PhD thesis

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‘Rooms of Light:

Bearing Witness to the Azerbaijani Hospitable Being’

Calvin Tiessen

OCMS, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

This thesis makes the claim that Azerbaijani ways of life are shaped by deep paradigms of hospitable being, an ontological hospitality. *Qonaqpərvərlik,* the Azerbaijani concept of ‘hospitality’, is described as a state of co-existence within which hospitable persons entrust one another with preservation of hospitable conditions. These conditions are experienced by Azerbaijanis as a shared commitment to interpersonal attentiveness and availability with the aim of assuring that hospitality roles are possible. Developed within the disciplinary stream of existential anthropology, this work is structured around an anthology of Azerbaijani hospitality encounters, developing and employing the phenomenological methodology of narrated ethnography. The hospitality roles of host, guest and witness, within Azerbaijani ways of hospitality, are described, providing insights into the manner in which Azerbaijanis live invitationally, negotiating needs and capacities within sustained conditions of gracious trust. The mobility of the Azerbaijani hospitable being is presented, revealing a formation of self as one continually on the way towards others. The process of seeking respite from challenges faced by the hospitable being due to experiences such as war and rapid social change, is explored. In the face of these challenges, the role of hospitable witness is shown to be vital for maintaining cohesion and coherence within Azerbaijani ways of hospitality. Attentive co-presence, life lived in faithful observance of others as well as pursuit of opportunities to engage them hospitably, is the unifying function played by the hospitable witness. This written presentation of research is an act of existential witness, to the persons Azerbaijanis are and become in their ways of hospitality, by the person into whom I have been transformed through encounters with these ways. It is based on more than twenty-five years, sharing ways of life with Azerbaijanis, eight of which were spent on this focused research, from 2014-2022.

‘Rooms of Light:

Bearing Witness to the Azerbaijani Hospitable Being’

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in Middlesex University

April 2024

Oxford Centre for Mission Studies

DECLARATION

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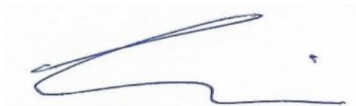

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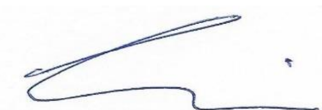
STATEMENT ONE

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote.

Other sources are acknowledged by midnotes or footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.



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STATEMENT TWO

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A guest is the light of a house

Qonaq evin nurudur

- Azerbaijani Proverb -

Dark homes unfrequented by visitors might better fall down

- The Book of Dede Korkut -

Acknowledgments

I write these acknowledgements at the end of an inspiring visit back to Azerbaijan in October 2022. The goal of this visit was to reflect with colleagues and research participants on my final written work and its musings. Due to several major life changes followed by the global pandemic, four years have passed since I have been able to be with you all in person. The experience of being welcomed back has been a gift and confirmation of the significance of this work for me personally. I have been pleased to find that words have now been given to experiences which were seeking to be expressed.

I have been able to personally thank many of you who have been so gracious to me with your time, your thoughts and your lives, though not all. I do hope that the inclusion of your stories in my writing is a form of thank you. You will recognize yourself in these stories. Know that I am grateful and have found them meaningful in helping me understand the wider narrative in which you live. We have indeed enjoyed a feast together around the Azerbaijani table of hospitable ways and practices.

On this academic journey I have not walked alone. I wish to thank Professor Jeremy Macclancy, Dr. Safet Hadžimuhamedović, Dr. Paul Bendor-Samuel and Dr. David Singh, for their faithful contribution to my journey. Much of our interaction was online in the latter years. But this was made possible by the strong relational investments we made prior to our distance work together. Thank you to each of you for the coffees, lunches, and walks we have shared. You have indeed been hospitable to me from the abundance of your being. I have books on my shelf which you have given me. And across the pages of my work, I see your contributions in so many ways – as we have worked on words and expressions, strengthened references and associations. I could not have asked for a better team.

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My dear wife Gabriela, thank you for holding down the fort on my frequent trips to the United Kingdom. But also, for all those conversations where we engaged around aspects of our shared experience of participating in Azerbaijani ways of life over these many years.

I wish all of you the greatest blessings and fruitfulness in your lives and in the pursuit of your dreams. This is not the end. It is a great beginning.

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Preface

My first introduction to Azerbaijani ways of life occurred a number of years before my eventual residence in the country. While working as an interpreter in southern Ukraine, in 1992, I met Telman[1,] an Azerbaijani man who had married a Ukrainian woman and had now moved to live with her in her homeland. Upon meeting, he greeted me with outstretched arms. “Welcome. My name is Telman. I would like to invite you stay in my home” [V92-6][2].

