

Rashad Alakbarov

## How the theory of constructivism explains rural-urban migration trend in Azerbaijan?

The aim of this study is to analyze the rural-urban migration trend and its consequences within the theoretical framework of constructivism. Since regaining independence, the internal migration pattern in Azerbaijan can be divided into three stages. The dissolution of the Soviet Union later followed by the escalation of a territorial conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh, which resulted in the expulsion of more than 750,000 refugees and internally displaced persons from the occupied territories of Upper Karabakh and surrounding areas to other regions of Azerbaijan, predominantly the eastern parts. The absence of strong central authority and the severe economic situation left few opportunities to cater for the innocent war victims' immediate needs, such as accommodation and workplace. In general, if for the government the emergence of the military phase of the conflict was the starting point of chaos, for those at the center of the fire it was simply a driver of the struggle for survival, which resulted in illegal seizure of urban households' flats in Baku, Sumgayit and close areas. (Yunusov, 2013) Hence, both refugees and city residents became "victims". In sociology, Anthony Giddens explains the idea of structuration as an instrument of defining a structure-actor relationship. He does believe that while a structure, produces sets of rules and conditions that constrain an actor, the latter also can somehow change the character of the structure. (Jackson and Sorensen, 2006). In this case, if the Nagorno-Karabakh war on the unit level could be seen as a structure guided by anarchy that constrained the maneuver area of actor – refugees and forced migrants and resulted in the violent seizure of flats of city dwellers, that action left no choice to the latter but to look at refugees and forced migrants through new lenses. Perception of "victim" about refugees and forced migrants, predominant in the beginning, was replaced by bias, suspicion, and

ambivalent feelings, even source of stress. Consequently, the emergence of a new formulation of ideas about them was necessary and distinction of "self" and "other", as in the Alexander Wendt approach, became inevitable. Above-mentioned drastic actions constituted the main core of community polarization and social-cultural gaps in urban society. The locals started to think about the newcomers as "others". Therefore, it is quite complicated to argue that there was a full social interaction between newcomers and locals. In reality, the preference of newcomers` in communication or social interaction is limited within the community.

We should keep in mind that the migration situation is able to change the whole motives and needs of newcomers, which are seen as the main regulators of social-psychological sides of human behavior.

Soldatova & Shaygerova express the level of stress as the main indicator of migrants' psychological stance. If migrants' psychology is traumatized by forced departure, it complicates the process of adaptation to the new environment. While migrants are in a state of post-traumatic stress, they are suffering from identity crisis (Efremova, Nesterova et al.). The same happened with the newcomers in Baku who were simply innocent victims of war.

It is noteworthy to mention that supporting and backing up each other within one particular community is an old stereotype in Azerbaijan. This "rule" is followed not only within the country, but also during the outflow migration to Russia, which is a main traditional destination for low- and middle-skilled Azerbaijani migrants. For instance, if people from Gazakh and Agstafa prefer to settle and doing business in Kogalym, Surgut or Tyumen, those who are from capital prefer to migrate to Moscow, or if

people from the Karabakh region used to settle chiefly in Samara and Nizhny Novgorod, their compatriots from Shamkir or Ganja choose Moscow, its suburbs and St. Petersburg. However, it should be noted that this “rule” is not strongly followed among the Azerbaijani highly professional groups who are self-confident, well-educated, aware of Western cultures and set of values as well as norms and thus mainly prefer to emigrate to the Western countries. For these reasons, they do not need any strong support from their relatives or close friends.

The magnitude of the above-mentioned stereotype is being observed among other ethnic minorities of Azerbaijan, as well. While the Lezgins are tended to be involved in service, construction or industry sectors, the Talysh prefer to control subtropical fruit and vegetable trade in Baku. (Allahverenov & Huseynov, 2013). However, it should be noted that in spite of the fact Azerbaijan has an ethnically diverse population over 80 ethnic groups, such as Lezgins, Talysh, Avars, Tatars, Tats, Armenians, Georgians, Ukrainians, Russians, Turks, Jews, Tsakhurs and so on, 9 out of 10 residents of Azerbaijan identify themselves as ethnic Azerbaijanis, and 99% claim proficiency in the Azerbaijani language. (Avdeev, 2015). Therefore, there are not deep community divisions either in rural or urban areas of Azerbaijan.

To sum up, supporting and backing up each other within the community in Azerbaijan should not be perceived as a division of society since it is an old stereotype, which is gradually subsiding among the new generation.

