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*Illinois State University*

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SOCIAL CAPITAL AND RELATIONAL WORK: UNCERTAINTY, DISTRUST AND  
SOCIAL SUPPORT IN AZERBAIJAN

Dustin S. Stoltz

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Much of the social capital literature focuses on unambiguous social situations where actors share generalized trust or interpersonal trust. Drawing on in-depth fieldwork in northwest Azerbaijan, this thesis focuses instead on distrust and the negotiation of conflicting interpretations of shared norms within moments of informal social support. In such situations, participants engage in an on-going negotiation of the situation, drawing on available cultural conventions to make sense of situations and perform relational work. They ultimately create meaning out of on-going social interaction and accomplish locally viable forms of social support.



SOCIAL CAPITAL AND RELATIONAL WORK: UNCERTAINTY, DISTRUST AND  
SOCIAL SUPPORT IN AZERBAIJAN

DUSTIN S. STOLTZ

A Thesis Submitted in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Department of Sociology

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2014

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SOCIAL CAPITAL AND RELATIONAL WORK: UNCERTAINTY, DISTRUST AND  
SOCIAL SUPPORT IN AZERBAIJAN

DUSTIN S. STOLTZ

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Aaron Z. Pitluck, Chair

Frank D. Beck

Virginia Gill

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D.S.S.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

Can there be social capital without trust or a shared interpretation of norms? A review of the vast body of social capital research within the community and economic development literature would suggest it is unlikely. This literature “rests fundamentally on liberal rational choice theory, which interprets the development process to be driven foremost by the decisions of equally endowed, self-maximizing individuals subscribing to principles of economic rationality” (Rankin 2002:4; see also Fine and Lapavitsas 2004; Kovalainen 2004). Similarly, there is a “prevalence of rational choice suppositions in social capital literature” (Manning 2012:119). This perspective would lead us to be pessimistic of the possibility of social capital in the absence of trust, as trust is considered necessary for social actors to eschew immediate self-interest and offer their own resources (e.g. Brehm and Rahn 1997:1000; Flap 2002:32; Gambetta 2000a:227; Kahan 2002; Newton 2001; Ostrom 2010:21; Rothstein 2000; Tsai and Ghoshal 1998). However, the alternative focuses heavily on governing “norms” which assume a high degree of shared interpretation among participants. While both trust in reciprocity or norms offer some explanations of social capital, this thesis argues that social capital is possible even in situations of distrust and disagreement about shared norms. I draw on Alejandro Portes’ conceptualization of social capital (1998a), and select examples from a

country with low generalized trust. In addition to being nestled in a region synonymous with ethnic conflict and corruption, measures of generalized trust are low in Azerbaijan. Drawing on ethnographic data, I describe two cases of social capital: mourning ceremonies and almsgiving to beggars. In both cases, even when participants lack generalized and personalized trust, or lack certainty regarding their obligations, transfers of resources still unfold.

To account for this, I argue that social ties are culturally constituted processes (Mische 2011), and through *relational work* (Zelizer 2007) actors negotiate the unique rights and obligations toward resources, ultimately defining relationships and structuring ongoing interactions (Fuhse 2009). This paper makes three specific contributions: (1) identifies cases of social capital in a country characterized by low generalized trust, (2) demonstrates that within these cases of social capital - at least some of the time - personalized trust and shared interpretations of norms are absent, and (3) applies the framework of *relational work* to better understand these cases of social capital.

### **Background & Theory**

This study focuses on social ties which provide access to resources. Although defining social capital is heavily debated (Adler and Kwon 2002; Borgatti, Jones, and Everett 1998; DeFilippis 2001; Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998:243; Poder 2011), I adopt Mario Small's concise definition: "resources that inhere in social relations" (2009b:6). This is a more restricted<sup>1</sup> conceptualization compatible with Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu

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<sup>1</sup> Although most social capital theorists would agree with this definition, they often draw a much wider circle. For instance, Putnam gives the definition: "features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" (Putnam 1994:167). Coleman states that social capital "is defined by its function. It is not a single entity, but a

1986, 1990, 2005) and network theories of social capital (e.g. Lin 1999a)<sup>2</sup>. My primary theoretical argument is that social capital is fundamentally part of the culturally constituted processes of tie formation and maintenance, and not simply the result of norm-following agents or rational actors trusting others to reciprocate in pursuit of self-interest. This builds on Foley and Edward (1999:146) who argue that the key to understanding how social relations facilitate access to social resources, requires “a conception of social capital that recognizes the dependence of its ‘use value’ and ‘liquidity’ on the specific social contexts in which it is found.” Following a common division between “structure” and “content” in the literature (e.g. Moran 2005), I first discuss *networks* followed by *trust* as they both relate to social capital. The final section outlines *relational work* (Bandelj 2012; Block 2012; Tilly 2010; Zelizer 2007), the theoretical framework I deploy to describe my selected cases of social capital in Azerbaijan.

### Resources in Networks

As several theorists show, there is an intuitive link between social network analysis and social capital (Borgatti et al. 1998; Burt 2001a, 2001b; Lin 1999a, 1999b; Son and Lin 2008), their main argument being that networks provide access to resources (Inkpen and Tsang 2005; Paxton 1999:89). Social capital is the return on the “investment

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variety of different entities having two characteristics in common: They all consist of some aspect of social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure” (Coleman 1994:302) . The World Bank offers an even broader definition: “social capital is not just the sum of the institutions which underpin a society – it is the glue that holds them together” (2013).

<sup>2</sup> Bourdieu defines social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (Bourdieu 1986:248) and Lin considers social capital “

an individual makes in its relations with others” (Lin 1995:701; cited in Poder 2011:341; see also Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998). Furthermore, this line of theorizing assumes “people will invest and divest in social capital according to the expected value of future support” (Flap 2002:37). Similarly, Coleman states that “actors establish ties purposefully and continue them when they continue to provide benefits” (1988:S105; see also Baker 1990; Frank and Yasumoto 1998; Lin 1999, 2002:19). This reasoning has two shortcomings. First, as Small points out, these theorists uncritically assume tie formation (and perpetuation) results from intentional acts of “investment” (Small 2009b:8–9).

However:

People can make ties when it was their purpose, when they had a purpose other than making ties, when their purpose was nothing but the act itself, and when they had no purpose at all at the time of social interaction (2009b:13).

Second, rational choice theorizing, such as Coleman’s, begins with pre-constituted individuals who begin to interact without prior histories or commitments (Aspers 2009; Connell 2007). However, people are “always already emerging” from social relations (Gergen 2009:xv) with an array of corresponding obligations.

Furthermore, the “mere fact of a tie implies little about the likelihood that social capital effects will materialize” (Adler and Kwon 2002:25). To meet this challenge, network theories of social capital emphasize the role of network “physics” in producing benefits to individuals, e.g. density, structural holes, strength, centrality, closure and distance (Adler and Kwon 2002:23; see Kadushin 2012:27 for an overview). Within this more “formal” approach “content” is overlooked, often intentionally (Erikson 2013:227):

Network research thereby usually pays little attention to the expectations, symbols, schemata, and cultural practices embodied in interpersonal structures:

the meaning structure of social networks. (Fuhse 2009:51; see also McLean 1998; Mutzel 2009; Pachucki and Breiger 2010)

Continuing this relational sociological critique, Ann Mische argues that networks are not merely conduits, but rather “composed of culturally constituted processes” (2000:1; see also White 1992:66–69). Resources, even cash (Zelizer 1989, 1997), are part of the toolkit (Swidler 1986) used to accomplish the (culturally constituted) processes of tie formation and maintenance. Therefore, I argue, social capital must be understood as entwined with the very “meaning structure of social networks.”

### Centrality of Trust

Reviewing several theorists, Kenneth Newton claims “Trust is a—probably *the*—main component of social capital” (2001:202 original emphasis). Both James Coleman (1988:101, 1994:306) and Robert Putnam (1993, 1995a, 2001, 2007) contend that “trust is an essential component of social capital” (Putnam 1994:170; Hariss 2002:18; Kovalainen 2005:74). Kenneth Arrow, one of the attendees of a 1997 World Bank workshop on social capital (Anon n.d.), refers to trust as “the most cited element” at the workshop (Arrow 2000:3). “Leading scholars from various disciplines consider trust in others as the core of social capital” (Delhey, Newton, and Welzel 2011:786), and numerous studies follow suit (Bowles and Gintis 2002; Dincer and Uslaner 2010; Fukuyama 1995a, 2001; Glaeser, Scheinkman, and Soutter 1999; Knack and Keefer 1997; Narayan and Pritchett 1999; Paldam 2000; Rothstein and Uslaner 2011; Uslaner 2004, 1999; Woolcock 1998:153). Documenting the connection with trust *empirically* “is one of the greatest puzzles of social capital research” (Delhey et al. 2011:801; see also Adler and Kwon 2000:101; Tonkiss 2004). However, *theoretically* the social capital

literature relies heavily on rational choice theories of action (Kovalainen 2004, 2005; Manning 2012; Rankin 2002), which assumes a necessary connection between trust and social.

Trust in this study, as in the social capital literature, follows a commonly cited synthesis: “[it] is a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions of another” (Rousseau et al. 1998:395). This is further delineated as *generalized trust*<sup>3</sup> toward anonymous others, and *personalized trust*<sup>4</sup> within unique relationships. For rational choice social capital theorists one or both forms of trust are required because, in the absence of anticipated reciprocity, self-interested actors would not provide resources to others. Therefore, “as there is a time delay between investments and returns, one has to trust the other that he or she will repay the services delivered and not act opportunistically” (Flap 2002:32). Consequently, “individuals must trust prior to making an investment in social capital” (Stickel, Mayer, and Sitkin 2010:306). The following section from *The Handbook of Research on Methods on Trust* further outlines this assumed link between trust and social capital:

...social capital derives from the influence of the individual on other members’ willingness to provide resources in an open exchange situation where the latter accept that they are vulnerable - this is where trust comes in - as reciprocity is not simultaneous. Those providing resources accept this vulnerability under the

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<sup>3</sup> Generalized trust is also similar to, or equated with, horizontal trust, impersonal trust, public trust, social trust, moral trust or thin trust. This is considered distinct from vertical, systemic, political or institutional trust (Sobel 2002:148) which Yamagashi and Yamagashi (1994) refer to as assurance.

<sup>4</sup> Personalized trust can also be based in knowledge of an actors’ perceived social category membership. For instance, people first encountering me may infer age, sex, origin and affiliations based on my face, hair, height, clothing, walk, language and accent. This may impact their trust in me.

assumption that they will get something in return later on. (Blumberg, Pierro, and Roe 2012:62)

Thus, it is argued, “social capital is a capability that arises from a prevalence of trust in a society” (Fukuyama 1995b:26).

