

NEW LIFE IN OLD BOOTS: MAKING ONE'S HOME IN A NEW VILLAGE AFTER COLLECTIVE RESETTLEMENT. *Summary*

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In 1989, during the Karabagh conflict, the inhabitants of an Azeri village in Armenia and an Armenian village in Azerbaijan performed a peaceful population exchange. The Azeris of Kyzyl-Shafag, located in the Kalinin district (now Lori *marz*) of Soviet Armenia, and the Armenians of Kerkendj, located in the Shamakhy district of neighboring Azerbaijan, switched places. As part of a joint Azerbaijani-Armenian research project funded by the South Caucasus Regional Office of the Heinrich Böll Foundation and carried out in 2006–08, we have attempted to reconstruct the history of this exchange.

Research on interethnic conflict often virtually ignores the multiplicity of peaceful contacts and conflict-free relations between groups. Our project assumed, on the contrary, that such peaceful contacts are at least as frequent as interethnic conflicts. Our research was based on participant observation and biographical interviews.

The present paper is based on field research performed by project participants from Azerbaijan in the village of Kerkendj, which is now inhabited by Azeris from Kyzyl-Shafag. It analyzes the process of making one's home in a "foreign" village following collective resettlement. The process of resettlement itself was facilitated by a long-standing tradition of collective discussion in a community linked by ties of kinship, as well as by the charismatic figure of the director of the Kyzyl-Shafag state farm, Bayram Allazov. Today, residents of the village are mostly middle-aged and older people as well as children, whereas most younger people took up residence there only briefly, then moved on to nearby Baku. Viticulture, previously a mainstay of economic activity in Kerkendj, has now largely been replaced by wheat crops and livestock.

The paper focuses on three main aspects of the experience of arriving in a "foreign" village and making it one's own.

Firstly and most importantly, Kerkendj has two cemeteries, an Armenian and an Azeri one. The central stipulation of the contract between the two communities was that their respective cemeteries be preserved. The Armenian cemetery was never considered as a possible resting place for the dead of the newly arrived Azeris. It

remains a space of “foreign,” “alien” memory. The resettled Azeris designated a new plot of land for their own cemetery. The high mortality rate among the settlers is sometimes seen as a consequence of their loss of roots in the process of resettlement, and the now inaccessible ancestral cemetery in Kyzyl-Shafag is still considered more authentic than the new one. Similarly, a memorial to residents of Kerkendj who died in the Second World War is ignored by the settlers, although there are veterans of the war among them. However, a holy place dedicated to a local Armenian saint has been incorporated into the Azeri settlers’ memorial practices.

The second aspect concerns the houses inhabited by the new settlers as spaces that constitute the memory of the exchange. It is in the space of these houses and through their new occupants’ everyday experience that the memory of “their” village in Armenia is constantly reproduced. The houses become foci of emotional experiences that designate the old village as a place of a better, more successful life. The new houses are perceived as inferior, but although the settlers often refer to themselves as good builders and regret having had to abandon their freshly-built houses in Kyzyl-Shafag, since the exchange only a single house in Kerkendj has been thoroughly renovated (following a landslide). Settlers use their savings to relocate to Baku rather than renovate local houses.

The third aspect concerns practices of acquiring local knowledge. In the period immediately following the exchange, the considerable differences in economic structure between the two villages forced the new inhabitants of Kerkendj to learn everything anew. They were helped by those Armenians who remained in the village after the exchange. Since the exchange took place before the end of the Soviet Union, the settlers re-created a collective farm in Kerkendj, and its director managed to obtain outside resources to help facilitate the transition to new types of economic activity. What little vines are preserved are a source of pride because of their scarcity in Azerbaijan. The collective farm was voluntarily preserved after the collapse of the Soviet system, but many services provided by the state have ceased to function due to their unprofitability.

We conclude that the population exchange was a means of preserving the social structure and integrity of the village community. The successful adaptation of the settlers from Kyzyl-Shafag to the new and “foreign” space of Kerkendj was facilitated by the preservation of their customary social ties in the process of collective resettlement. By bringing most of their belongings and relocating as settlers rather than refugees, the former inhabitants of Kyzyl-Shafag managed to avoid a ghetto effect.