The first phase of migration should not be characterized only by the movement of refugees and forced migrants from the occupied territories to Baku, since during the 1990s major part of Russians, Jews and Armenians left the country. The Russian researcher V. Tishkov argues that the decision to emigrate made by a large part of the Russian-speaking population was due to economic difficulties and lack of optimism about the future which characterized the transition period of the 1990s.

In addition, some members of Azerbaijani intellectual elites also decided to leave Azerbaijan, mainly for Russia, Turkey and Western countries.

Historically, Baku has been the only metropolis in Azerbaijan and hosted multiple ethnic groups throughout the history. According to the first Russia-wide population census of 1897, there were 112,000 residents in Baku; in 1926 that figure increased by 4.6 times as the city had turned into an industrial center. In 1979, ethnic Azerbaijanis constituted only 56% of the population living Baku and adjacent peri-urban areas subordinate to the Baku City Council, while of the one million people living in the capital city itself, 52% were Azerbaijani,

23% Russian and 17% Armenian. According to the Soviet Union census in 1989, the total population of Azerbaijan was slightly higher than 7 million, of which Azerbaijani Turks constituted 82% (5,800,994), the Russians 5.6% (392,303), the Armenians 5.5% (390,495), the Lezgins 2.4% (171,395), the Jews and Mountain Jews less than 0.5% (25,190 and 5,484 respectively.) In absolute terms, all these ethnicities felt themselves safe and not isolated. In January 1992, while giving an interview to the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board Documentation Centre a former Jewish resident of Baku emphasized: “Perhaps Azerbaijan is the best place for Jews to live.” (Azerbaijan: The Status of Armenians, Russians, Jews and Other Minorities, 1993). Since the late 19th century, the huge development oil production and proceeding in Baku caused a high concentration of foreigners, such as Russians, Poles, Scandinavians and Germans who arrived in Azerbaijan to work in Baku’s oil industry. So Baku became an international city, where the co-existence of different ethnics, beliefs and cultures, and interaction among them turned into an indivisible part of daily routine. The level of literacy and exposure to the larger world was significantly higher among the residents of Baku and its suburban areas, compared to the rural areas of the country.

For instance, by 1940 Azerbaijan had 31 theaters, compared to just two in 1913, 22 museums, and more than 1,600 clubs. Furthermore, the number of libraries increased from 25 in 1913 virtually to 1,400 in 1940. During the same year, over 1,100 books with a total circulation of nearly five million copies, including 614 books in Azerbaijani with a total circulation 3.9 million copies, were published in Azerbaijan.

If in 1913 91 books with a total circulation of 112,000 copies were published totally, in 1950, 94 newspapers with a circulation of 419,000 copies were published including 73 newspapers in Azerbaijani with a circulation of 224,000 copies. All these rapid developments eventually led to the emergence of the common identity of urban population, which could be characterized as open-minded, well-educated, and proficient in Russian knowledge. If the urban households in Azerbaijan are more inclined to be secular, the population of rural areas remained far more conservative and loyal to their traditional values. Therefore, when refugees and forced migrants resettled in Baku, Sumgait, and Absheron peninsula, socio-cultural and psychological distinctions in terms of their way of thinking were clear-cut.

The signing of Contract of the Century in 1994 accelerated the country’s transition into the market economy. The Production Sharing Agreements with major international companies, such as Amoco, BP, McDermott, Unocal, SOCAR, LukOil, Statoil, Exxon, TPAO, Pennzoil, Itochu,

Ramco, and Delta on the exploration of “the Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli” deepwater oil fields, extracting and exporting the of bulk carbohydrate reserves of the country were extremely vital in attracting much-needed foreign direct investment to the country, particularly during the transition period. As the result of successful implementation of oil strategy, a strong impetus to the development and enlargement of Baku was provided. Following a chain of events, many people from rural areas decided to move to urban areas. The reason was simple: “surged income gaps”. Eventually, Baku’s population began to increase between 1992-2010 recording an annual increase of 0.3% between 1993-1999; 1,1% during 2000-2004 and 1,5% during the 2005-2010. In general, the intensity and direction of the internal migration flow in Azerbaijan are primarily stimulated by regional disparities, income gaps, and socio-economic development of urban areas.

