accepted as something intrinsic and inviolable. For instance, Le-11 rejects the probability of his wife's travel abroad without asking his permission and argues:

"No, you know, we are Azerbaijanis. One cannot change our blood. These are pillars of the strong Azerbaijani family. Nobody can destroy them. It is not acceptable".

His membership of the ruling party can explain Le-11's strong adherence to the idea of Azerbaijanism, which is connected with the late President and YAP founder Heydar Aliyev, and, as a part of the ruling party ideology, comprises adulation of the national Azeri traditions and moral values.<sup>72</sup> H. Aliyev was for the secular state, but against secularization of culture.<sup>73</sup> Generally, it is a tendency observed in the socio-political life of the Republic not only among the pro-governmental youth but also elders. An opinion by Zelimkhan Yagub, a popular poet and MP from the ruling party is indicative of this tendency: "I think that why one should avoid one's way but follow others? Shows, soap operas, disgusting speeches, revealing garments, which one shall I remind, my child?! Hey you, stop, look back and see what you do have in your treasury. Hey people, where are you going? We are Azerbaijanis. They say let us become Europeanized. No. Let us become Azerbaijanianized. Let us not bring disgusting processes going on in Europe and dishonourable "novelties" stretching till the bed to Azerbaijan, and not make this nation unhappy".<sup>74</sup>

In opposition to the above position, Hikmet Hajizade from the Musavat Party and one of the translators of Robert Dahl's "On Democracy" into Azeri argues: "National Azeri values were formed in the Middle Ages, and as one can see have undergone so little changes since then. The backbone of Azeri moral rules, often referred to as Turkic-Muslim, was formed under the influence of medieval Turkic military-feudal code of honour. ... Therefore, we can conclude that our contemporary values are not "national", but "patriarchal" and "archaic". It is obvious that they are not compatible with the requirements of modernity".<sup>75</sup>

The split around the national Azeri traditions and cultural norms can be simultaneously observed among the pro-governmental and opposition youth organizations. Orxan Arabov, Head of Humanitarian Department of National Assembly of Youth Organizations of the Republic of Azerbaijan (NAYORA) notes: "Our duties also include advocating patriotism, our national moral and cultural values. We have very rich culture and historical roots. But, if there are certain foreign elements that can provide with positive development and can help our people, then we can benefit from them. However, I am certainly far from the idea of copying directly and deleting our culture completely. We can add something to our culture both from the Western and Eastern cultures, but by preserving our identity".<sup>76</sup>

<sup>72</sup> "Heydar Alirza oğlu Aliyev: National Leader of Azeri Nation" Found in:

<http://www.yap.org.az/view.php?lang=az&menu=2>

<sup>73</sup> Heradstveit, Daniel. 2001. Democracy and Oil: The Case of Azerbaijan. Wiesbaden, Reichert Verlag. p.40

<sup>74</sup> "Zelimkhan Yagub: Long live craziness of Habil Aliyev, Gadir Rustamov, Ramish, Alim Gasimov!" Found in:

<http://mia.az/news/900.html> (in Azeri, translation by this researcher)

<sup>75</sup> Hikmet Hajizade. 2008. National Values and European Values. Found in:

<http://www.almazetzi.com/index.php?mod=view&id=3691> (in Azeri, translation by this researcher)

<sup>76</sup> From personal interview with Mr. Arabov in December, 2008

Meanwhile, Araz Gasimov, acting chairman of Dalgha Youth Movement (DYM) labels *mentalitet* as one of the three fundamental problems (together with illiteracy and religion) of the Azeri society. He argues that some mental values hinder from establishing open society and permeating new secular values, but are more supportive of the domination of feudal environment.<sup>77</sup> The DYM was established on February 12, 2005 by 7 students of the Economic University.<sup>78</sup> Since then they have launched a number of campaigns against corruption in education system, gender inequality, repressions to free press, violations of human rights, etc. Its emblem – two open angled triangles means free individual and free society.

The next sub-section demonstrates that there is regional variation in Azeri gender and inter-generational relations. However, it is not as simple as being Baku and outside of Baku, but there is also a similar division within Baku.

