

Title

Teaching Citizenship in a Post-Soviet World: Azerbaijan's Changing Schools

Topic of Research

In its broadest scope, my research is concerned with the impact of the former Soviet Muslim republics' changing education systems on the development of their countries' citizens. My field work investigates one former Soviet Muslim republic's - Azerbaijan's - secondary schools' conception of, and communications with respect to, both formal and informal citizenship, including their official and unofficial policies regarding it. My field work also examines their academic and non-academic methods for training and encouraging their students to become Azerbaijani citizens and, critically, their students' understanding of citizenship, particularly their sense of "belonging" to various religious, ethnic and linguistic groups, which is the heart of informal citizenship.

Relevance and Contribution to the Field

The Caucasus region invites scientific and social scientific inquiries, as well as explorations of the arts and humanities, because it has been and continues to be a crossroads of competing social, political, economic, religious, cultural and linguistic systems. At the same time, it is a region of great geopolitical and economic significance and concern because of its instability; its proximity to and relationship with nations such as Russia, Turkey and Iran; and its oil reserves. My research presents ethnographic data and an anthropological analysis of how Azerbaijan's secondary schools' curricula, textbooks, directors and teachers; its newspapers and journalists; and its non-governmental organizations' programs and administrators are teaching, or failing to teach, Azerbaijan's first post-Soviet generation to become citizens of a newly

independent, “democratic”, Muslim state, and the consequent understandings and attitudes of those secondary school students.

Scholarly Impact: In the introduction to the edited volume Socialism: Ideals, Ideologies and Local Practice, anthropologist Chris Hann writes, “Anthropologists can play a part, along with other intellectuals, in tracing the genealogies of . . . ideas [associated with Western political theory], but their more distinctive contribution lies in *documenting the significance of the ideas in concrete social contexts.*” (Hann 1993:15) (emphasis added)

Anthropologist Katherine Verdery’s beliefs and practices support Chris Hann’s position (Verdery 1996:3-16). Specifically, she criticizes Western political theorists who – without having conducted much ethnographic field work – presume the former Soviet republics and satellites are necessarily “transitioning” from Soviet institutions to Western ones. Verdery – who has conducted extensive ethnographic field work in former communist eastern Europe - believes it is more appropriate to approach the former Soviet republics and satellites as nations in states of “transformation” as opposed to “transition”. According to her, “transformation” implies the potential for many different types of change, while “transition” implies a predictable change from one definite form, a communist political system, to another definite form, an essentially Western democratic political system. And, according to her, there is little ethnographic evidence suggesting the majority of the former Soviet republics and satellites are necessarily developing West European and/or North American models of democracy.

My field work contributes to the ethnographic data on post-Soviet nations, where much of the scholarly attention has been focused on Russia, the Baltic republics and several East European countries (eg Romania, Hungary, eastern Germany) and not the

Muslim republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia, which are more unstable and have more problematic futures. At the same time, my research contributes to anthropological analyses and theories concerning education's role in the development of citizenship in a newly independent country.

Sociologist T.H. Marshall was one of the first social scientists to elaborate the concept of citizenship. According to him, it was composed of civil, political and social rights. Social rights were engaged through a variety of institutions, though notably, according to him, public schools (Marshall 1964:71-83). Today, Western scholars' concept of citizenship is generally presented as a dichotomy: legal citizenship versus cultural citizenship. However, some anthropologists have argued that citizenship, like other political, economic and social categories, is fluid, and can take multiple forms within a single society. For example, different categories of citizen in a society may be subject to religious, ethnic or linguistic discrimination, or may be the recipients of advantages not available to all citizens in that society (Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005; Kipnis 2004; Nic Craith 2004; Paley 2002; Rosaldo 1994; Verdery 1998).