This relationship also plays out methodologically as “most social capital research has hitherto measured social capital as generalized trust” (Svendsen and Svendsen 2010:7). Svendsen and Svendsen continue, in the *Handbook of Social Capital*, stating that the question “Generally speaking, do you believe that most people can be trusted or can’t you be too careful in dealing with people?” is social capital’s “most important proxy” (2010:2). Following this reasoning, one study states: “trust *is required* to underpin social capital, so if results showed the presence of social capital without trust, this would call into question our measures employed” (Cooke, Clifton, and Oleaga 2005:1069 emphasis added). This frames a central research question: Can there be social capital without trust or a shared interpretation of norms?<sup>5</sup>

### Relations and Relational Work

I argue that a relational model of action offers a third perspective, where social ties and networks are not merely conduits for self-interested individuals confined by norms, but “composed of culturally constituted processes” (Mische 2000:1). Rather than interactions between otherwise predisposed, fixed or self-subsisting entities, the relational perspective assumes:

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<sup>5</sup> To answer this question, some suggest that “norms” govern interactions in the absence of - specifically interpersonal – trust. However, this offers an explanation for situations in which there is agreement or certainty among participants about pre-constituted ideas. The addition of norms, like trust, only explains some sources of social capital.



...the very terms or units involved in a transaction derive their meaning, significance, and identity from the (changing) functional roles they play within that transaction. The latter, seen as a dynamic, unfolding process, becomes the primary unit of analysis rather than the constituent elements themselves (Emirbayer 1997:287).

From this perspective, the sources and instantiations of social capital are fundamentally part of the culturally constituted processes of on-going tie formation and maintenance, and deriving content and form from this interaction. Within *transactions*, or “bounded, short-term interactions between persons” (Zelizer 2007:37; see also Fuhse 2009:52; Tilly 2000:723), social capital is made tangible either as implied potential or actual resource transfers. For the observer, social capital is never more concrete – that is, a temporal-spatial, social reality – than within transactions involving a transfer of resources by virtue of a social connection.

Central to these transactions is the *relation* actors are accomplishing through transferring resources. *Relations*, as used here, refers to the “meaning structure” of ties or “cultural blueprints” (Fuhse 2009:60) consisting of “named sets of understandings, practices, rights and obligations that link two or more persons” (Zelizer 2007:37). Importantly, these relations must be empirically grounded, rather than “extremely stylized, average, ‘typical’- devoid of specific content, history, or structural location” (Granovetter 1985:486). It is also necessary to avoid inferring the content of relations solely on the duration of a social tie – and by extension, the supposed “durability” of a network<sup>6</sup>. Even fleeting social encounters, such as those between strangers on the street (Goffman 1963), are grounded in a meaningful social relation, which provide coherence

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<sup>6</sup> For a somewhat similar argument see Krippner (2001:785): There is “a broader tendency in economic sociology to conflate the duration of a market relationship with the degree to which it is ‘social.’”

and strategies of action (Swidler 1986). Whenever the accomplishment of any social relation involves the obligation to give or the right to draw specific resources, I argue, this is the materialization of social capital.

A social actor may be expected, or feel compelled to perform a certain relation; however they might suggest an appropriate, alternative relation with different obligations. This ongoing *relational work* is how people differentiate and sustain distinct social ties. Zelizer offers the following introduction to relational work:

For each meaningfully distinct category of social relations, people erect a boundary, mark the boundary by means of names and practices, establish a set of distinctive understandings and practices that operate within that boundary, designate certain sorts of economic transactions as appropriate for the relation, bar other transactions as inappropriate, and adopt certain media for reckoning and facilitating economic transactions within the relation (2007:32).

Variable combinations of the above result in viable “relational packages” (Zelizer 2012:151) with corresponding rights and obligations toward resources. These resources are quite broadly understood, but are particularized as *media*, marking the meaning and boundaries of exchanges. Charles Tilly offers the following illustration:

We watch Mary hand Harry a ten-dollar bill. How can we know whether the monetary transaction is a tip, a bribe, a heartfelt gift, regular compensation for goods or services, fulfillment of an entitlement such as an allowance, or some sort of payment? We can determine this only by ascertaining the relation between Mary and Harry: apartment dweller and doorman, driver and traffic cop, sister and

brother, mother and son, householder and handyman, a so on through a wide variety of possible pairs (1999:42).

In this example, the ten-dollar bill is the resource and the media its form: tip, bribe, gift, etc. Drawing on cultural resources, actors *(re)negotiate the obligations and rights to resources to define and accomplish social ties*, and ultimately make sense of “what is going on here” (Goffman 1986:8). To apply the concept of relational work, for each *category of relations* researchers must identify, (1) boundaries, (2) appropriate practices, including economic exchanges, within those boundaries, (3) barred practices, and (4) media.

The meaning and expectations, and thus the meaning and propriety of economic exchanges, within social ties are constantly reworked as the situation evolves, and opportunities and tensions arise. Often “relational work is highly routinized” but, “there are many settings where the actors cannot rely on a fixed script” (Block 2012:137). It is in this latter case – when situations are uncertain – that relational work excels as an explanatory concept. For instance, Jennifer Haylett (2012) applies the concept to account for rises in egg donation in the United States in light of cultural taboos against the commodification of reproduction. Haylett argues “that the successful normalization of egg donation is facilitated by the relational work done by all parties involved” (2012:242). Donors are partly motivated by compensation at the beginning; however, with the help of staff narratives, donors downplay compensation and construct a fictive recipient to whom they are *donating* their egg. They draw on cultural ideals of motherhood to constitute a meaningful relation in which “what they are doing is

primarily helping another woman.” In another example, Christine Milford and Ronald Weitzer (2012) apply relational work to explain the experiences of clients of sex workers. Although the exchange of sex and intimacy for money may appear to be a simple *quid pro quo* transaction, clients often find themselves in ambiguous situations. Clients struggle to categorize the situation as “counterfeit intimacy” or “emotional authenticity.” While some clients develop romantic relationships with sex workers, other clients struggle with unexpected cravings for increased intimacy (2012:464). Clients note a variety of cues from the sex worker that the relationship is changing, including “such things as the reduction or suspension of hourly fees and a wide variety of ‘off-the-clock’ activities.” The relational perspective describes how people appropriate and piece together cultural resources to make sense of interactions and form viable relational packages.

Following the sociological tradition that attempts to pave a path between the undersocialized and oversocialized views of human activity (e.g. Dépelteau 2008; Granovetter 1985:483; Gronow 2008), I do not consider social actors as rational “fools” (Sen 1977) or cultural and judgmental “dopes” (Garfinkel 1967:67). Rather they are creative problem solvers (Emirbayer and Mische 1998; Zelizer 2012), using their “cultural toolkits” as “resources for constructing organized strategies of action” (Swidler 1986:283). Like all cultural resources, these categories of social relations do not belong to an all-encompassing, unitary field (Swidler 2000:12). They are fragmented and contradictory, and are open for reinterpretation and appropriation (DiMaggio 1997). This enables social actors to engage social reality as competent members, however it also constrains subsequent actions (Tilly 2010:391). These cultural “conventions” are not

controlling norms (in the sense of Coleman 1987), but rather aid in defining the situations and the expectations therein (Whitford 2002:352).

### **Azerbaijan: Bereft of Trust**

As stated previously, generalized trust is the established measure of social capital in the literature, particularly in cross-country comparisons. Many such studies find that post-Soviet societies are epitomized by generalized distrust (Bjørnskov 2006:7; Bowser 2001:8; Fukuyama 2001:18; Khodyakov 2007; Mishler and Rose 2009; Paldam and Svendsen 2000; Raiser 1998; Rose 1994, 2000; Sapsford and Abbott 2006). Thus it is likely that post-Soviet Azerbaijan would share similarly low levels of generalized trust, which is indeed confirmed by previous commentators (Hasanov 2009; Pearce and Kendzior 2012; Roberts and Pollock 2010). These claims are largely supported when we look at current data from the *World Values Survey*, the *Caucasus Barometer*, and the *Social Capital, Media and Gender Survey*. Using one of the most widely used measures of generalized trust (Bjørnskov 2006:2; Delhey and Newton 2003:104) on the *World Values Survey*, the average from 1997 until 2012 of Azerbaijanis stating “most people can be trusted” is just 27 per cent<sup>7</sup>. Moving the “radius of trust” closer (Delhey et al. 2011), in response to the questions “do you trust people in your country?” only 27 per cent stated they did “a lot” or a “fair amount.” Moving even closer, the same question for “town/region” was only 39 per cent (CRRC 2012b). My own field work confirmed this general sentiment. For instance, one afternoon, a group of men in their late twenties

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<sup>7</sup> This would be categorized as low by several studies (Delhey and Newton 2003; Newton 2001; Zak and Knack 1998). For comparison, Putnam (1995a) supports the decline of social capital in the United States by citing the drop in the same measure of trust from 58 per cent in 1960 to 37 per cent in 1993.

working on building a youth center lamented over this lack of generalized trust and their lack of funding. Without grants from foreign institutions they could see no alternative. Their general sense of the local community is that people will not trust them when they ask for donations. Rasham summarized this sentiment:

It is the character (*khasiyyet*), the character of my people. They will not give, they will not donate. The trust (*inan*) has declined since fifteen, twenty years ago. People started to run away with the money.... The people will not give. They don't trust people.

Putnam argues that if personalized trust is concentrated in the family, this leads to “amoral familism,” which exemplifies the “absence of civic virtue” (Putnam 1994:88, referring to Banfield 1958<sup>8</sup>). According to the *Caucasus Barometer*, 96 per cent of Azerbaijanis surveyed stated they trust their family “a lot,” which every interviewee corroborated. The value of family to Azerbaijanis, coupled with poverty, is considered a potential source of dishonesty for one interviewee (Hasad):

[People] trust less now than in the past - with globalization, and all things changing so fast, it is difficult to know each other and it is difficult to take care of your family... People are much poorer and they do everything they can to take care of their family, and maybe you can't trust that person because of it.