### *Metropolitan-Periphery Differences in Gender and Intergenerational Relations*

This research was carried out in Baku and Lenkaran to display regional varieties. They both stretch out on the coast of the Caspian Sea. With its abundant hydro-carbon reserves Baku has been attracting investments and a wide range of local and foreign professional employees since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Baku population consisted of Azerbaijanis (36%), Russians and Ukrainians (35%), Armenians (17%), Transcaucasian and Northern Caucasian people, Southern Azeris, Jews and Europeans at the turn of the century.<sup>79</sup> Besides, many non-Azerbaijanis continued inhabiting Baku during the Soviet time, whereas immigration of Azeris from peripheries to Baku was limited under strict registration policy. Niyazi Mehdi considers that on the basis of Russian education, Azerbaijanis, Jews, Russians, Armenians, etc. of Baku created so-called “the nation of Bakuvians” (“нация бакинцев” in Russian), a sub-culture which was essentially different from Russian culture.<sup>80</sup> This cosmopolitan sub-culture was also different from ethnic Azeris by their manners and lifestyle and they held high positions in the Azeri society.

However, even Russian speaking Azeris were not able to challenge the rigid gender norms since tangible *chadra* (veil) was replaced with virtual *chadra* in the society; and some Soviet-Azeri parents let their sons learn Russian, while depriving their daughters from this opportunity due to the principle of “honour”.<sup>81</sup> Under this principle, which remains valid nowadays, requirements for chastity, especially virginity were similarly applied to the elite and rural females. For example, according to one survey, nearly 99% of women were virgins at marriage and 98% of them have had only one sexual partner.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Natig Mukhtarli. 2008. What are the Three Fundamental Problems of the Azeri Society? Found in: <http://www.almazetzi.com/index.php?mod=view&id=2917> (in Azeri, translation by this researcher)

<sup>78</sup> Official website of Dalga Youth Movement. Found in: <http://dalga.azeriblog.com/>

<sup>79</sup> Swietochowski, Tadeusz. 1985. Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920: The Shaping of National Identity in a Muslim Community. Cambridge University Press. p. 199

<sup>80</sup> Niyazi Mehdi. 2007. Virtual Hijab and Sexual Aggressiveness of Muslim Men. Found in: [http://www.kultura.az/articles.php?item\\_id=20080506092221603&sec\\_id=21](http://www.kultura.az/articles.php?item_id=20080506092221603&sec_id=21) (in Russian, translation by this researcher)

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Gender Assessment for USAID/ Caucasus/ Azerbaijan. January 15, 2004. DevTech Systems, Inc. USAID Contract#: GEW-I-01-02-00019-00. The Women in Development (WID) IQC. p.15



After the 1991 independence, as a result of the war with Armenia, many non-Azerbaijanis inhabiting Baku left for abroad and Azeris from the occupied regions fled for Baku. In addition, a lot of Azeris for the pursuit of employment and better life options have moved to Baku from peripheries in the last years. Socialization and assimilation of provincial newcomers in the city do not happen overnight. They bring stricter cultural norms as well as gender attitudes with them and usually because of the lack of communication with urban population live within closed circles of their relatives and/or countrymen. It is therefore significant to take the abovementioned nuances into account in juxtaposition of urban and rural culture among the Azeri youth.

Moreover, a cursory glance over Baku architecture reveals the existence of neighborhood communities (*mahalla*) known as Yasamal, Shamakhinka, Kubinka, Papanin, Sovetski, etc. among the people (their Russian names were changed during the years of independence). The architectural design of these *mahallas*, country style houses and villas, has fostered communalism and regionalism versus urbanism in the center of Baku for many years, and hindered its acquisition of a true urban spirit. For example, native inhabitants used to live mainly in Sovetski, while newcomers in Shamakhinka (literally place where comers from Shamakhi lived) or in Kubinka (comers from Guba). One can visualize the *mahalla* features in Yasamal, where a highway separates administrative unit of Yasamal into two parts: one consists of typical old style houses with flat roofs and the other – apartment blocks.

For example, Ba-20 (male, 31) lives in the old part of Yasamal. Despite the existence of Baku State University in the vicinity he, like the majority of the Yasamalians, did not wish to study. Concerning study he says:

“In general institute (any higher educational institution) was considered badly in the past, for example the girls studying at institute were not regarded well. As I told before many families from Yasamal did not allow their daughters to go to school after the 8<sup>th</sup> class. As to institute it was considered badly, but for boys it was ok”.