Some anthropologists have focused on religion, ethnic and linguistic nationalism and, tangentially, non-governmental organizations in their studies of education and citizenship in Egypt (Starrett 1998), Turkey (Rutz 1999), Cyprus (Bryant 2001) and the European Union (Soysal 2002). However, to date few if any anthropologists have conducted such studies in the former Soviet Muslim republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia. My research builds upon current ideas of how school directors and teachers, and to a lesser extent other government officials, journalists and non-governmental organization workers, conceive of and impart various understanding of

both formal and informal citizenship to Azerbaijani students. It also focuses strongly on how those students interpret, internalize and communicate, both verbally and non-verbally, their own understanding of formal and informal citizenship in an unstable, rapidly changing, post-Soviet Muslim society.

Policy Significance: My research provides critical insight into the way the Azerbaijani education system is directly and indirectly attempting to train and encourage its students to become citizens in an officially secular, yet Islamic, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual authoritarian society (which defines itself as “democratic”), and the consequences of such attempts. In so doing, my research sheds light on young Azerbaijanis’ sense of “belonging” to various religious, ethnic and linguistic groups, which is the heart of informal citizenship. Such knowledge will help illuminate the direction Azerbaijan will take as a society in the next decade and beyond and, consequently, should be of great interest to policy experts in several areas, especially those who are interested in promoting Western-style democracy in the former-Soviet Muslim republics. For example, my extensive participant-observation in many different types of schools’ ninth, tenth and eleventh grade history, civics and constitution classes revealed that little curricula, textbook or classroom time is devoted to meaningful explanations, let alone discussions, of democracy as that concept is understood and used in the West. My student surveys and informal conversations with students revealed that many of them equate democracy with anarchy and radical selfishness. And my in-depth interviews with school directors, teachers, government officials, journalists and non-governmental organization workers, as well as my informal conversations with many other types of individuals, exposed a general lack of interest in, and sometimes even distrust of,

democracy, since Azerbaijan's "democratic" government has failed to ameliorate problems such as unemployment, low wages and poor health care, while tolerating widespread corruption.

Summary of Methodological Approach

I used my six-month IREX IARO grant to finish conducting the field work for my doctoral dissertation in anthropology, which I had begun conducting under my thirteen-month Fulbright grant. I spent the majority of my time living and doing research in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan. I also spent a couple of months living and doing research in a village four hours west of Baku, and I made several additional trips to this rural area, as well as to several other rural areas, during the course of my field work. Since I was interested in the schools' influence on the first post-Soviet generation's understanding of citizenship, I focused my attention on ninth, tenth and eleventh grade students who were born, for the most part, between 1990 and 1992 during the collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of Azerbaijan. In order to develop a representative picture of these Azerbaijani students' understanding of citizenship, I selected five different types of schools at which to observe and interact with them, their teachers and their directors. Four of the schools were located in or around Baku, while an additional school was located in a village four hours west of Baku.

As required by my human subjects' protocol, I cannot identify the schools at which I conducted research. Accordingly, I have labeled them as someone who is familiar with the school system in Azerbaijan would label them: private, specialized public, regular public, refugee and rural. All Azerbaijanis are supposed to complete at least nine years of formal education at one of the above-mentioned types of schools.

During Soviet times, parents could choose to send their children to either Russian language or native (eg Azerbaijani) language schools. Azerbaijani parents can still select the language in which they wish their children to study. There are far fewer Russian-language-only schools in Azerbaijan now than during Soviet times, though they still exist. Instead, many schools in or around Baku offer a Russian-language and an Azerbaijani-language track within the same school. The private, specialized public and regular public schools at which I conducted research had both language tracks. The refugee and rural schools at which I conducted research were Azerbaijani-language-only schools, since very few of those schools teach in Russian.

Most, if not all, Azerbaijani schools follow the same curricula and use the same textbooks. More information about, and discussions regarding, citizenship occur in the mandatory history, civics and constitution classes, so I spent the majority of my time observing those classes and examining their curricula and textbooks. The bulk of my thirteen-month Fulbright grant was dedicated to observing two to four classes per day, six days per week, at the private, specialized public, regular public and rural schools, while two of the six months of my IREX IARO grant were spent observing classes at the refugee school.