Like other post-Soviet societies, Azerbaijan would appear bereft of generalized trust (Fukuyama 2001:18), and therefore lacking social capital (Paldam and Svendsen 2000; Paldam 2000). The brutal history of the Soviet government discovering and punishing dissenters, has turned families, communities and citizens against one another, thereby spreading distrust (Ledeneva 1998). Even worse, the Nagorno-Karabakh<sup>9</sup> conflict

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<sup>8</sup> A heavily criticized work on its own, (see Hariss 2002:15; Muraskin 1974)

<sup>9</sup> The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict began in 1988 over the sovereignty of the mountainous enclave in the southwest of Azerbaijan bordering Armenia. Despite a ceasefire the conflict continues to draw casualties

with Armenia lingers unresolved and the Caucasus continues to be a region synonymous with ethnic conflict (Cheterian 2008; Cornell 1997, 2001; Schurr 2012; Zürcher 2007) and corruption (Bayulgen 2003; Cornell 2010; Enterprise Surveys 2009; European Stability Initiative 2012; Guliyev 2009; Human Rights Watch 2010, 2012; Lussac 2011; Meissner 2011). Given this state of affairs, Azerbaijan would seem to be “stuck in a social trap” (Rothstein and Uslaner 2011:70; 2005) “marked by a high degree of social disorganization – or, in other words, by a lack of social capital” (Coleman 1988:S103). For just these reasons, Azerbaijan is an interesting location to search for social capital. If there are resources embedded in social relations outside of familial ties, and if resources are exchanged in the absence of personalized trust, this warrants even deeper reexamination of the nature of social capital.

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to this day. In-country, recurring television broadcasts reminds all that Azerbaijan is still at war with Armenia (see Goltz 1998; Human Rights Watch/Helsinki 1994; Laitin and Suny 1999; de Waal 2003, 2010; Yamskov 1991)

## CHAPTER II

### METHODOLOGY

This empirical exploration is based on my multi-method ethnographic fieldwork over the course of one year in four communities in Azerbaijan, thus this study joins “the relatively few researchers [who] employ qualitative methods in their studies of social capital” (Bell 2009:631). The bulk of the data are derived from twenty in-depth, semi-structured ethnographic interviews, ongoing discussions with ten informants, three focus groups, passive-observation and participant-observation. I also consulted secondary data from the Azerbaijan State Statistical Committee, the Caucasus Research Resource Center, the World Bank, various public documents and news sources. As demonstrated in the previous section, a country level, survey-based view of Azerbaijan would lead us to assume a lack of social capital. However, within a short time on the ground it became apparent that numerous activities could be classified as social capital. My task became reconciling this lack of generalized trust with what appeared to be social capital.

My methods were informed by the conventions of grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss 1990; Glaser and Strauss 2009). Describing two socio-cultural situations from the native’s point of view is central to my argument, which warranted ethnographic methods (Spradley, 1979:3). As social ties exist in concrete *transactions* and as intersubjective and subjective *expectations* (for an overview of this distinction see Fuhse 2009:52–53), I used a wide range of methods to capture multiple perspectives while also observing these



situations of social support as they unfolded. Living with two families and working in a local nonprofit and a couple elementary schools, I developed close relationships with many people in different settings. I was able to participate in the everyday activities of family life, which included household labor, entertainment, shopping and cooking. In the community, invitations to have tea or lunch were very common, even from strangers I met while shopping or traveling; our mutual curiosity often sparked very informative conversations. I was also invited to attend many ceremonies and celebrations, wedding parties, birthdays, graduations, funerals and holidays. During the day I jotted field-notes (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011:84–104) about my activities and encounters, which I expanded into full, typed notes during the evening when possible. These notes generally followed the chronological order of events in the day, which I divided by location. As my fieldwork progressed, I began to code relevant segments of these notes and record my own emerging interpretations following the constant comparative method (Glaser 1965).

### **Research Setting**

Azerbaijan is a country of over nine million inhabitants, occupying a small area of about the size of the state of Maine. The country's tremendously rich diversity in geography results in an array of livelihoods, the largest sector being agriculture which employs 38% of the population. However in the last decade the economy in terms of GDP has been dominated by the growing oil industry, which employs about 12% of Azerbaijanis (CIA 2011) and resulting in a rising GDP since 2006. Azerbaijan is now considered a middle income country, with a medium level of inequality (World 2011; but see Ersado 2006). The vast majority of the population (over 90%) considers themselves ethnically Azerbaijanis (or Azeri), and also the majority (93.4%) are Muslim, with the

majority, Shi'ite<sup>10</sup>. However, the country is considered secular, and many people are not strict adherents<sup>11</sup>.

During my first three months in Azerbaijan, I lived with an Azeri-Lezghi family in a suburb of the capital city of Baku where I was immersed in an entirely Azerbaijani-speaking environment. My host family consisted of an elementary teacher who was a widow with two sons; both had four year degrees, but were unemployed at the time. For the remaining time, I lived with an Azeri-Avar family in a medium-sized town in the Northwestern regions, with an income at the median level for the region<sup>12</sup>. This family also consisted of an elementary teacher who was a widow with a daughter and son; both attending college. These northwestern regions are often combined to form the Sheki-Zagatala Economic Zone in census data. The Greater Caucasus Mountains form the northeastern border of the Economic Zone with the Russian Federation of Daghestan. The Alazani River forms the southwestern border with the Republic of Georgia. While the entire area is just over eight thousand square kilometers it is highly diverse with a number of different ethnic groups, and a total population of 575,300 (State Statistical Committee 2013). The eastern edge of the Economic Zone sits 180 kilometers from Baku, even closer is T'bilisi, Georgia and South Ossetia to the west, Grozny, Chechnya

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<sup>10</sup> Azerbaijanis are predominately Shi'ite, however, in the northern regions most are Sunni. Under religious denominations seventy-one per cent listed "Islam" with only a total 9.8 per cent marking Shi'ite or Sunni (Caucasus Research Resource Center 2012a). The northern regions are also home to a notable Salafist group.

<sup>11</sup> For instance, on the *Caucasus Barometer*, only 3.6 per cent stated they had any level of involvement with "religious groups" (Caucasus Research Resource Center 2012a) While, only 12.1 per cent stated they attended a religious service at least once a month. The lack of centralized coordinating religious institutions and the 'domestication' of Islam is largely a legacy of Soviet era policy (Dragadze 1993).

<sup>12</sup> The average nominal wage for the Economic Zone is 195.20 AZN, which is the second lowest in the country; the first being the regions surrounding the disputed territory currently occupied by the Armenian military, at 193.10 AZN.

and Ingushetia to the northwest, and Makhachkala, Daghestan to the north. This location offers an even more interesting case for the study of social capital, as in recent years, each of these cities and regions have been variously described as one of the most dangerous places in Russia, Europe and the World (BBC News 2007; Ash 2011; Dzutsev 2011; Markedonov 2013; Mydans 2011; Schlotterbeck 2012).

### **Informants & Participants**

As a development worker and English teacher I developed on-going relationships with ten informants, four males and six females. These informants lived and worked in the three communities from which I draw my primary data. They represent diverse socio-economic and ethnic groups in the region, which afforded me comparative perspectives on life in Azerbaijan. Each informant was active in helping me gain *entrée* and develop *rapport* within the communities I studied and worked. As concepts emerged from my data, I discussed relevant findings with my informants to assure I was gaining a native's view. In three communities in the northwestern regions, accompanied by my respective informants, I went door-to-door introducing myself as a teacher, development worker and researcher. This, in turn, allowed me to create a "situation analysis" or an "ethnographic map," to identify key demographics in the surrounding communities. Drawing a purposive sample (Coyne 1997; Tongco 2007) from this map of households, I attempted to gather a broad cross-section of families – also referred to as "maximum variation sampling" (Coyne 1997). Accompanied by my informants, I approached these selected households about being interviewed, and gained consent from each participant. Additionally, I recruited participants from English conversation classes for three focus groups. Each group met twice a month for six months, with roughly eight to ten

participants per meeting. With the safety of participants in mind, all names have been changed, and locations are only vaguely referenced to further obscure the participants' identities.

### **Interviews & Discussion Groups**

My in-depth interviews included: four households in a rural town, mostly ethnic Georgian and Muslim<sup>13</sup>; three households in a small, semi-isolated mountain town, predominately Caucasian-Avar and Muslim, and six households in a regional center, the majority Azeri and Muslim. These interviews were conducted in Azerbaijani, Georgian, Avarski, Russian and English<sup>14</sup>. I attempted to recruit everyone in the household however some opted out or were not present<sup>15</sup>. While, at the onset I anticipated difficulty talking with women, this proved not to be the case<sup>16</sup>. The semi-structured questions drew on the work of Spradley (1979) at the onset and focused on “what people do when bad things happen.” Themes emerging from previous interviews informed subsequent interview questions. I wrote notes for each interview, and all but two interviews were digitally recorded. I first created an outline of each recording by themes, and transcribed and translated sections which were relevant as the research progressed. Additionally, the focus groups aided in cross-checking findings, reassuring proper translations of key ideas

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<sup>13</sup> The Georgians in this study are predominantly Muslim and are known by Christian-Georgians, and self-described, as *Ingiloy*. However, some linguists group all the Georgian (Kartvelian) speaking populations in Azerbaijan as *Ingiloy*, regardless of religion (Clifton et al. 2005; Gerber 2007).

<sup>14</sup> Interpreters helped with Georgian, Avarski and Russian interviews, and to verify my own Azerbaijani translations (Bujra 2006). The most common words and phrases to describe relevant themes are used in this paper, and are predominantly Azerbaijani.

<sup>15</sup> Only one person agreed to be interviewed, and then stopped the interview before it began.

<sup>16</sup> One husband agreed to allow his wife to be interviewed, and later decided otherwise. In contrast, in two cases men opted out of being interviewed as they felt their wife would represent his views.

and offered “folk models” to interpret emerging themes (Agar and Macdonald 1995; Morgan 1996).

### **Case Selection & Analysis**

My initial focus was what households do when bad things happen. In interviews and discussions, participants discussed many forms of social support (formal and informal). In my field notes and interviews I specifically coded instances in which resources were exchanged in the absence of immediate reciprocity. It became apparent early on that relying on informal social support was a common feature of daily life, even though people were distrusting of others and spoke often about their distrust. Using the logic of theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss 2009), I selected two such cases which were relevant to the subject of this article and also demonstrated theoretical saturation (Small 2009a). More importantly, in both cases I was also able to not only discuss the (inter)subjective expectations of the situations, but also observe, and to some extent, participate in each. The first case examines a “typical” form of social capital – giving at mourning ceremonies. In Azerbaijan, mourning ceremonies are one of the largest gatherings of a household’s social network – second only to wedding parties – bringing together even the most distant ties. Indeed, even people with ill-feelings are likely to put aside their grievances to pay their last respects. The second case considers a rather heterodox situation as social capital – giving to beggars. Although this social tie is situationally fleeting, it is culturally durable. This case was selected to apply a similar reading as that of the mourning ceremony and demonstrate the extension of my argument to a case of high uncertainty and low trust. For both cases, I first determine whether social capital is present, followed by a discussion of the presence of trust and certainty.

Lastly, I use the framework of relational work as outlined by Zelizer (2007) to organize and interpret the situation.