Invitation followed naturally and quickly after introduction, the latter seemingly peripheral to the deeper desire of getting to what really mattered - bringing me in to his life. Introductions preceded invitation chronologically, but the invitation was obviously something that lay as an opening long before its verbalization. Telman lived with the desire to welcome in, to invite, to host. Procedures of familiarization, introductions, getting to know, were laid on the foundations of welcome. As I got to know Telman, I truly could describe his ways of life as founded on a continually predicated state of welcoming. On this predication all the spheres of his life were enacted in a state of searching and pursuit, to welcome in. To this day, Telman's ways of life represent for me a strong image of what is foundational to many of the lives I have come to know in Azerbaijan and beyond.

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[1] All names in this work have been changed to pseudonyms.

[2] As I have placed phenomenological data into my writing, I have provided a simple reference for each occurrence, indicating the type of data and the context in which I collected it. References are labelled as coming out of a vignette, a narrative, a discussion group record or a general ethnographic record (V, N, D or E). I have also included the year in which the reference was recorded and its place within the overall collection of records I have from that year. More on this system of reference is provided in Chapter Three. A list of the referenced occurrences in this written work can be found in the Appendix.

This study reveals deep paradigms of hospitality which drive Azerbaijani ways of life, underpinning significant aspects of these ways of life. Deep hospitality is a foundational starting point for understanding Azerbaijani ways of life. It comes first before all else. Not all Azerbaijanis are just like Telman. But many of them are, and there is a broad recognition of the virtuosity and appeal of this image of 'being Azerbaijani'. There is a light that shines for Azerbaijanis which originates in the joy and sense of well-being that hospitality embraces. I have had the privilege of walking into rooms, sitting at tables and being in the presence of Azerbaijani hospitality. These spaces of light and illumination have brightened my life profoundly. Where hospitality fails this light is darkened.

In writing this work I recall particular words of advice, given to me early on my journey of life among Azerbaijanis. While in a village several hours north of the capital Baku we were invited to a banquet [V00-18]. At this banquet I was asked to take the role of *tamada*, the toastmaster. This was an unusual request in some ways as I myself was a guest at the banquet. It was quite an honour to be asked to play this role. I was new to the expectations of what the role involved and one of the older schoolteachers in the group who had been taking care of us in the village gave me the following advice: “Say something honouring about everyone, in turn, in order of respect, and don’t hurry.”

I wish to duly honour those whose stories are represented in these pages. I have striven to give recognition to all who have shared and to properly identify the relative importance of the various themes which have emerged. And I do not wish to “hurry”. This is a work of inter-personal reflection. In this reflection I have been guided by the desire to honour both the act of discovery, which for me is a truly exciting endeavour, as well as the knowledge which is discovered. Azerbaijani ways of life warrant such a posture from one

who has been given the gift of these stories. It may be said that “I raise here a toast to Azerbaijani ways of life.”

Chapter One: Introductions

He who searches for his beloved is not afraid of the world.
- Nizami Ganjavi, *Leyla and Majnun*, *(XII)*[1]

This opening chapter is directed towards acquaintance, familiarization and delineation of expectations. It is a welcome to the study. Welcome is extended here in five parts. First, a rationale for this work's ethnographic contribution is given. Second, the key concepts and perspectives of existential anthropology are described, highlighting the ways in which they inform and direct this research and articulation of its discoveries. Third, background perspectives on Azerbaijani ways of life are introduced, highlighting the pluricentric character of Azerbaijani history. This is followed by an overview of elements of the anthropology of hospitality which have particular relevance to this study. The chapter closes with a description of the logical progression of the study's eight chapters and their aims.

* * * * *

It was a moment of pause [V99-23]. The last few passengers had disappeared up the escalator, the train from which they had alighted was but a distant rumble down the tunnel. I lingered for a moment on the empty Nizami underground platform, one of Baku's oldest stations.

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[1] Ganjavi & Gelpke 2011: 54

“We knew him.” Turning to the voice, a man, likely in his late 60's, I nodded in recognition of his presence. He gestured to the tiled murals on the walls, the works of Mikayil Huseyn oğlu Abdullayev (1921-2002), a decorated People's Painter of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The two of us gazed for a while at the intricate renditions of classical stories from Nizami Ganjavi's (1141-1209) Khamsa.

“Do you like them?”, he eventually asked. I nodded once again. There was an intriguing beauty to the colourfully sculptured expressions that had, numerous times, inspired me to stop and gaze. Much older artistic renderings of these stories hang in museums around the world (Titley 1984; Berthels, et al. 2016). But these, in this everyday setting, so readily available, passed by regularly on my way through the city, had become a special place of inspiration for reflection and pause.