In addition to conducting extensive participant-observation at the five different types of schools, and reading and analyzing several different classes' curricula and textbooks, the last four months of my IREX IARO grant were spent: distributing a fifteen-page survey I had written (to be completed anonymously) that covered personal/family, political, economic, ethnic/linguistic, religious and academic/career topics to a sample of more than seventy-five male and female tenth and eleventh grade

students at the specialized public, regular public, refugee and rural schools; conducting in-depth interviews with school directors and teachers at the five different types of schools; collecting, reading and analyzing more than thirty different newspapers printed in Azerbaijan; conducting in-depth interviews with journalists; visiting non-governmental organizations and conducting in-depth interviews with their workers; and visiting branch offices of the Ministry of Education, such as the Institute of Educational Problems and the Teacher Training and Re-Training Institute, and conducting in-depth interviews with their officials.

All classroom observations and interactions employed Russian and/or Azerbaijani. Most interviews, with the exception of some with journalists and non-governmental organization workers, were conducted in Russian and/or Azerbaijani. The surveys were written in Russian and Azerbaijani. And all of the materials collected and analyzed (eg curricula, textbooks, newspapers) were in Russian and/or Azerbaijani.

Summary of Findings and Conclusions

In the research proposal I submitted in September 2006 I indicated, among other things, that I would use an IREX IARO grant to learn about Azerbaijanis' identification, or non-identification, with one or more *religions* and one or more *ethnic nationalisms* and *linguistic nationalisms* in an attempt to understand how they are influencing young Azerbaijanis' notions of citizenship. Below are some of my general observations and preliminary conclusions.

Religion: Azerbaijan is an officially secular yet socially and culturally Islamic society. According to its constitution, ratified in 2005, there is separation of church and state. In the mandatory ninth grade constitution class, which has its own curriculum and textbook

and is supposed to meet once per week, teachers are supposed to spend several lessons presenting the concept of separation of church and state and reinforcing the idea that all religions, and the people who practice them, are equal before the law. While I often observed the constitution teachers - who are also the history teachers and the civics teachers - omitting one constitution topic or another, or simply replacing an entire constitution lesson with a history lesson, I did observe each of the constitution teachers at the five different types of schools presenting the concepts of separation of church and state, religious tolerance, etc to their students for at least part of one lesson (and sometimes no more than that). And, in contrast to many of the other constitution topics, the majority of the students seemed genuinely engaged with this one. Specifically, they seemed to want to learn about various religious beliefs and practices.

For example, I noticed that a fair number of students from the five different types of schools asked their teachers questions about Wahabis, Muslims who practice a radical form of Islam. I also noticed that questions or comments about Wahabis were not uncommon in casual conversations among immediate family members, relatives, neighbors, friends and colleagues. Unfortunately, when students asked their teachers - and when I asked other people (eg my various host families' relatives, neighbors, etc) who had mentioned Wahabis or Wahabism in a conversation - to describe Wahabis' religious beliefs and practices to me, students and I were usually met with blank stares and eventually told "[male] Wahabis have beards and wear short pants" and "they are bad" or "they do bad things." Little or no additional information about Wahabis or Wahabism was offered.

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In short, while many Azerbaijanis seem to be interested in learning about and discussing religion, and the role of religion in an officially secular society, few seem to be very informed about it. For example, the fact that many seem to be using (or learning to use) the word “Wahabi” to represent anything and everything that is “bad” and potentially “threatening” to them and their way of life, as opposed to using it to refer Muslims who practice a radical form of Islam and who have a presence, albeit a small one, in Azerbaijan, demonstrates a high level of interest but a low level of knowledge. Discussions among students, teachers, their family members, their friends, etc about “mainstream” Islamic beliefs and practices seemed to be somewhat more informed, though not as informed as one might expect from the inhabitants of a country that recently decided to replace many of its secular holidays with Islamic ones. Discussions among Azerbaijanis about Christianity and Judaism, and the role these religions might play in Azerbaijan, were rare to non-existent, despite the fact there are significant Christian and Jewish communities in Baku.