## CHAPTER III

### ANALYSIS

#### **Case I: Social Capital of the Dead and Bereaving**

Death is emotional, spiritual and social, but also economic, in that it occasions the exchanges and transfers of resources. In Azerbaijan a person's passing is honored by several days of mourning and remembrance, each referred to as a *yas*<sup>17</sup>. While the burial (*defn*) occurs as soon as possible, remembering and mourning involves several ceremonies over the course of the next forty to fifty-two days. Hosting several *yaslar*<sup>18</sup> is considered obligatory, but creates an economic burden for a family that has already suffered. Attending a *yas*, on the other hand, involves a transaction where time and resources flow toward the bereaving family, in part, to lessen this burden emotionally, spiritually and financially. Participants stress the moral obligation to help bereaving families and honor the dead through this transaction. Importantly, people should attend and offer money with sincerity, "from the heart" (*ureyindan*). High costs associated with funerals are common elsewhere in the world (Cleaver 2005; Mitford 2011), and many communities have informal arrangements which attempt to offset these costs (e.g. Fafchamps and Lund 2003:28; Johnson 1974; Ngwenya 2003; Rutherford 1996:9). The

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<sup>17</sup> *Yas*: literally means mourning, and usually are held on Thursdays. In only this case, "Thursday" would be referred to as "*adina*", as opposed to the formal, "*cuma akhshami*" or the informal "*dordunju-gun*" ("fourth day")

<sup>18</sup> The plural form of *yas*

resources provided in this situation is considered a quintessential case of the materialization of social capital: resources flow toward the bereaving family and the dead by virtue of social relations (Dercon et al. 2006; Grassman and Whitaker 2007; Kuehnast and Dudwick 2004:72–74; Narayan and Pritchett 1999; Ngwenya 2003; Roth 2000)<sup>19</sup>. In one especially germane example, economic anthropologist Erik Bähre, arguing against romanticized views of social support, describes neighbors attending the funeral of a reviled person. Although “respect and disgrace were intermingled at the wake” (2007:45), many people attended and even gave money, albeit only a little. Bähre’s example, and the case I will discuss shortly, supports the argument that the content of social capital is not dependent on trust and goodwill. In the paragraphs that follow, I first discuss how the *yas* involves social capital, I then consider the role of trust within these social relations, and lastly I apply the framework of relational work toward understanding the nuances of the *yas*.

The *yas* involves the materialization of social capital in two ways: toward the dead and toward the bereaving. The manifest purpose of the *yas* is honoring the deceased. The deceased accrues social ties with respective histories over his or her lifetime, and the *yas* is one of the largest concrete interactions of this amassed social network, often compelling even the weakest ties to attend. The social capital within those ties is contextually changed by the logic of the *yas*, which “purchases” a slightly different set of

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<sup>19</sup> For instance, in a reference to funeral rituals in Ghana, Bonsu and Belk (2003:51) describe one women’s plight in the face of increasingly costly displays of status at funerals: “Akyia, who had little economic or global cultural capital, was able to compete successfully using local cultural capital (plate of lemons, skillful address of audiences, local cloth) and social capital (her local support network and the numbers who turned out for the funeral).”



obligations and media, and does so *after* the deceased is no longer a corporeal actor<sup>20</sup>. Typically, *yaslar* reoccur over the course of a month and a half, and it is not uncommon for the family to hold another event at the anniversary of a death<sup>21</sup>. Furthermore, especially close friends and relatives might feel compelled “to keep the *yas*” (*yasa saxlamaq*). When keeping the *yas*, people will not go to weddings or host celebrations in their yards for up to a year, men may refuse to shave, and will forgo enjoyable activities such as listen to music or dancing. The bereaving family anticipates the social capital of the dead, and can reasonably expect many people to come to their home to mourn and offer respect (*hormet elenmek*). The meal provided for guests by the bereaving family, referred to as the *ehsan*, is considered closely akin to a religious offering for the deceased. As such, instead of saying “thank you” (*saq olun*<sup>22</sup>), guests will say “*Allah qebul elesin,*” roughly “May God accept (this food).” The important thing to note is that the *yas* is centered on the obligations within the social ties with the deceased, and thus *the social capital of the dead*.

However, many will also attend as a result of their connection with the bereaving family. Those considered a member of the mourning family often live together, generally

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<sup>20</sup> Often overlooked in the social capital literature is that relations and corresponding obligations continue even after there is no longer a self-interested ego. This is also true in the economic literature: “In most economic models, death is simply a known point at which the utility-maximizing machine, of the human entity, ceases to exist” (Cameron 2002:41). Many sociologists and anthropologists have noted the nuanced obligations bound up in the unique relations between living and dead (Ardener and Burman 1996:117; Bonsu and Belk 2003; Kwon 2007; Metcalf and Huntington 1991; Mitford 2011; Seale 1998:69; Watson 1988:9; Weiss 1997; Woolsey Biggart 2001:143).

<sup>21</sup> These are the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup>, and 40<sup>th</sup> day after death. The 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 40<sup>th</sup> are usually the largest<sup>21</sup>. In some regions – particularly the northeastern regions – a smaller *yas* is held on the 52<sup>th</sup> as well. Participants consider the importance of the 3<sup>rd</sup> day a legacy of Islam, the 40<sup>th</sup> of Christianity and the 52<sup>nd</sup> of Zoroastrianism.

<sup>22</sup> Literally, “be well”

in the same household (*teserrufat*) or courtyard (*heyet*). The nearest family members – usually spouse, sibling or children – clean, prepare and wrap the body, which is taken to the burial site by the closest male relatives, on the day of death if possible. Before the burial begins, an *imam* or *mullah* oversees the burial ritual, offers the proper prayers and reads from the *Quran*<sup>23</sup>. The closest male relative drops a handful of dirt onto the body. This act is the final labor close relatives are expected to do; from here others *should* take care of the preparations for each *yaslar*. In terms of economic burden, providing food for guests is one of the largest an Azerbaijani family will experience<sup>24</sup>. All who are compelled to attend are considered a guest, and in Azerbaijan, being hospitable (*qonaqperver*) is immensely important. As one interviewee stated (Elshan) “our first aim is to greet people well... if people come, we need to feed them well, if this problem is solved, we wouldn’t need other people to help.” Visitors enter the yard of the deceased and separate by gender. The oldest and closest males to the deceased sit at the gate of the property, greeting other male visitors. These male visitors stop a few paces away while each greeter stands, holding their hands to the sky and saying a prayer before brushing their face with both hands as if to wash. After which, the male visitors offer condolences to each, usually by saying “May God comfort<sup>25</sup>” and shaking hands, hugging or kissing on the cheek. Afterward, the visitors proceed to mourn or sit at a table where they reminisce with others and are served the *ehsan*.

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<sup>23</sup> This strong connection between Islamic practices and funerals in Azerbaijan is attributed to Soviet policy which only allowed overt religious displays to honor the dead, but were restricted elsewhere (Grant 2011; Kotecha 2006).

<sup>24</sup> This is second to the immense expenses involved in weddings (*toylar*) (Yalçin-Heckmann 2001, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> “*Allah rehmet elesin*”

An important contemporary public debate occurring in Azerbaijan is the use of funerals to demonstrate prestige (Bayramova 2001; Philomena 2011). In the northwestern regions, and among participants, this was considered an illegitimate use of the *yas*. Despite the local social pressure to keep funerals modest, providing the *ehsan* is still difficult for most families. While, some use catering companies to prepare and serve food, the rural *yas* usually involves neighbors and friends coming together to cook and serve. Some donate food, others *samovars*<sup>26</sup>, pots and plates. To offset this burden nearly every attendee donates cash – about five to twenty manat, but up to a hundred manat is not uncommon. This tradition of offering cash at a funeral is considered widespread in the Caucasus, not unique to Azerbaijanis or among Muslims. Yochanan Altman, while living with recent Georgian migrants to Israel during the early 1980's noted:

On the occasion of the first Georgian funeral I attended in Ashkelon, I was amazed to see the grandson of the deceased being given cash donations by mourners and recording them in a small notebook (Altman 1983:135).

Interviewees pointed out that, while the tradition of giving money at the *yas* certainly occurred in the past, the practice expanded considerably in the region after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which they attributed to rising poverty. This relationship is curious, as the more who attend, the more food must be purchased and the more money required. Whether this money was enough to pay for the *yaslar* was contested. Some interviewees were certain their community provided enough and other regions did not, while some

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<sup>26</sup> A *samovar* is a special, often decorated, water boiler. A small fire and chimney form the center of the container, and a small kettle of concentrated tea is set atop the chimney to brew. Tea drinking is an all-day, everyday affair, and the *samovar* was for most the superior preparation mechanism.

interviewees felt the opposite to be true. In either case, focusing only on whether the economic transfer is adequate would fail to capture the significance of this exchange.

Typically, a male – acting as a *de facto* representative of a household – offers a small amount of money, which is recorded in a small notebook. Females also give money, usually straight to the matriarch, which is not recorded. In some cases a person's own economic situation mediates this obligation. For instance, participants referred to a few poor families that still offered condolences, even without money. They noted it being honorable that these families did not use being poor as an excuse to avoid a *yas*. Nonetheless, nearly every interviewee had borrowed money from other people in order to offer that money at the *yas*. An older retired man offered a proverb to explain why: “If a house is burning, and you pour one glass of water on it, it helps. But if you dump a lot of water the next day, it doesn't help.” In this regard, the exchanges at the *yas* are an example of social capital: resources flow from the guests to the hosts by virtue of social ties with the deceased and bereaving.

In many cases, the obligation to attend and offer money often corresponds with intimacy and trust toward the deceased and bereaving. However, as the *yas* brings even the most distant social ties, it is not uncommon for attendees to also hold feelings of distrust and contempt, or somewhere in between. Although the commitment to “give from the heart” is nearly ubiquitous among participants, not all intentions are thought to be so pure. Often, the moral obligation to help the bereaving is at odds with this equally important commitment to sincerity. Most interviewees agreed that certainly there are people who did not truly want to give, but did so anyway. Referring to such a person with disapproval, one interviewee (Hasad) offered the analogy: “there is no forest without a

wolf.” A funeral is also a time when people set aside hard feelings and past transgressions, at least for the moment. When explicitly asked if people would still attend a *yas* when they did not trust the deceased, my informant (Shalale) stated:

Yes, some people still go. It depends... what was the connection (*elege*) with that person. For instance, if you were close before, you will still go. But, if you really do not like them ... you have a lot of hate, you won't go.