Ba-04, female, 18, was born and lives on the other side of Yasamal. She studies part-time at the University of Economics and works in her free time. Her grandparents are teachers and parents are accountants. She attended Russian sector at school, thinks and dresses more openly than the youth on the old part of Yasamal. However, owing to the ongoing influxes, the overall social environment between the two Yasamals now differs little.

Ba-04 says: “They look at me strangely when they see my short skirt; or wonder why I am with a boy or why I enter in the *mahalla* in a boy’s car. My *mahalla* guys tell me “Why you are like this? It is not a right behavior. You demean us in front of that boy. You do not respect us.” I answer “What is it to say? Is it your *mahalla*? I live in this *mahalla*. I come and that’s it.” Even the boy who drives me in the car hesitates “Better if I do not drive in the *mahalla*, it is not right”; I say “No, you will drive in”. And the elderly neighboring women sitting in front of the block look at me disapprovingly. I know they gossip about me. They have adapted to the society and afraid of acting like me because people can turn from them. They look at me with disdain. So what? It is my own business. If anyone does something s/he does not tell me. It is her/his own life, own business.”

On the other hand, Lenkaran served as a southern fortress both to the Russian Empire and Soviet Union on the border with Iran. Native Russians were moved to Lenkaran and its neighborhoods, and Russian settlements were established here starting from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, the degree of Europeanization among Azeris through Russification in Lenkaran never reached that of Baku given strong religiousness of the region and less Western involvement. On the contrary, in the contact with the local population Lenkarani Russians partly adapted to the

local customs. After the independence, many of them left for Russia, or other places for better life options.

Being situated between the Caspian Sea and the Talish Mountains Lenkaran enjoys a rich nature with sub-tropical climate that makes it a great place for relaxation and tourism. But conservative-puritanical gender norms and customs have led to segregation of public places and dull dynamics of secular lifestyle in the town that once was lively and colorful with the presence of Russians.

Le-17 (female, 27) says: “My father recalls that Russians were decorations of Gala (the central of Lenkaran town). In the past we had theatres and cinema here. After work Russian couples used to walk in the park, nicely dressed, hand in hand, and go to the theater or cinema. But now when our Azeri relatives go out husband says to the wife “I go in front, you follow me”. By now we do not have a culture that husband and wife go side by side and hand in hand. Some men really do not like it; they either send their wives by car or they walk by keeping distance. When an Azeri couple goes to wedding party, husband goes and sits at men’s side and wife at women’s side. So, the party is divided into male and female sides.”

Azeri gender norms require couples not to display signs of physical affection in public and in front of the elders. It is also very rare to notice any female driver in the town which was the case in Baku several years ago. Females, including wives usually sit in the back seat but not in front next to driving menfolk, especially husband. Business meetings and events in the town are normally organized daytime so that females can join. In such meetings and events males and females have to observe distance.

Le-03 (female, 31) observes: “Let us say we go to a meeting at the Executive Apparatus. If a man sits on a bench in the row, a female will leave one empty seat and sit in the next one. Men also try to be careful because the woman may be married and this might create a problem for her family. So if she does not sit next to me, the man thinks, I should not sit next to her either. But if a female sits next to him, then the man is not afraid of. He thinks she is a normal person with normal thinking.”

There is a lack of female presence on the streets after dusk in Lenkaran, which can be also observed in Baku though to a lesser extent. Females’ mobility is restricted in the Azeri society since home is considered to be a female domain. This Azeri “normality” is one of the abnormalities that first strike Western visitors in the country. For example, Kate, female, 28, is from the US and lived with a host family (consisting parents, a son and a daughter) in Baku in 2008 for several months. She remarks:

“Living with that family made it very clear that women in the family do not leave house very much like if they go out they would visit their family, like aunts, etc.; besides, specific things to do like to buy a new pair of shoes or to go to a wedding party they didn’t just go out very much and not very much like social stuff, whereas the men in the family were not at home really so much. It is like very clearly: women in the society stay at home and men go out. That is insane. Even as a foreigner I realize it is different from me and this is also one reason why I decided not to continue living with this family. But just walking down the street if you are out after 7 or 8 o’clock at night 4 or 5 people that you have around are men. It is just so uncomfortable sometimes. I was taking the bus to home, actually after having dinner with my host family and I was the only woman on the bus. It was 9.30 at night, it was not very late. It is funny when you are out at 10 o’clock at night as a woman walking around, I do not feel unsafe, it is not the issue; that is not like I am holding my purse, looking around; I just feel uncomfortable.”