In general, I observed more discussions about religion, and the role of religion in society, and greater adherence to Islamic beliefs and practices in the rural areas than in Baku. For example, I spent Ramadan 2006 living with an Azerbaijani family in Baku observing history, civics and constitution classes in a private, a specialized public and a regular public school there. I estimated that between fifty and seventy-five percent of the teachers at each of those three schools observed the Ramadan fast that year. In contrast, I spent Ramadan 2007 living with an Azerbaijani family on a farm in a village four hours west of Baku where more than ninety percent of the teachers at the local school told me they were observing the Ramadan fast that year. I do not know why there seems to be

more interest in religion in the rural areas than in Baku. I have tentatively concluded, however, that it is at least partially a consequence of the fact that “Christian Armenians” and “Muslim Azerbaijanis”, who peacefully coexisted until the brutal Armenian-Azerbaijani wars of the late 1980s and early 1990s that culminated in the Armenian occupation of Azerbaijani-claimed Nagorno-Karabakh, now see one another as “the enemy”. And rural Azerbaijanis, who in many cases lost more relatives and friends, more homes, more electrical lines and gas pipelines, etc than urban Azerbaijanis, feel the need to distance themselves from “the enemy” more strongly than their urban counterparts. One way for them to do so is to focus on Armenians’ Christian religious affiliation. If this hypothesis is correct, and if Armenian-Azerbaijani relations are not repaired, then “being Muslim” may become, for a large number of Azerbaijanis, an integral component of what it means to be an Azerbaijani citizen, despite the government’s textbook messages about religious tolerance and the secular nature of the Azerbaijani state.

Ethnic Nationalism: As mentioned above, the Caucasus has long been a crossroads. For example, present-day Azerbaijan was invaded by the Persians in the sixth century BC, the Albanians in the fourth century BC and the Romans in the first century BC. It witnessed several Turkic conquests between the fifth and seventh centuries AD, followed by an Arab invasion, and then several more Turkic conquests between the ninth and eleventh centuries. The Mongols arrived in the thirteenth century. Following their defeat, the Persians re-assumed control of the territory. However, the Russians, who had advanced into Azerbaijan in the early eighteenth century, defeated the Persians in the second Russian-Persian war in the early nineteenth century which, following the Treaty of

Turkmenchai in 1828, enabled them to control Azerbaijan until the Russian Revolution of 1917. Azerbaijan experienced a brief period of independence from 1918 until 1920. However, it was ultimately incorporated into the Soviet Union and remained a part of it until the latter's dissolution in 1991 (Altstadt 1992:89-107; Cornell 2001:36-39; Dragadze 1996:269-270; Swietochowski 1996:211-212).

Because of the various empires that have dominated present-day Azerbaijan, it is home to many different ethnic groups. Some, such as the Lezgens who live primarily along the Georgian border in northeastern Azerbaijan, speak their own Lezgi language and are numerous enough to support several Lezgi-language tracks in Azerbaijani-language and Russian-language track schools. Others, such as the Malakans who live primarily in the fertile mountains of the Ismayli region in northwestern Azerbaijan, practice their own form of Orthodox Christianity and speak their own dialect of Russian, as well as sell their very popular organic products – under their ethnic group's label - in downtown Baku.

Despite the large number of different ethnic groups represented to one degree or another in Azerbaijan (which, in addition to the Lezgens and the Malakans, include the Russians, Armenians, Talishis, Udis and others), few young Azerbaijanis seem to identify with a specific one. For example, when students were asked to indicate to which “ethnic group” they, their parents and their grandparents belong, the overwhelming response they gave was “Azerbaijani” as opposed to “Lezgen”, “Malakan”, “Talishi”, “Udi”, etc. Perhaps young Azerbaijanis' lack of ethnic identification is evidence that the Soviets succeeded in eradicating such identities among their parents' and grandparents' generations. The various conflicts that have erupted along the former Soviet republics'

borders since the collapse of the Soviet Union would suggest otherwise, however. Or, perhaps young Azerbaijanis' lack of a strong ethnic identity is evidence – as I believe it is - that some other type of identity – such as a “regional nationalism” – is now more meaningful than an ethnic one. For example, while most young Azerbaijanis neither self-identify nor identify others with one specific ethnic group, most are acutely aware of the difference (or, rather, perceived difference) between Azerbaijanis who are “Bakinski” (whose parents, grandparents, etc were born and raised in Baku and who generally are perceived to belong to the *intelligentsia*) and Azerbaijanis whose parents, grandparents, etc were born and raised in a village outside of Baku and then moved to Baku to get an education or to find work.