Later she added, after consulting her mother, if harboring feelings of distrust or hate toward the deceased, “[attending] would mean, ‘I forgive you, may God forgive you’<sup>27</sup>, or [they] might say ‘I have paid my debt, as God has instructed.’<sup>28</sup> Thus offering one manner in which people are able to honor their moral commitment to the *yas*, while reconciling their feelings of distrust or even hate. Bähre (2007:48), offers a similar sentiment from a speech at a wake in South Africa: “Even if you have fights or other problems, this is the time to put that aside because you are confronted with a funeral.” Two families I observed questioned if they were really obligated to attend an upcoming *yas*. In one case, the matriarch of the family used her age and health, the distance and the fact that the deceased was *only* related by marriage to justify avoiding. Although adamant that she did not want to attend, she suggested her daughter go instead. The daughter protested, stating that the bereaving household was “*medeniyyetsiz*”<sup>29</sup> a common insult indicating the family was unscrupulous. She attempted to strengthen her case by inferring that this *yas* would probably be ostentatious, which, she argued, went against the *Quran*.

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<sup>27</sup> “*Men seni bagishlayiram, qoy Allah seni bagishlasin*”

<sup>28</sup> “*Men oz borcumdan kecdim, Allah bilen meslehetdi*”

<sup>29</sup> Literally: “without culture.”

The daughter went regardless with cash and food, making the journey from the regional center to a town an hour away.

The deceased – as a general category – is morally-in-need, regardless of their status. As one interviewee (Hasad) describes, “it doesn’t matter who died, if [his/her] family is rich or not.” Another interviewee (Arshad) stated similarly: “It doesn’t matter if [he/she] lives good or bad; [he/she] is poor or rich. It’s necessary. It’s law. It’s people’s law, not state law. It’s unwritten.” The bereaving family is also morally-in-need, which means the bereaving household’s wealth, record of reciprocating and trustworthiness are not considered viable reasons to avoid offering condolences or giving money. In one small, *Ingiloy* town specifically, interviewees expected nearly every family in the surrounding area to attend. One interviewee (Elshan) estimated that there are 780 households in his area, and approximately 700 would give. “In general,” another interviewee (Arshad) stated “we feel indebted to the family who has lost someone, we feel we owe them... it is necessary to give.” While some stated that *other people* might avoid a *yas*, they all stated they personally would go regardless of their personal feelings, unless they could offer a legitimate excuse. For instance, distance in terms of time and difficulty to travel to the *yas* might be used to opt out. Interestingly, although not attending would still – in a sense – offset the burden of the *ehsan*, no one considered this a viable (moral) justification for avoiding a *yas*.

When discussing the possibility of someone who ought to attend, but did not, one informant (Raghima) laughed and said “We all know who they are!” When asked if he would go to their *yas*, he responded, “Yes, of course.” Although people discussed *others* avoiding, all interviewees agreed they would go to this defector’s *yas*, regardless of their

deviance. One interviewee, in response to this, said “We don’t separate people from each other. We help all.” Even if one family does not deserve it, or is not in need, attending and offering money is necessary. The reasons provided point to a complex history that is mostly outside the scope of this study. Quoting a *mullah* from the same northwestern regions, anthropologist Bruce Grant argues that the *yas* was one of few forms of expression not repressed during the Soviet era:

You never went to a mosque for services. You wouldn’t even think about it. The only time you made yourself known to officials was when someone died. It was as if death was the only real proof we had that our faith existed, according to the government. If people didn’t actually die, it’s as if God wouldn’t even exist, that’s how it used to be. No one would touch you if you showed up for funeral prayers, it was as if the government was afraid of what would happen if people couldn’t bury their dead in the way they had become used to (Grant 2011:661; see also Kotecha 2006).

As a result of this unique history, anthropologist Farideh Heyat argues, “for Azeri society... [the] *yas* has come to constitute the most salient expression of community solidarity and confirmation of ethnic/national/religious identity” (Heyat 2005:113). For these reasons, among others, most interviewees felt the *yas* – as an institution – should be valued for itself. Furthermore, all interviewees and informants believed giving money was a necessary part of sustaining this institution; and, more importantly that no family should struggle to provide the *ehsan* at the *yas*. One older interviewee (Hasad) offered a summation of others’ feelings, “maybe if we lived in a place where everyone has enough money, or everyone has [funeral] insurance, we can stop this tradition [of offering money].” Another interviewee (Ruslan) agreed that the tradition might go away, but stressed the importance of fairness: “if people were insured, and the insurance company helps some people, and doesn’t help others, then the tradition will not go away.”

Participants often wrestled with reconciling these moral commitments with the content of

their social ties to the dead and the bereaving. Although sometimes problematized by distrust, attending and offering money did not require interpersonal trust.

A *yas* is a social situation in which several relations are accomplished, each reframed by the death. The family and the visitors offer a variety of media – prayers, lamentations, flowers, food, cash and labor – all in the act of giving condolences (*bashsaghligi vermek*) and offering respect (*hormet elenmek*). Participants also felt that items offered at the *yas* should be given in even numbers (contra Guliyeva 2011:140)<sup>30</sup>. In addition to the specifications of viable resources, participants also “designate[d] certain sorts of economic transactions as appropriate for the relation” (Zelizer 2012:142). For instance, when “giving” cash Azerbaijanis do not use the verb “to give” (*vermek*). It is rude for the occasion. Instead, they use the verb “to put” (*qoymaq*). As was explained to me, giving (*vermek*) is directed toward an actor, while putting (*qoymaq*) is directed toward a place. Sometimes people will use the more obscuring: “to be caused to write money” (*pul yazdirmaq*). Rather than saying, “I gave money at a *yas*,” they would say “I was caused to write money (for a *yas*).” This linguistically and symbolically marks the boundaries of the transaction from other types of mutual support (*garshiligli yardim*). In turn, the boundaries of this transaction, and the media involved in *bashsaghligi vermek*, aid in defining the relation between the dead, bereaving and those who *put* money. However it is also through these transactions and the accomplishment of the various relations that the *yas*, as an institution is (re)produced and delineated.

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<sup>30</sup> Offering gifts was especially common in everyday life and I was instructed by friends and informants that I should bring odd numbers for most events, as even numbers are associated with the *yas* and cemeteries. For this reason, one informant (Shelale) stated, “Most people prefer odd numbers, and some people even count your sneezes.”



As Zelizer (2012:142) notes, relational work also involves “bar[ing] other transactions as inappropriate.” This holds true for those who attend a *yas*, as the cash *put* is not a gift (*heddiye*). Putting cash at the memorial (*yasa pulu qoymaq*) is merely a form of help (*komek*). Specifically, this help is expected to cover the expenses of the *yas*, primarily the food<sup>31</sup>. Furthermore, the manner in which the social capital of the dead is converted is restricted. As stated previously, participants felt strongly that funerals should be modest, despite rumors of flamboyant *yaslar* elsewhere in the country. For instance, in some regions crying is known to be very raucous and several interviewees recounted hearing about families paying for “professional criers.” This was viewed as an illegitimate conversion of economic capital to acquire prestige. A point argued in a news article by the president of the Azerbaijani Sociological Association, Rufat Guliyev: “Lavish funerals are not a sign of respect towards the deceased – people actually just want to demonstrate to others that they have a certain status” (quoted in Philomena 2011). In the northwestern regions, informants and interviewees referred to such displays of status with strong disgust. “We mourn for the dead (*oluler*) and they mourn for the debt (*borj*)” one informant (Raghima) noted. Informal rules surfaced in these regions, such as the funeral table should not have Fanta or Coca-Cola, only tea. Interviewees commonly stated that a passer-by should be able to distinguish between a funeral and a wedding. In addition to only tea, the *ehsan* is restricted to a few local meals<sup>32</sup> and only

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<sup>31</sup> While it is assumed that the family will use the money to pay for the cost of the *yas*, the only restriction offered was that this money should not be used to purchase alcohol.

<sup>32</sup> This includes: dolma (either grape leaf or cabbage), ash (a rice dish also called *plov* or *pilaf*), a vegetable soup or meat soup, cucumbers, tomatoes, bread, a few candies and halva (a sweet hard candy made with sesame flour).

one serving is provided for each guest, unlike the constant refills at a wedding party. Thus, obligations which partly constitute the social ties with the dead can be so specific as to exclude Coca-Cola, but expect hot tea from a *samavor*.

Another important aspect of relational work is the distinct practices and understandings that facilitate the transfer of resources, while linking the distinctiveness of the relations involved. At each *yas*, a “special table” or “accounting table” is set up out of the way of arriving guests. Seated at this table is a male friend or relative, acting as “accountant.” At the funeral, cash is collected in a jar, which is wrapped in a bag to obscure the amount, and the accountant uses a small paperback notebook to record who gave, and how much<sup>33</sup>. Ideally, this money is given by one male of a household, usually referred to as the *boyuk*<sup>34</sup> and is generally the patriarch of the *nesil*<sup>35</sup>. Most often, the full name of this patriarch is recorded regardless of who actually offers the money. Although, depending on the social ties involved, others in the house may represent the family or even give additional amounts. Specifically, if the *boyuk* of the *nesil* does not know the deceased or the family at all – such as their children’s workmate – they will not go or *put* money. Work places will often hold a collection, where the closest or the most available person brings the entire amount, in which case the work place’s name is recorded. At the *yaslar* I attended, this special table was always located on the men’s side of the yard and this transaction only involved men.

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<sup>33</sup> At the wedding cash is usually collected in a suitcase, and the amounts are also recorded in a similar fashion.

<sup>34</sup> Literally translated as “big,” but in this context it refers to an elder.

<sup>35</sup> The patrilineal family

Recording the amounts and the names is important to link the amount *put* to a concrete relation. As an older interviewee stated (Hasad), without the notebook “that person whom we help...maybe he will see that 100 manat [from the poor man] and that 10 manat [from the rich man], maybe he will assume the 100 manat is from the rich man.” On one occasion, when I gave money at a *yas*, I noticed the recorder wrote “*Amerikali qonaqi*,” or “American guest” next to my name to account for my offering. Interviewees were uncomfortable when I suggested people might use the notebook to hold others accountable<sup>36</sup>. Rather, as the notebook is a tangible reminder of the extent of one’s social network, they implied the family might read it to feel supported in a time of emotional need. Furthermore, not all that is given is recorded. Interviewees noted that most women will give a smaller amount of five or ten manat<sup>37</sup>. Contrary to the somewhat removed manner that men *put* money in the jar away from the mourners, women exchanged money from their own hands directly into the hands of the bereaving women of the family. An informant (Shelale) described the exchange as often obscured by another action, such as hugging or kissing. The transfer is not very visible – often the banknotes are rolled up, and rather than bringing the exchange to eye level, is kept low, near the hip<sup>38</sup>. In this situation, it would be very inappropriate for the recipient to count the money in front of the giver, in stark contrast to the money written in the notebook.

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<sup>36</sup> This was surprising as people often joked about others doing this in the case of giving at wedding parties.

<sup>37</sup> No one could offer an estimate for how much was given by women – and I could not observe – but most assumed it was significant.