In Lenkaran young females usually do not attend public events which are always crowded with males. Since my fieldtrip coincided with the Nowruz Bayrami (spring holiday) I had a chance to attend the holiday concert organized in the town park. It started at 9 pm and one could see

mainly young males around. If there were any young females they were accompanied by their family members, like Le-06 (female, 20), who thinks she is even in a better situation than many other of her peers.

She says: “My neighbors’ daughters left school after the 4<sup>th</sup> form or 9<sup>th</sup> and sit at home. I am different from them in a way that I have a secondary school leaving certificate, I study part-time at the university, I work, and I join events organized by local Women’s Organization. When there are concerts in the park those girls do not come saying that “No, what is there to do? I am sitting at home. Its sound reaches our yard anyway”. I attended the concert organized for the occasion of the Nowruz Holiday. Father took us – me, mum and my brother.”

Football stadium, *chaykhanas* (tea houses) and beaches are strictly gender segregated places in Lenkaran town. The town has own football team (Khazar-Lenkaran) and a newly built spacious stadium. I attended one of its matches together with one of my male respondents who warned me to be ready to hear swearing if their team loses; fortunately it won. The stadium was full of males of different age except for the wives of a few foreign players of the local team.

Another example of gender segregation is *chaykhana* which is not a case only for Lenkaran but also Baku and throughout Azerbaijan. Due to her observations in Baku, Heyat remarks: “The strong identification of tea/coffee houses as male spaces is a feature of social life in many areas of the Mediterranean and the Middle East where there is also a prevailing social discourse of male superiority and female subordination. But here, in a communist society with its official emphasis on gender equality in public life, I had somehow not expected their presence”.<sup>83</sup>

Last but not least, one of the most gender segregated places in Lenkaran is its beaches on the seacoast. Neither over 70 years of Sovietization, nor the presence of Russians with their more open culture has left any significant influence on this issue. The closest beach to the town at Sutomurdov (a settlement adjacent to the town) is divided into men’s and women’s sides by natural canes. On the other hand, Lenkaranis prefer to go with their families to distant places where they may ignore alien eyes. In both cases women do not wear swimming costumes but go in the water in their casual dresses, and young especially unmarried females do not join. By driving or going away, Lenkarani males consider they respect other men when they see them on the seacoast with their womenfolk.

Le-14 (20) says: “The youth go to the beach, but male part. I am personally against this completely. Why there are no opportunities for females? This is factually violation of their rights. They sit at home and see that dad and brother go to the beach. They also wish to go but it is impossible. Why? Not because brother does not allow this, not because perhaps father does not allow, but because there is a public censure (*ictimai qinaq*). Families do not take (adult) daughters to swim in the sea, only girls by the age of 6-7 are allowed. Or elderly women go to the female part of the seacoast, but they do not wear modern swimming costume.”

Le-14 is aware of alternative lifestyles and criticizes inequality faced by young females. However, he belongs to a society whose censure he is not able to confront alone. On the other hand, apparently he has not fully internalized the alternative views yet and is not consistent in his behavior. 19 year old Le-09, a female student shares her observation about Le-14:

“He organized an event last summer. It started at 7 pm. His sister called his mobile and asked whether she should come. He told: “No, you should not come”. What is this to say? It means we

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<sup>83</sup> Heyat, Farideh. 2005. *Azeri Women in Transition: Women in Soviet and Post-Soviet Azerbaijan*. Baku, Chashioglu. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. p.37

are bad that we came here but your sister is clever and stayed at home? There are things like this – they (males) ask others to do things which they would not permit their female relatives. He behaves as if he is my friend, he likes me very much, etc. So, if you are my friend, why your sister does not attend? Let her come, too!”