Such a “regional nationalism” may or may not have negative implications for Azerbaijani society. Unfortunately, some other types of “regional nationalism” seem to hold greater potential for social divisiveness. For example, in the build-up to the Armenian-Azerbaijani wars of the late 1980s and early 1990s, many of the Azerbaijanis who had been living on the Armenian side of the border decided to move to Azerbaijan, specifically to Baku. Then, during the wars, all of the Azerbaijanis who were living in Nagorno-Karabakh were forced to relocate elsewhere in Azerbaijan, generally to Baku. While both the Azerbaijanis from Armenia and the Azerbaijanis from Nagorno-Karabakh are refugees or Internally Displaced Peoples from the same conflict, some young Azerbaijanis (and a substantial number of older Azerbaijanis) differentiate between the two groups. Specifically, they call the former group's members “eraz” or “Armenian-Azerbaijanis” - which many of the individuals to whom the label is being applied view as an ethnic slur - while they simply call the latter group's members “refugees”. In sum,

while it does not seem that the first post-Soviet generation's concept of citizenship is being shaped by traditional ethnic identities, it does seem that it is being increasingly influenced by new "intra-Azerbaijan regional nationalisms", which have a potential for being socially divisive.

Linguistic Nationalism: According to one linguist, the Caucasus is home to more than fifty languages, thirty-seven of which are indigenous to the region. The Caucasus' non-indigenous languages belong to variety of language families such as the Indo-European, Turkic, Slavic, Mongolic and Semitic (Catford 1977:283-286). Prior to the Russian conquest of Azerbaijan, the majority of its population spoke mainly Persian and Turkic languages. Following the Russian Revolution of 1917 and its incorporation into the Soviet Union, however, its linguistic landscape began to change.

One of the Soviet's achievements was the establishment of Russian language and native language schools in each of its republics and compulsory education for all Russian and non-Russian boys and girls for a minimum of nine years (Atakishiev and Avakov 1984; Grant 1964). At the beginning of the Soviet period, students were encouraged to study in their native languages. As early as 1920 at least nine of the Caucasus' numerous indigenous languages had become literary languages (Catford 1977:295-298). As the Soviet period progressed, however, laws were passed that increasingly favored the Russian language schools over those using native languages.

Stalin's Russification program aimed to homogenize the Soviet Union's ethnic groups and native languages into shaping one *Homo Sovieticus*. First, a 1939 law entitled "On the Obligatory Study of the Russian Language in Schools of National Republics and Regions" required all native language schools to offer a minimum number of hours of

Russian language instruction. Then, a series of laws passed between 1958 and 1959 elevated the Russian language from the status of a foreign language to that of a native language. Finally, a 1978 law entitled “On Measures for Further Improving the Study and Teaching of the Russian Language in the Union Republics” mandated that Russian language curricula and textbooks be introduced in all schools (ie native language schools) in which the Russian language was not the main language of instruction. From the end of World War II until *glasnost* and *perestroika*, Russian language and native language schools had different curricula, textbooks and teachers, and students from the former were more likely than those from the latter to be accepted at universities to pursue academic, professional or government careers (Kellner-Heinkele and Landau 2001:51-62).