<sup>38</sup> This encounter at the *yas* was described to me by female informants. However, I witnessed a similar exchange when a group of women offered money to a family whose home had recently been demolished by

While avoiding a *yas* directly challenges the moral commitment as outlined previously, refusing money from either the men or women is equally troublesome. Also note by Altman (1983), refusal is regarded with suspicion, even if the family is wealthy. Refusing money, in this circumstance, is sometimes taken as a critique of the overall tradition, but more importantly it challenges the definition of relation between the giver and the receiver. If someone offers a transaction through a particular media and it is refused, it contests the expectations which mark the relation. The participants must reconsider the question: “What is going on here?” Categorizing resources exchanged is a feature of most transactions, and certainly the meaning of resources can remain in a “categorical limbo” long after the transaction is completed. For instance, if someone *puts* more than expected, the recipients will be compelled to ask, “Why?” Using intermediaries if necessary, the participants will attempt to clarify the relation which makes sense of the transaction and media. That is, they search for or construct an account (Orbuch 1997; Tilly 2006). For instance, the giver might be hoping for an equally large reciprocation. On the other hand, they might be demonstrating their own assumption of intimacy and closeness. A more elaborate story may be required to explain the misaligned transaction. This is not unlike using “techniques of neutralization” to explain “deviant behavior” after the fact (Sykes and Matza 1957). A final option, offered by an informant (Shelale), the giver might be offering it “*prosto komek uchun*” (just for help), with no implied obligations. The act is pure altruism. In either case, if the transaction and media

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an earthquake. The cash was exchanged between closed hands and obscured by a hug and kisses on either cheek.

is misaligned to the assumed relation, the participants must engage in explicit relational work to come to an understanding.

While kinship forms the core, the *yas* demonstrates that social connections with obligations toward the deceased often reach far and wide. As stated previously, the *yas* is one of the largest gatherings of a household's social network. It logically follows that these network ties are "ordered" by several different categories of association (Fuhse 2009). School and work are primary locations where friendships are formed, often drawing people out of otherwise confined communities. For instance, agricultural workers prefer to work in distant communities to prevent any potential resentment caused by bargaining over the price of their labor (Yalçın-Heckmann 2011:119). This, along with non-agricultural work that required travel, often created spaces for diverse ties to form. Two interviewees (Arshad and Hasad), describing working seasonally in Baku, always attempted to make a friend on the eleven-hour train ride to the capital. Close friends were very often considered "fictive kin" (Ebaugh and Curry 2000) even using the familial language to define the social tie. Within this ethnically diverse region, participants also prided themselves on their tolerance for other groups. However, spatial segregation, reinforced by policies which privatized land based on registered family ties, reinforced networks of similar ethnic ancestry. Although, depending on which lineage a person chose to acknowledge at a given moment, people could be many ethnicities. Another, perhaps even more important, signifier of solidarity is the strong sense of place.

Azerbaijan is well-known for the importance of “*yerlibazlik*<sup>39</sup>” or regionalism (Altstadt 2003:11; Bolukbasi 2011:7; Ergun 2010:71; Guliyev 2005:401; Heyat 2005:185; Kerimova 2009:82; Olivier 2005:202; de Waal 2003:97). One informant (Aysel) described this as: “you see someone in the street in Baku and you don’t know them, but you help them because you are both from the same place. That is *yerlibazlik*.” Just like ethnicity, family and friendship, a shared region could be “activated” and boundaries transformed to legitimate or challenge a particular relation. Each of these various relations is accomplished at, and through, the *yas*. Through relational work participants attempt to reconcile conflicting moral commitments, personal histories, and various categories of membership, to form viable “relational packages.”

### **Case II: Almsgiving without Trust**

The beggar-giver form a relation – a “named [set] of understandings, practices, rights and obligations that link two or more persons” (Zelizer 2007:37) – involving the transfer of resources by virtue of that particular relation. Portes (1998:7) recognizes almsgiving as a case of social capital (Portes 1998b:7). The relation becomes momentarily concrete within a “street encounter” (Lee and Farrell 2003) when one actor solicits “a voluntary unilateral gift in a public place” (Dean 1999:85). This relation is one among several potentials that can be invited and accomplished on the street (Lankenau 1999). Central to performing this particular relation, however, is the flow of resources from the passer-by to the beggar. The “unilateral gift” indicates “what is going on” – whether the passer-by refuses or not (Travers 1999) – but, importantly, it is shrouded in

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<sup>39</sup> Also called *yerbazlik* and is more directly translated as “localism.” *Yer* means earth, soil and place. The suffix *-li* connotes origin, thus *yerli* translates as local, both referring to a location and a person.

broader cultural concepts and moral commitments that are invoked by particular practices. Despite strong distrust for beggars and moral ambiguity surrounding giving, people do give often. In Azerbaijan only seventeen per cent said they “made a contribution to charity in the last six months,” and less than a third donated money “for religious purposes.” *However, seventy-five per cent gave money to a beggar in the last six months*<sup>40</sup>. In northwestern Azerbaijan the only beggars are an ethnic group, the *Qarachi*<sup>41</sup>, who most consider to be dishonest and potentially undeserving. My own observations confirmed that a large portion of people do give when encountering the begging *Qarachi*, despite distrusting them.

In the northwestern region of Azerbaijan, a common sight at the entrance to the regional *bazaars* (large open-air markets) and *avtovagzals* (bus stations), are the *Qarachi*. There were nine to eleven that traveled from a remote part of a neighboring region, to the larger transportation hubs via bus on most days of the week. They spend the day asking passers-by for a little money until the last bus takes them home. I encountered them continually throughout my weekly routine either shopping in the *bazar* or traveling by bus. On four occasions, I specifically observed them and their interactions with others at

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<sup>40</sup> The Caucasus Barometer (2012a). Separating respondents by gender showed that males and females gave at nearly identical rates. Separated by age they give at close to identical rates: 18-35 year olds (75%), 36-55 year olds (77%) and 56 and up (69%). The northwestern region, separated from the rest of the country, is also 75%.

<sup>41</sup> *Qara* is the color “black” and the suffix “chi” is used to denote an occupation, as in *chorekchi* (baker). A person is “*qarachi*” if they engage in “*qara ish*” or “black work” which is considered physically demanding labor or very low in prestige. It is also used sometimes as a racial slur toward darker skinned people, similar to the use of *chernye* for immigrants from the Caucasus in Moscow (Sahadeo 2012:332). One informant suggested this particular group were Kurdish, however the term is most often translated as “Gypsy” which is possible and may refer to Roma, Dom, or Lom in the Caucasus (Marushiakova and Popov 2010:97–98; Weyrauch 2001:31). The Azerbaijani government does not include any of these ethnic groups in census data.

the entrance to the regional *bazar*, and on three occasions at the *avtovagzal*. All were women save for two young boys that occasionally accompanied the group. They are assumed to be a distinct ethnic group by local Azerbaijanis, and considered part of the broader category “people of the street” (*yolchu* or *bomzh*,<sup>42</sup>). Most encountered them as, and consider the name, *Qarachi*, synonymous with, *dilenchi* (beggar), but distinct from “forced” beggars, such as *shikest* (cripple), or mendicant *dervishlar*<sup>43</sup>. Homelessness in Azerbaijan is a rare sight and most know that the *Qarachi* do have a home, and sold yogurt, cheese and blackberries door-to-door in addition to begging. Despite having a home and other means of income, it is widely believed that this ethnic group *chooses* to incorporate begging into their lifestyle as part of their cultural heritage.

Nearly every day of the week, the *Qarachi*<sup>44</sup> asked for money in the short space between the *bazaar* and the *avtovagzal* in the regional center. On one particular overcast and drizzling afternoon, a middle-aged woman standing behind a child asleep in a wheelchair, held out her hand toward no one in particular, and chanted, “God bless you,” or “you are beautiful and kind, may God keep you that way.” The little boy was sometimes replaced by a little girl who could be seen asking for money nearby. The woman formed a line parallel to the walkway with three moneychangers (all men), each themselves

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<sup>42</sup> *Yolchu*: A person who occupies their time in the street, wanderer. *Bomzhi*: A Russian acronym for “Of no fixed abode.”

<sup>43</sup> *Dervish*: are Sufi-Muslims who devote themselves to a life of poverty and spiritual enlightenment. They are rare, it at all present, and often de-coupled from the idea of begging in Azerbaijan (Naroditskaya 2004).

<sup>44</sup> Most assumed they belonged to the same biological family, but this could not be verified.



chanting “manat, dollar, ruble, lari, euro, *deyishik*<sup>45</sup>.” *Marshrutka*<sup>46</sup> drop people off at the mouth of the bazaar for their daily shopping every twenty minutes. Many people pass, many give. She repeats God’s blessings, almost to the point of rhythmic chanting, in unison with the moneychangers. A larger bus unloads a group of ten women from a nearby village; they descended on the shopping center, each giving a few coins to the begging *Qarachi* women while chattering amongst themselves. That day many people offered, handing coins pinched between two fingers into the palm of the *Qarachi* woman. Never making direct eye contact, she would reply “*Allah qorusun*<sup>47</sup>.” Some quickly gave their *sedege*, continuing to the shopping center. Others walked by, only to dig into their purse or pocket and hurry back. The exchanges involved very formal and polite language<sup>48</sup>, and references to God on both sides – embedding the relations into a moral framework. Further solidifying the social distance between the actors, the recipient would drop her head and shoulders as if to humble herself in the presences of her benefactors.

In keeping with the definition of social capital as the resources that inhere in social relations, I consider this exchange of coins between the passer-by and the beggar as the materialization of a form of social capital. Beggars can be described as “having” social capital in that they can appropriate the cultural convention of almsgiving to the poor. While there are certainly differences between this social tie, and the sort that

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<sup>45</sup> *Deyishik* is “exchanging”

<sup>46</sup> These are mini-buses that primarily serviced routes between the smaller towns and villages and the regional centers in fifteen to thirty minute intervals.

<sup>47</sup> May god protect (you)

<sup>48</sup> In Azerbaijani, speaking in the second-person plural conveys respect. If words were exchanged, all parties in the beggar-donor relation almost always use this polite form.

comprises the *yas*, a distinction cannot be based entirely on appeals to network “durability.” Certainly, in most instances, the social tie between beggar and passer-by is fleeting. The actors involved are likely never to move beyond their roles of beggar and passer-by. However, this relation is culturally durable, and concretely reoccurring (although with different individuals). In fact, as community members are likely to encounter the *Qarachi* weekly, this social tie is a tangible reality more often than many of the acquaintances that attend the *yas*, or the cousin who works in Moscow. Similar to Desmond’s (2012) conceptualization of “disposable ties” as sources of social support among the impoverished in Midwest America, the beggar-passer-by relation does not exist on a continuum of strong to weak ties. It also does not create or bridge networks. In fact the transfer of resources reinforces and constructs the inequality and exclusion that motivates the passer-by to give.