Young males, for instance, like Le-11, Le-14, Le-15, who have decided to make careers in local community usually try to show conformity in the delicate issues such as gender norms in order to pursue their careers smoothly, rather than challenging them. And since these norms *do not* restrict males’ social mobility and *do* grant them more freedom than females they are more comfortable with them. Hence, they do not challenge them; as such they maintain the social order in Azeri society, with its authoritarian and undemocratic features.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This research has examined the contemporary youth gender and intergenerational relations in Azerbaijan. Its findings confirm that gendered patterns of behavior with their strict limitations posed on females and greater freedom granted for the males are instilled in the young from early childhood. Furthermore, strong emphasis on deference to the elders is cultivated through early socialization.

Gender relations in the ethnic Azeri culture are based on the codes of *namus*, *qeyrət* and *ayıb*, which restrict female physical mobility for the sake of control of “female honour”. In turn, the latter leads to lack of opportunities to develop one’s individuality and enjoy personal rights. Broadly speaking, it hinders females’ social mobility, their freedom of association and opportunities for their personal and social development. As a consequence of this, we do not hear voices of young females as often as that of the males.

Another consequence of observing the ethnic Azeri moral codes of behavior has been to segregate public places and discriminate against social activity of females. This is particularly the case in Lenkaran region, where public presence of females is greatly limited. Limitations on the girls’ and young females’ mobility and prevailing inhibitions regarding their education and training lead to their lack of social skills, self-confidence, and generally low self-esteem. All this, contributes to their low degree of involvement in the economy and political life. However, young Azeri females, regardless of their level of education and locality, seem to be more progressive in their social attitudes than the males. This may be partly explained by the fact that they directly face the consequences of the unequal gender relations and often exposed to exploitation within the family and beyond.

Expectations of Azeri masculinity and femininity (discussed in section 3) favor male-dependant females rather than independent and mature individuals with initiative and opinion, who are free in making decisions and acting on their own. Female obedience to male authority in the parental home reproduces the wife’s subordination to her husband and his elders in married life, and female employees’ subordination to male boss and elderly employees at work, and female citizens’ submissiveness to authorities in public.

Azeri society, in general, considers marriage and child-bearing as ultimate goals of young females. This very often overshadows the young women’s career wishes and plans for education and employment. This, in turn, leads to women handing over power within the family to their menfolk, which in turn leads to low levels of female participation in decision making in social life. Consequently, as poorly trained and educated, and submissive females they tend to become

vulnerable to manipulation and propaganda on social issues. An example of this is the way many young women follow the voting preferences of their menfolk in the elections.

Moreover, gender relations in the ethnic Azeri culture require male protection of female honour, which translates into male accompaniment and control of their female folk. This in turn both distracts males from their own plans and makes them vulnerable to peer and the community pressure in cases of nonconformity.

The Azeri youth intergenerational relations are based on the cultural/conventional norm of respect for elders, which perpetuates rule of elders versus rule of law in a country with one of the highest corruption rates in the world.<sup>84</sup> Respect for elders and traditional-cultural norms further disempower youth. The notion of respect turns into a mechanism of control and suppression. In practice, it manifests itself in the form of positive discrimination in favor of elders and the elders' expectations of obedience by the younger. The latter is highly undemocratic in a way: (1) It does not allow merit-based competition among different age cohorts and discourage the youth self-expression and initiative; (2) It leads to the youth dependence on the elders and instills submissiveness in them; and (3) This mini model of power relations in the family reproduces the authoritarian/hierarchical relations in the society.

“In the political realm, the rise of Postmodern values brings declining respect for authority, and growing emphasis on participation and self-expression. These two trends are conducive to democratization (in authoritarian societies) and to more participatory, issue-oriented democracy (in already democratic societies).”<sup>85</sup> The systems of Azeri youth gender and intergenerational relations generate deference to authority of males and elders in the family, and in the society at large. These features of Azeri culture are not postmodern and thus not compatible with democratization.

Another trend observed among the today's Azeri youth is that young members of the ruling party YAP are more conservative in maintenance of the patriarchal-authoritarian cultural norms than neutral and oppositionist youth. It can be explained with the fact that (1) adherence to those norms is associated with respect for the late party leader and authoritarian figure H. Aliyev; (2) being a member of the ruling party facilitates career development of those youth. In the meantime, the Azeri youth are mostly not politicized, especially females. It can be observed in their absenteeism in nationwide political events such as the recent referendum and non-participation in civil society organizations.