According to Arthur W. Lewis, while exploring the rural-urban migration trends, relationship between periphery – agricultural sector and capitalist – industrial sector should be analyzed from the perspective of economic growth. More precisely, the development of capitalist sector creates labor shortages, the latter covered by a surplus labor originating in the periphery. (Aliyev)

In the case of Azerbaijan, the development of oil industry of the capitalist Baku and accumulation of revenues suggests various employment opportunities, which guarantees inflow of rural migrants from periphery to urban area. The dissolution of Soviet Union resulted in poverty and distortion of traditional sectors in rural areas. Therefore, in the light of urban development of Baku which caused income gaps a decision to emigrate from rural areas to the capital in most cases was the most reasonable option. Hence, rural-urban migration started in Azerbaijan and there are more than two decades that this migration pattern has dominated in the internal migration.

According to the State Statistical Committee, the total population of Azerbaijan is estimated to constitute 9,810 million people in 2017, 5,199 million thereof living in cities. A significant number of rural migrants have settled in big cities, such as Baku, Sumgait and Ganja. Today, almost than half of the whole urban population resides in Baku causing negative consequences, such as overpopulation, environmental degradation, congestion, traffic jams, unemployment, pollution, difficulties in water supply and sewage systems, etc. According to the Baku City Statistical Office, currently 2,249,500 million people live in Baku by recording the highest level of population density over the country: 1051 people per sq.km. Not surprisingly, with the score of 27,6 in the Health and Sanitation ranking, Baku constitutes one of the 17 most

polluted cities in the world (<http://wisetoast.com/top-17-dirtiest-cities-in-the-world/>).

The second phase of urbanization started with the oil boom and lasted until the late 2014. Starting from 2006, the successful completion of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipelines led to the pouring of vast capital into the budget of the country. In the wake of these oil revenues, the government made a decision to make huge investments into the country’s image, particularly transforming the outlook of Baku into a modern supercity. Some sources do claim that while reconstructing the capital from the scratch, the central government and city administration opted for a strategy of simply copying Dubai, which was considered the shortest and easiest way for achieving desired result. (Valiyev, 2016) Hence, since the regaining of independence the first grand construction wave was officially announced, which ensued the advent of new brand hotels, sport facilities, parks, modern bridges and re-organization of road infrastructure in the capital and its suburbs. At the beginning of this boom, real estate developers focused on building construction in the central part of Baku.

From 2000 until 2005 at least 500 skyscrapers as well as fabulous low-rise buildings were constructed, changing the character of the city. The government defined the key points of redevelopment in Baku including the city centre, which was reflected in the last Master Plan from 1987 (Jafarli)

Undoubtedly, all noted infrastructural projects created numerous workplaces and here the major source of workforce were rural migrants who moved to the capital in search of better life. In terms of occupational composition, rural migrants are usually involved in seasonal construction sector, serving as workers, night managers or guardians, or in service sector, working in cafes, shops and markets in accordance to their job skills.

It should be noted that this phase of urbanization is especially notable for the growth of black economy in Azerbaijan. According to the World Bank 2010 report, the share of the workforce without an employment contract ascended from 45,3% in 2003 to 59,5% in 2006, out of which 71% were rural residents. The large-scale number of informal laborers has been particularly observable in construction and service sectors, both revitalized by the oil revenues: out of 223,000 people employed in construction sector, only 25% had labor contracts. (Guliyev)

The current stage of urbanization is a de-urbanization or movement of people from urban to rural areas, which started to rise after 2014 and is still ongoing. By December 21, 2015, a 33,4% devaluation of the national cur-

rency by the Central Bank was a spark for the new social concerns. Low oil price reduced public investments, which concurrently undermined the construction sector. The gradual drop in oil prices revealed – how the economic model of Azerbaijan, particularly banking sector and macroeconomic policy framework was vulnerable and less developed. Eventually, a considerable number of rural residents who were involved in construction and service sector lost their jobs. Consequently, they left no choice other than leaving the city and returning back to the regions.

In conclusion, the overall analysis demonstrates that as a result of weak social interaction between urban population and newcomers, dissimilarity of values and lifestyles between them, vulnerability to economic challenges of city life, as well as being strongly tied to their families and relatives living in the regions weakens the position of internal migrants in large cities and affects their migration decisions.

*Note:* \* forced migrants – in our context IDPs

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### About the author:

*Rashad ALAKBAROV, Doctoral Candidate at Near East University, Nicosia. He holds Master degree from Near East University (NEU) in International Relations, worked as a lecturer at NEU and Azerbaijan University. His main research interests cover migration studies and protection of vulnerable groups, EU migration policy, security studies, political Islam, and geopolitics of the Middle East.*

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