Few participants believe that beggars can be trusted, the pity in their voices often mixed with disdain. The *Qarachi*, in particular, are considered even less trustworthy, and their very destitution is questioned. Although this ethnic group is specifically referred to as *Qarachi*, this term is also used derogatorily toward many classes of people. Most interviewees described them as potential thieves, liars, poor parents or otherwise deviant (this was often openly contrasted with their claims of tolerance toward other ethnic groups). It was common for participants to describe the actions of these beggars as a thinly veiled charade, not much different from the money changers, with some likening them to shrewd profiteers. For instance:

You do not know why they [the Qarachi] are collecting the money... for example they might be doing it as a business, but with [other] poor people, you are giving money and you know they are poor and need something to eat. (Shelale)

One informant (Ramash) claimed, “They [*Qarachi*] have much money, and only try to seem poor,” he added “everyone knows this about them.” These general stereotypes about the *Qarachi* - as Gypsies - does not differ from elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, Russia in particular (Lemon 2000).

Most interviewees and informants considered this transaction with skepticism. Nonetheless, participants – often quoting the duty of Muslims – believe there is a moral imperative to help the needy. However, there was much uncertainty as to whether giving actually helped. Similar questions regarding legislation of the homeless and panhandlers in Western countries arise in the Azerbaijani context: Does giving really help them? Should we give more or less? Would a different sort of a help be better? When I asked why people gave to beggars, typical responses included, “I felt bad,” “God had been good to me, I should be good to others,” “these are tough times for everyone” and “it is our duty to help the needy.” Those who said they gave were also among those that questioned the transaction altogether. People often contrasted this with the Soviet times, when “street people” meant “lazy people” (Schmemmann 1991). In Russia, begging was outlawed since the time of Peter the Great (Lindenmeyr 1996:168) and during the Soviet era, “anti-parasite laws<sup>49</sup>” allowed local administrators to deport those accused of vagrancy with little justification, including those who aided vagrants (Beermann 1964). Along with the “right to work,” Soviet citizens were also subject to the “duty to work.” Legislation against “anti-social” activities continued to broaden well into the final years of the Soviet Union (Stephenson 2006:84). Similarly, private charities were banned after the early

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<sup>49</sup> In its entirety: “On Measures Intensifying of the Struggle Against Persons Who Avoid Socially Useful Work and Leading an Anti-social, Parasitic Way of Life.”

1920s (Lindenmeyr 1996:3). Although, people had more cash to spare during that period<sup>50</sup>, the moral obligation to give to street people was less, and the risks fairly high. Now, instead of dysfunctional rebels against an otherwise stable system, the entire economic climate is highly uncertain (Rasizade 2003). Those faring better feel a duty to help others including the *Qarachi*.

The accomplishment of the beggar-giver relation in this context is a concrete actualization of deep, yet vague, moral values. Whether giving alms to the begging *Qarachi* is suffice is uncertain and debated. A few participants cited specifically saying to themselves “*bashimdan sedege olsun*”<sup>51</sup> which strongly connotes a wish: “may it be *sedege* from me.” Rather than certainty and trust, participants try to *give from their heart*, and pray it is correct and sincere. As one interviewee (Khanim) explained, “a beggar on the street may be put there by God as a test,” and “it is better to just be a good person, because you never know.” In addition to lacking interpersonal trust, this particular exchange is defined by *expectation of non-reciprocity* (Testart 1998:98). Indeed, for participants, assuming a reward calls the legitimacy of the transaction (*sedege vermek*) into question. Referring to *sedege*, an older *Ingiloy* man stated, “If someone helps [*by giving sedege*] expecting a reward, he/she has done a bad thing” and he offered the story:

Before he died, my father brought a bag of flour to a poor family. .. Leaving it inside the gate, he returned without saying anything. My mother asked him where

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<sup>50</sup> With wages paid in ruble, but few consumer items to purchase, households amassed large savings. During the dissolution of the USSR, this was referred to as the “ruble overhang” (Conway 1994).

<sup>51</sup> Coming from the verb *olmaq*, which means “to be,” *olsun* is the third person command form, the speaker is directing it toward an object (in this case *sedege*), and it translates, in this instance, as “may it be” or “let it be.”

he went, where he brought the flour, and he did not say. That person never knew who gave them flour. (Arshad)

Similarly, in a focus group, one young Azeri woman stated (with the other participants in agreement):

You must ask your heart... give from your heart...it means you must believe it wholly. You must not give with ill intentions, you must not show off, you must not give because you are pressured, you must not give because people are critical of you, and you must not give because you want people to think you are a good person. You must give and forget. (Renee)

As they understand it, this transaction should be an end in itself for the donor, who should delight in the opportunity to give from the heart. The *Qarachi* invites the passer-by into a relation. Whether the passer-by gives or not, and indeed whether interviewees were certain about their moral obligations, their actions make their judgments public. The invitation from the beggar pressures passers-by to make a tentative social connection suddenly concrete, and thus open the box to Schrödinger's cat.

I argue that beggars and passers-by (attempt to) maintain the expectations of the situation through relational work and construct culturally viable “relational packages” (Zelizer 2007). Returning to Tilly’s (1999:42) example: When we witness a monetary exchange on the street, how can we know what it is? “We can determine this only by ascertaining the relation between” the two. In the case of the *Qarachi*, they receive money by virtue of a relation and the culturally defined obligations bound up in that particular relation. Participants form a connection with relevant and meaningful categories (beggar and giver) which invokes an appropriate transaction (*sedege*

*vermek*<sup>52</sup>). Similar to the social capital of the dead, the social capital of the beggar is restricted. The passer-by may harbor many resources, most of which are not made available by the relation with a beggar in the context of the street encounter. In Azerbaijan, the resource – at least in nearly every conversation and observation – is a few coins, and it is symbolically packaged as “*sedege*,” discussed in the *Quran*. Importantly, *sedege* is voluntary – as opposed to *zakat*<sup>53</sup>. *Zakat* requires a strict set of rules and is reserved for a different class of needy person, or given directly to a mosque. There is no set amount or schedule for giving *sedege*, and it is reserved for moments where the giver is moved – spiritually or emotionally. Participants believe that being a good person and a good Muslim means aiding the needy, but in the case of *sedege* it is also important that one do so voluntarily. Although to some extent both are required by Islam, the flexibility of *sedege* allows for a more nuanced “strategy of action.” When informants and interviewees describe their motivations to give they further define and police the meaning of the transaction. For instance, although the offering is almost always a small amount consisting of coins, participants link this to the generosity that *sedege* connotes. Furthermore, when discussing the reasons Azerbaijanis gave they always refer to the importance of *ureyindan vermek*, or “giving from your heart.” With just moments to make a decision, the passer-by must solve this moral dilemma. In fact, spending too

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<sup>52</sup> *Sedege vermek*: the act of giving to the needy, sometimes a beggar.

<sup>53</sup> *Zakat* is similar to a religious tax, tithe or mandatory gift. *Zakat* is one of the five pillars of Islam; however, Azerbaijanis see it only as a religious tax. No one interviewed knew of a person wealthy enough (above the minimum *nisab*) to qualify for *zakat*. In Azerbaijan, those wealthy enough usually pay *zakat* around holidays, specifically *Gurban* or after *Ramadan*.

much energy deliberating over whether to offer *sedege* would challenge the very core of the transaction: the commitment to *give from the heart*.

As discussed previously, whether the *Qarachi* are truly eligible for *sedege* is questioned. To suggest eligibility, beggars engage in an appropriate drama, displaying the appropriate mix of scripts and cultural knowledge. The performer creates a sense of despair, but without acting desperate. As Travers (1999:128) notes about the streets of London and Bristol, but also rings true for northwestern Azerbaijan, “The speech of beggars to passers-by seldom consists in agonized cries, screams, and wails but is characteristically a chant or recitative prayer.” This requires considerable effort to walk a fine line – violating the stranger’s expectations of “civil inattention” (Goffman 1963), but only offering an arms-length tie in its place. This performance is an invitation to a relation with ultimately two roles for the passer-by: donor and non-donor. The non-donor could deploy a range of tactics to avoid giving - such as speeding up, using another as a human shield, fidgeting with their phone or bag, taking interest in an event beyond the beggar – but this does not deny the salience of the invitation. The social tie between beggar and passers-by is culturally durable, but temporally fleeting: the passer-by decides in just moments and the beggar does not follow, does not engage in conversation, and only offers God’s blessing to start and end the scene.

Although the beggar invites a particular relation with two possible roles for the passer-by, this is not always reciprocated. The passer-by may challenge the invitation by attempting to create a new relation. For instance, while discussing with an informant (Tural) and his friends about this topic, a friend (an early thirties man) stated that he only gave once. Describing the instance he stated, it was because she was (in English) “a

smoking-hot miss.” The resulting conversation strongly connected the deviance of the *Qarachi* woman, with the deviance of a prostitute. While the *Qarachi* woman was trying to accomplish the beggar-relation, the young man was trying to transform it into another and the money he offered was not *sedege*. As a researcher, I also challenged the invitation and engaged in relational work in an attempt to gain rapport. On more than one occasion I did not give money and attempted to offer an alternative relation to the *Qarachi*. One child grabbed my coat while I waited for the bus and held her cupped hand toward me, all while offering a blessing and looking around as others passed us. Instead of giving or ignoring, I looked her in the eyes and politely asked her name, “*adiniz nedir?*” She responded with a baffled expression and continued to repeat her blessing in Azerbaijani before running to another passer-by. The relation and media I offered were shrouded in uncertainty and confusion that was ultimately rejected by my young interlocutor.

Although, individuals might develop an interpersonal history, forming a “durable” or “intimate” tie (e.g. developing friendship or mentorship), this results in a re-negotiation of the boundaries and definition of the relation. The resources involved, and the communicative work of these resources, will also change. In the context of the beggar encounter in northwestern Azerbaijan, the *Qarachi* draw on available conventions – in this case largely religious notions of equality and charity – to motivate a transaction and construct a specific relation. For the participants, as part of the meaning negotiated, expecting to receive a reward for almsgiving would not amount to a viable relational package. The givers also draw on similar religious ideas of equality and charity to explain and order the interaction.



## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

The central question this study sought to answer is: Can there be social capital without trust? This question was posed against a dominant strand of theorizing in the social capital literature, following rational choice models of action: actors give resources to others because they trust those others to reciprocate. To answer this question, I first look for social capital in a country characterized by low generalized trust, Azerbaijan. This literature also argues that in the absence of generalized trust, actors will rely on personalized trust to facilitate transfers of resources. To further challenge this argument, I select two cases from over a year of ethnographic fieldwork in Azerbaijan. These cases, of giving to bereaving families and almsgiving to beggars, demonstrate that interpersonal trust is not always necessary for such transfers. Lastly, I apply the framework of “relational work” to offer a more effective description of these exchanges.