In the context of the above-described overall picture, the present composition of Azeri youth attitudes to gender and authority can be characterized as a pastiche of traditional, modern and postmodern patterns. However, the majority conform to the traditional way of thinking. The personal examples of the respondents of this research demonstrate that the contemporary Azeri youth vary according to their education, social status and locality. In Baku, historically a cosmopolitan environment, because of prevalence of foreign residents and greatly diminished neighborhood surveillance system, which existed in the Soviet time, and influx of regional population to Baku, there is a greater degree of anonymity coupled with a greater access to the internet, and individual liberty for young males and females than in the regions. In contrast, Lenkaran is a more closed society with far stricter observance of the traditional norms and

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<sup>84</sup> Azerbaijan ranked 158 with 1.7 scores among 180 countries according to Transparency International Organization in 2008. Found in: “Transparency International: Corruption in Azerbaijan Increases” <http://www.un-az.org/undp/bulnews63/ec3.php>

<sup>85</sup> Inglehart, Ronald. 1997. *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies*. Princeton University Press. p.43

restrictions on female comportment and male-female relations. Hence, there is far less opportunities for individual liberty, which reinforces the gender and intergenerational inequality, and male-biased gender norms.

There is a shift from traditionalism to liberalism among younger generation, which reflects a widening intergenerational gap between the youth and elders. A small number of liberal-democratic Azeri youth exposed to the influence of the West through study abroad and close contact with international NGOs in the country contrasts with the majority of the youth being traditional /conservative and close to the generation of their parents. Western NGOs act as agents of social change. The lack of European involvement would retard the further liberalization of gender and intergenerational relations.

The followings would help to combat with undemocratic nature of the existing youth gender and intergenerational relations in Azerbaijan:

1. Redefinition of the ethnic/cultural notions of *namus* and *qeyrat*. For example, in Turkey through the campaigns by women's movement and in order to facilitate entry to EU, Turkish Parliament agreed to redraw the 1926 Penal Code in 2004 to eliminate gender biased moral terms. The old Penal Code was full of traditional concepts adapted from Arabic such as *irz* (honour or purity), *haya* (shame) and *ar* (things to be ashamed of), and treated women's sexuality as a threat that needed to be controlled by society.<sup>86</sup> In Azerbaijan similarly it would be useful to have campaign around the redefinition of the mentioned omnipresent notions.
2. Sex and gender education at secondary schools to develop rational understanding of and informed attitude towards human body, biological needs and unbiased, constructive and healthy relations between boys and girls;
3. Economic empowerment of the youth through job creation with decent salary and facilitating independent housing conditions for the young through favorable mortgage programs and expanded rental market in order to weaken their familial dependence and develop individual agency;
4. Encouragement of portrayal of liberal gender and intergenerational attitudes in the media through TV programs, public discussion forums, etc.
5. Review of school and university textbooks, syllabuses and educational programs, with the view to reduce gender inequality and increase students' /young people's agency.

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<sup>86</sup> European Stability Initiative. 2 June 2007. Sex and Power in Turkey. Feminism, Islam and the Maturing of Turkish Democracy. Berlin-Istanbul. p.13

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**Table 01 In-Depth Interviewee Characteristics**