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, each of the former Soviet republics has tackled the “language issue” somewhat differently. On the one hand, Azerbaijan seems to have gone to great lengths to reduce or replace the use of Russian with the use of Azerbaijani. For example, most store fronts, newspapers, radio and television broadcasts and most, if not all, official documents (eg leases) are now in Azerbaijani rather than Russian. Perhaps more telling is the dramatic decrease in the number of parents choosing to educate their children in Russian. According to the Ministry of Education’s Institute of Educational Problem’s statistics for the 2007-2008 school year, only seven percent of the country’s children are currently studying in Russian-language tracks. If this trend continues, those who study in Azerbaijani-language tracks will be more likely than those who study in Russian-language tracks to be accepted at universities to pursue academic, professional or government careers. However, the government’s message via its

mandatory ninth grade constitution class is that, while the Azerbaijani language is the national language, everyone is entitled to speak – and, indeed, to study in - the language he/she desires. In other words, just as Azerbaijanis are supposed to be tolerant of various religious beliefs and practices, so too are they supposed to be tolerant of the use of different languages. Unfortunately, it appears that the first post-Soviet generation may not be as accepting of Russian-speaking Azerbaijanis as of Azerbaijani-speaking Azerbaijanis, which could have divisive consequences.

For example, the responses I received from a number of teachers to the in-depth interview question “In which language track do or will your children study?” suggest some Azerbaijanis may support an Azerbaijani-language-only policy. Specifically, some teachers who had been educated in the Russian-language track and are now teaching in their schools’ Russian-language track told me “There is no reason for my [sons or daughters] to learn to speak Russian. They are Azerbaijanis, and *real Azerbaijanis* do not speak Russian. They speak Azerbaijani.” Conversely, the “Bakinski” (whose parents, grandparents, etc were born and raised in Baku and who generally are perceived to belong to the *intelligentsia*) and the “nouveau riche” – or Azerbaijanis who have acquired a significant amount of money since independence in 1991 and, more specifically, since the oil boom that began in the late 1990s – have made it apparent by choosing to speak, read the newspaper, educate their children, etc in Russian that they believe Azerbaijanis can and perhaps even should speak Russian as opposed to Azerbaijani. Furthermore, while the predominantly Azerbaijani-speaking Azerbaijanis represent a larger percentage of the population, “Bakinski” and the “nouveau riche” hold more social, political and economic power, at present, within society. Thus, it seems almost inevitable that young

Azerbaijanis' notions of what it means to be *real Azerbaijanis* will be strongly influenced by the presence of these two strongly competing linguistic nationalisms.

Suggestions for Future Research

Despite its unique position as a former Soviet Muslim republic that has reasonably good relations with Russia, Turkey, Iran and the West, and which has substantial oil reserves, few long-term, in-depth, academic or policy-driven research projects have been conducted in Azerbaijan. Below I propose three projects that would significantly improve the West's understanding of Azerbaijani society.

One - My study of Azerbaijan's first post-Soviet generation's conception of citizenship has revealed that many young Azerbaijanis do not really know what it means to be a citizen of Azerbaijan, because their school curricula, textbooks, directors, teachers, government officials, newspapers, non-governmental organizations' programs, etc are presenting different – often conflicting – definitions of and ideas about democracy, citizenship, human rights, religion and ethnicity. Given Azerbaijan's increasingly important position in various political and economic arenas, and its young citizens' confusion about their role, and their country's present and future roles, in such arenas, I believe additional studies should be conducted among young Azerbaijanis. They are not a uniform group. Rather, they belong to several different socio-economic groups such as: those getting married and starting families at the age of sixteen or seventeen; those working as migrant fruit and vegetable sellers in the markets in Russia; those pursuing technical training in rural towns; and those pursuing university degrees in Baku. Each of these socio-economic groups, and others, presently has a different understanding of, and a different perspective with respect to, the critical concepts of democracy, citizenship,

human rights, etc. This might help develop a vibrant Azerbaijani citizenry and a truly democratic Azerbaijan. Or, conversely, it might lead to social and economic divisiveness impairing the development of democratic institutions.

Two - Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the independence of Azerbaijan and the reevaluation of the Soviet Union's social, political and economic policies as they applied to Azerbaijan, some girls, particularly those who live in Azerbaijan's rural areas, have been getting married and starting families earlier than their Soviet predecessors. At the same time, high unemployment in many parts of Azerbaijan has forced many men to pursue work outside of Azerbaijan, generally in Russia. As a consequence, the rural Azerbaijani family's socio-economic structure has changed dramatically within the past decade. Now, a substantial number of children are being born to teenage mothers and raised by them, their mothers and/or their mother-in-laws, who are simultaneously running the family's household and farm and managing the family's finances, because the husbands, fathers and brothers are absent. A study of the profound changes to the rural Azerbaijani family's socio-economic structure since independence would be of great value to many non-governmental organizations that are developing social and economic programs for this population.