In the case of giving to bereaving families, death is the catalyst for social support, even between people without trust. The mourning ceremony represents one of the largest gatherings of a household’s social network, which involves transfers of resources to the bereaving families. Many attendees are motivated by intimacy and trust, however even the unscrupulous receive social support and some must set aside ill feelings to pay their last respects to the deceased. In the second case, passers-by offering alms to beggars, all of who belong to an ethnic group that most consider especially untrustworthy, even their

destitution is questioned. Despite this, most people offer them alms. I argue that in both of these cases, the unique rights and obligations toward resources are entwined with the culturally constituted processes of tie formation and maintenance. By matching transactions, resources and relations with suitable rights and obligations, participants construct boundaries and define interactions as distinct and meaningful. Thus, social capital, as the resources that inhere in social relations, is bound to this process.

The first contribution this article makes is identifying instances of social capital in a country characterized by low generalized trust. This, I would argue, is not unique to Azerbaijan. Defining social capital as the resources that inhere in social relations, it is likely to be present in so-called “failed states” such as Somalia (Saggiomo 2011), locations of violent ethnic separatism such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and the North Caucasus (O’Loughlin 2009; Ward et al. 2006); or criminal organizations such as the Sicilian mafia (Gambetta 1996, 2000b; Portes and Landolt 2000), Colombian drug cartels (Rubio 1997), meth markets in the United States (Brownstein et al. 2012), or within urban gangs in the United States (Portes and Landolt 1996; Venkatesh and Levitt 2000); even among street children in Moscow (Stephenson 2001), and in various American high-poverty neighborhoods (Desmond 2012; Stack 1975). This suggests that social capital can be present in places with widespread “deviance” or “disorganization” (contra Coleman 1988:S103). However, it is unlikely that the mere presence of social capital “will [cause] a positive spillover effect into the larger society” (Fukuyama 2001:14). Even the presence of social capital within a cultural institution as pervasive as the Azerbaijani mourning ceremony is unlikely to translate into other areas of life. Thus, if

societal change is predicted to emerge from social capital the researcher must specify the causal mechanisms involved.

Fundamental to the work of both Coleman and Putnam are lamentations for an assumed bygone social harmony (for a critique see Phillips 1993). Coleman explicitly sought to design “purposive organizations” to “compensate for the loss” of social capital supposedly inherent in “primordial” social ties (Coleman 1993). Likewise, Putnam introduces his retooling of social capital by telling Americans it is disappearing with terrible consequences and a call to action (Putnam 1993, 1995a, 1995b, 1996)<sup>54</sup>. The ideological orientation of these foundational authors is perhaps why the so-called “dark side” of social capital was so easily overlooked (Di Falco and Bulte 2011; Levi 1996; Portes and Landolt 1996; Putzel 1997), and that community “stocks” of social capital is often regressed against “positive” developments such as economic growth and democratic progress. In contrast to the projects of Coleman and Putnam, researchers should take care when declaring “low,” “perverse” or “dark” social capital, and should accept that solidarity “is not opposed to conflict, nor does conflict necessarily take place outside of the realm of solidarity” (Bahre 2007:52). Indeed, death, disenchantment, risk, chaos, violence and even perceptions of a coming apocalypse, can be productive resources for cooperative activity (e.g. Dake 1992; Mitchell 2002; Taleb 2012; Thompson 1983; Zaloom 2004). As Pat O’Malley argues (1999), crime and deviance may very well emerge as important sources of social cohesion and equality, which

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<sup>54</sup> As discussed earlier, the theoretical concept of social capital is heavily debated, but also the data and findings Putnam uses has been refuted by several scholars, namely Ladd (1996) and Portes and Vickstrom (2011).

requires that we question to what extent “seeing disorder” is historically contingent and saturated with social meaning (Sampson and Raudenbush 2004).

The second, and primary, contribution of this study was demonstrating that social capital materializes even in situations of uncertainty and distrust. By removing the necessary link between trust and transfers, research on social support – and social embeddedness more broadly – can move beyond trust and the assumption that “pro-social” action is fundamentally fragile (e.g. Luhmann 1979:89). Not only can resource transfers, collaboration and cooperation exist in the presence of distrust and disdain, but also in cases of relative ephemerality and anonymity (Bernstein et al. 2011; Coleman 2011). Trust is often used as an umbrella term for numerous *dimensions of reliability and expectation*, therefore “we obviously need to distinguish different forms of trust” (Baier 1986:232; see also Lewis and Weigert 1985, 2012). As stated earlier, the bulk of social capital literature relies on the formulation of trust synthesized in Rousseau et al (1998), which is closely akin to what Lewis and Weigert (1985) refer to as “cognitive trust,” and what Cook, Hardin, and Levi call “encapsulated trust” (2007), but researchers should be sensitive to the manifold processes which produce an immanent sense of order, reliability and expectation. For instance, alternative conceptions of social capital can be linked with devices of commitment (Hardin 1996); assurance (Yamagishi and Yamagishi 1994); emotional trust (Lewis and Weigert 2012); social knowledge or familiarity (Gulati 1995; Luhmann 1979; for a critique see Rubbers 2009); confidence (Luhmann 1979; Seligman 1999; Tonkiss and Passey 1999; Tonkiss 2009); dependence (Kovalainen 2005; Sheppard and Sherman 1998); belief or faith (Audi 2007; Möllering 2001); legitimacy (Suchman 1995); hope or projectivity (Crapanzano 2003; Desroche 1979; Emirbayer and Mische

1998; Mische 2009); and of course the “taken for granted” of everyday life, the undisputed or *doxa* (Bourdieu 1977:154). A future theoretical and empirical project is to bridge the community and economic development literature with these alternative conceptions of social capital.

Lastly, this study joins the very few articles demonstrating the empirical application of relational work (Haylett 2012:226). This relatively young conceptual framework emerged within economic sociology and offers analytical tools to unpack the complex interplay of economic activity within human relations – from the most intimate to the most impersonal (Block 2012; Whitford 2012; Zelizer 2012). Rather than framing the content of social ties as existing on a scale of more-to-less trusting, social capital researchers should be attuned to the multiple layers of meaningful connections within families, marriages, kinship and friendship – indeed, all relations which provide access to resources. These overlapping social ties are potentially conflicting mixtures of power, oppression, trust and equality, pulling actors in various directions at different moments. The incessant negotiation of varying relations is highly consequential for the resources exchanged and vice versa. Furthermore, relations at all levels exhibit contradictions (Lewicki, McAllister, and Bies 1998), as well as prevalent power and resource imbalances as evidence by the vast feminist literature in general, and studies of intimate partner abuse in particular (Acker 1992; Babcock, Green, and Robie 2004; Garcia-Moreno et al. 2006; Pope and Englar-Carlson 2001; Rennison and Welchans 2003; Stith et al. 2004; Tjaden and Thoennes 2000). For instance, scholars from vastly different traditions have argued it is within the family that social actors potentially conflate authority, violence and love (Deleuze and Guattari 2004; Swinford et al. 2000). In

supposedly “unauthentic” relations such as between sex workers and clients (Milrod and Weitzer 2012) as well as seemingly “pure” relationships (Jamieson 1999) tension, conflict, disagreement and misalignment are bound to surface (Gergen 2009). Relational work is uniquely positioned to better understand the resources that inhere in the complexity of social relations. As this is the first application of Zelizer’s “relational work” within the vast social capital literature, there is still much theoretical and empirical territory to cover.

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APPENDIX A  
SAMPLE CONSENT FORM

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

I am carrying out social scientific research to understand what future events people worry about and how they deal with uncertainty. The purpose of this research is to explore how Azerbaijani households manage the difficulties and fears they may face.

The purpose of this letter is to formally request your voluntary participation. The interview will take about one to two hours. The researchers and interpreter will keep everything you say confidential. With your consent, I would like to record our interview. Please be assured that the only people who will listen to the recordings are me and my university advisor, Dr. Aaron Pitluck. In all publications, your name and all identifying information will be kept confidential.

Although you will not be paid for your time, a possible benefit of your participation is the creation of projects that will better meet the needs of people like you. You will also be teaching the researchers about topics that are important to you. You are not required to answer any questions that are sensitive or make you uncomfortable. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty.

If you later have any questions or concerns regarding this research, please contact me at (51-764-83-08 or dsstolt@ilstu.edu.) You can also contact Dr. Aaron Pitluck at

(Aaron.Pitluck@IllinoisState.edu or +36-1-327-3000 extension 2241). Within Azerbaijan, you may contact the Azerbaijan Peace Corps Country Director, at (012-596-17-20).

Sincerely,

Dustin S. Stoltz, B.S.  
Peace Corps Volunteer and Graduate Student, Illinois State University, USA

I consent to participating in the above study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX B  
SAMPLE INTERVIEW GUIDE

Background and Attitudes toward Uncertainty

1. What big changes has your family experienced recently?
2. Can you give me a list of unexpected events that have happened to your family?
  - a. Which of these unexpected events do you consider positive or negative?
3. *If currently unknown:* Does your family have or have ever had an insurance policy?

Values, Risks and Management

4. Can you tell me about some things you fear losing? (*As specific as possible*)
  - a. Have you ever experienced X loss before?
  - b. *If no:* Can you tell me more about this fear?
    - i. If you did lose X, what do you think you *would* do?
  - c. *If yes:* I would like to talk more about X past loss that your family has experienced. *Refer to events in question #1 as well.*
    - i. How did this “event” impact your family?
    - ii. How did each person respond?

Insurance

5. What do you know about insurance providers in this area?
  - a. How did you first learn about insurance?
  - b. What kinds of insurance providers are there?
  - c. Do you know anyone who has an insurance policy?
    - a. Have you heard about their experiences with insurance?
    - b. Do you feel that insurance is readily available?

6. Are there alternatives to insurance available?
7. *If they have or have had insurance:* I'm very interested in how you ended up with an insurance policy. Please, tell me the story about how your household got an insurance policy.
  - a. How did you feel about insurance before getting a policy?
  - b. How do you feel about insurance now?
  - c. *If they dropped a policy:* Can you tell me the story of how you dropped insurance?
8. *If they do not have insurance:* Has your household ever considered getting insurance?
  - d. *If yes:*
    - a. That's very interesting. Can you please tell me about this experience?
    - b. What is appealing about insurance?
    - c. Are there barriers to getting insurance?
  - e. *If no:*
    - a. What is unappealing about insurance?
    - b. Why do you think a person would get an insurance policy?