Code Name	Gender	Age	Current Residence	Generational Status at the Current Residence	Education	Occupation	Current Organizational Membership	Marital Status	Lives with
Ba-01	F	31	Baku	Newcomer	High	Teacher at a university	Professional	Single	Extended family
Ba-02	M	33	Baku	Newcomer	Secondary school	Driver	None	Married	Own nuclear family
Ba-03	F	34	Baku	Newcomer	High	Journalist	Professional	Single	Siblings
Ba-04	F	18	Baku	Native inhabitant	Studying at university	Seller in a cosmetics shop	None	Single	Parental family
Ba-05	M	30	Baku	Native inhabitant	High	Serves in army	Professional	Single	Parental family
Ba-06	M	25	Baku	1 <sup>st</sup> generation	Secondary school	Self-employed mason	None	Single	Parental family
Ba-07	M	27	Baku	Newcomer	High	Controller at a gas maintenance department	None	Married	Own nuclear family
Ba-08	F	21	Baku	1 <sup>st</sup> generation	Secondary school	Seller in a women's dress shop	None	Single	Parental family
Ba-09	M	27	Baku	Newcomer	High	Teacher at a university	Professional	Single	Parental family
Ba-10	F	30	Baku	1 <sup>st</sup> generation	Incomplete secondary school	Seller in a mechanic equipment shop	None	Divorced	Parental family
Ba-11	M	23	Baku	1 <sup>st</sup> generation	High	Credit specialist in a bank	Sports	Single	Parental family
Ba-12	M	21	Baku	Newcomer	Secondary school	Seller in a carpet shop	None	Single	Parental family
Ba-13	F	29	Baku	Newcomer	High	Teacher at a college	None	Single	Sibling
Ba-14	F	25	Baku	1 <sup>st</sup> generation	Secondary school	Ticket seller at a theater	None	Married	Extended family
Ba-15	F	29	Baku	Native inhabitant	High	Advisor at the Ministry of Communication & Technology	Educational	Single	Parental family
Ba-16	F	19	Baku	Newcomer	Incomplete secondary school	Unemployed	None	Single	Parental family
Ba-17	M	26	Baku	2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	Secondary school	Seasonal trade worker	None	Single	Alone (parents died)
Ba-18	F	23	Baku	1 <sup>st</sup> generation	High	Laboratory assistant at a steel factory	None	Single	Parental family
Ba-19	M	32	Baku	1 <sup>st</sup> generation	High	Lawyer in a foreign banking company	Professional	Engaged	Parental family
Ba-20	M	31	Baku	1 <sup>st</sup> generation	Secondary school	Shoemaker	None	Married	Extended family

## How Youth Gender and Intergenerational Relations Affect Democratization in Azerbaijan

Code Name	Gender	Age	Current Residence	Generational Status at the Current Residence	Education	Occupation	Current Organizational Membership	Marital Status	Lives with
Le-01	M	21	Lenkaran	Newcomer	Studying at university	Part-time journalist	Youth org.	Single	Roommates
Le-02	F	21	Lenkaran	Newcomer	Secondary school	Assistant in a photo shop	None	Single	Parental family
Le-03	F	31	Lenkaran	Native inhabitant	High	Teacher at a secondary school	Political party & professional	Married	Extended family
Le-04	M	28	Lenkaran	Native inhabitant	High	Head of the branch of an international NGO	Political party & professional	Single	Parental family
Le-05	F	26	Lenkaran	Native inhabitant	High	Lawyer at a university	None	Single	Parental family
Le-06	F	20	Lenkaran	Native inhabitant	High	Teacher at a secondary school	None	Single	Parental family
Le-07	M	22	Lenkaran	Native inhabitant	Secondary school	Driver	Sports	Single	Parental family
Le-08	F	23	Lenkaran	Native inhabitant	High	Coordinator at a library	None	Single	Parental family
Le-09	F	19	Baku	Native inhabitant	Studying at university	Assistant at a chemist's	Youth org.	Single	Roommates
Le-10	F	25	Lenkaran	Newcomer	High	Teacher at a secondary school	Educational	Single	Parental family
Le-11	M	34	Lenkaran	Newcomer	High	Coordinator of an agricultural project	Political party	Married	Own nuclear family
Le-12	M	27	Lenkaran	Newcomer	High	Head of an NGO	Political party & professional	Married	Own nuclear family
Le-13	F	21	Lenkaran	Native inhabitant	Secondary school	Administrator at a hotel	None	Engaged	Parental family
Le-14	M	20	Lenkaran	Native inhabitant	Studying at university	Youth organization volunteer	Youth org.	Single	Parental family
Le-15	M	27	Lenkaran	Native inhabitant	High	Adult education teacher	Political party	Single	Parental family
Le-16	M	25	Lenkaran	Native inhabitant	Secondary school	Seller in a shoe shop	None	Single	Parental family
Le-17	F	27	Lenkaran	Native inhabitant	Secondary school	Assistant at a chemist's	Women org.	Single	Parental family
Le-18	M	30	Lenkaran	Newcomer	Secondary school	Unemployed (before security administrator a transportation agency)	None	Single	Extended family
Le-19	F	32	Lenkaran	Native inhabitant	Secondary school	Housewife	None	Married	Own nuclear family
Le-20	M	26	Lenkaran	Native inhabitant	High	Coordinator at Lenkaran Executive Power	Political party	Single	Parental family