Three – Since the late 1990's accelerated development of Azerbaijan's oil reserves, and the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Jayhan pipeline, a number of Western oil companies and related industries have established a presence in various parts of Azerbaijan and developed relationships with the Azerbaijani government, its oil companies and their related industries, as well as with some of Azerbaijan's schools and local non-governmental organizations. The Western oil companies and the people who work for or

with them have a strong – though temporary - presence in Azerbaijan. They are affecting and will continue to affect the local economy and the natural environment for a long time. A study of the social, political and economic ramifications of the Western oil companies engagement with and impact on Azerbaijan's local economy, on its environment and, critically, on its citizens - specifically those citizens' understanding of what the companies are doing for themselves, as well as for Azerbaijan - would be invaluable to both Azerbaijani policy makers and the Western companies that are presumably interested in maintaining good relations with the people of Azerbaijan.

Recommendations for U.S. Policy Community

My research is more academic than policy-driven. However, much of the information I have gathered, and the conclusions I have drawn, while conducting field work in Azerbaijan are relevant to the U.S. policy community's interests there and elsewhere in the region.

For example, to the extent the American and Western European governments are trying to help the Azerbaijani government reform its education system, as the recent multi-million dollar World Bank grant to Azerbaijan's Ministry of Education suggests, then it is important to understand that rewriting curricula and textbooks are, unfortunately, not likely to have a meaningful impact on students' academic development until teachers, whose average salary is one hundred dollars per month, earn more. Since teachers' salaries are so low, a great many of them are choosing to supplement their teaching income with income from private tutoring. Specifically, history, math, science, Russian and English language teachers – those teachers whose subjects are on the state exams the eleventh grade students are required to take and pass to go to university – are

devoting much of their time to preparing for and giving private tutoring lessons rather than covering critical material in the classroom, because private tutoring is more lucrative than classroom teaching. Not only are potential university students, whose families cannot really afford to pay for private tutoring, under-prepared when it comes time for them to take the state exams, but all students are presented with a classroom experience that provides much less knowledge than necessary for an adequate secondary school education. In addition, few teachers and students are devoting much time and attention to subjects such as civics and the constitution that are not on the state exams and thus are not deemed to be important.

Given that the schools' civics and constitution classes are a low priority for both teachers and students, and that teachers are consequently poorly prepared and unmotivated to teach them, most young Azerbaijanis have a very limited understanding of Western-style democracy and the conditions necessary for it to be developed and maintained. Instead, the majority of them are continuing to learn the Soviet-era ideological position that equated democracy with anarchy and radical selfishness. In addition, as mentioned earlier, many older Azerbaijanis display a general lack of interest in, and sometimes even distrust of, democracy, since they believe Azerbaijan's government, which asserts that it is democratic, has failed to resolve problems such as unemployment, low wages and poor health care.

Informed citizens are the basis of democracy. One cannot talk about developing a democracy without talking about the role the democracy's citizens will play in it. Unfortunately, for Azerbaijanis who were educated under the Soviet system and did not learn about Western-style democracies, let alone citizens' rights and responsibilities

within them, it is very difficult to impart the essential components of a Western-style democracy, such as involved citizenship, human rights, the rule of law, an independent court system, etc, to the first post-Soviet generation. Consequently, the policy experts who are working with the non-governmental organizations that are trying to promote democracy in Azerbaijan (and the other former Soviet republics) need to reassess the way in which they are presenting fundamental concepts (such as involved citizenship, human rights, the rule of law, an independent court system, etc) to make sure they are fully comprehensible to Azerbaijani teachers (and others) whose social, political and economic framework has, until recently, lacked such concepts, as least as they are understood in the West.

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