Connecting for a moment around these murals, there hung between us an invitation. As he stood beside me, I felt an offer to pursue a conversation, to push into a potential acquaintance. Before us, the vehicle of our connection, were works of art with much to express about much that had gone before us. Now, beside me, it seemed, was someone who could take me further in my experience and understanding of these works. But the moment quickly passed. The sounds of a train coming closer filled the space and the platform soon teemed once again. “Welcome”, said the man and shuffled off to join the crowd.

Regretting my pause, the moment of dialogue lost, a myriad of questions remained as he moved on. What was it that spurred him to speak to me? It may have been the oddity of someone actually stopping to look. The apparent novelty these murals held for me may have labelled me as one who didn't know Mikayil Abdullayev, perhaps didn't even know the great twelfth century poet, Nizami. I wanted to know more - more about the man, how

he knew the artist, what he might have to tell me about these murals and the historic stories behind them. Then he was gone, and with him his stories. I was left with my own musings on the artwork before me. While others came and went, trains passed by and lives moved in and out of the station. What remained were the echoes of a heartfelt “welcome”.

This is a study of what can be learned in the space between welcome and response, a study of ways of life in the modern Republic of Azerbaijan as they are shaped in the meaningful spaces of hospitality. It is a work informed by more than two decades of my own participation in the ways of life which are embraced by Azerbaijanis. The question with which this study engages is an ethnographic one. *How does hospitality shape Azerbaijani ways of life?*

This opening chapter is directed towards acquaintance, familiarization, and delineation of expectations. It is a welcome to the study. In the words of a master of Azerbaijani welcome, a long-standing personal friend, “a welcome is like a skilfully prepared dish of *paxlava*[2] - it is a delicacy to be offered only after intricate preparation has been adequately made - else it is but an invitation to disappointment”[3] [V13-11]. Welcome is extended here in five parts. First, a rationale for this work's ethnographic contribution is given. There is an invitation to study which arises from significant historical and contemporary claims to the importance of hospitality in Azerbaijani ways of life. This invitation has

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[2] A sweet dessert commonly prepared in Azerbaijan consisting of many layers of thin pastry interspersed with honey and nuts, most often baked in a large metal dish and cut into decorative shapes before served.

[3] The following are the International Phonetic Alphabet symbols (given in parentheses) which correspond to letters in the Azerbaijani alphabet which do not occur in the English alphabet or which represent different sounds than they do in the English alphabet: ç (ʧ), ə (æ), ğ (ɣ), x (x), ı (ɯ), j (ʒ), g (ɟ), k (c), q (ɡ), ö (œ), ş (ʃ), ü (y).

prompted the current work of research and stands as an important foundation for its conduct.

Second, the language and structure of this study has been shaped by its disciplinary location in existential anthropology. Space is given, therefore, in this opening chapter to describing the key concepts and perspectives of existential anthropology, highlighting the ways in which it has informed and directed the research and articulation of its discoveries.

Third, I provide some background perspectives on Azerbaijani ways of life, highlighting the pluricentric character of Azerbaijani history. This is followed by an overview of hospitality as a subject of study within anthropology and the manner in which this study finds its place in the character of witness.

I close this chapter with an overview of the flow of thought which the study will follow, like the slow rise of Camus' (1957) guest, first viewed from afar, then climbing to the forefront to be received, encountered, and ultimately engaged. A description of the logical progression of the study's eight chapters and their aims is provided.

The Significance of Hospitality in Azerbaijan

If one is looking for a window into Azerbaijani ways of life, a handle to lay hold of in the door to "being Azerbaijani", hospitality qualifies supremely. As I have pursued the study of hospitality in Azerbaijan I have been intrigued by the perseverance of its resonance within society, significantly within the last 150 years, most notably in the last thirty. Since the new nation-state of Azerbaijan gained independence in 1991, coming out of a seventy-year history with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, marked social, economic, political, and ideological changes have been part of the daily reality of citizens. Through it all, key perspectives and practices which define what being Azerbaijani means have survived.

Over the years that I have worked among those whose ways of life differ from my own one of the maxims I have learned to follow is, “It’s easier to look for open doors than to knock.” When it comes to a topic of research, hospitality is an open door in Azerbaijan. It is a topic on which Azerbaijanis welcome dialogue and embraces a broad range of practices which are readily observed. The deep reverence Azerbaijanis hold for hospitality and its attendant practices is an invitation for interaction.

Such reverence for hospitality is not unique to Azerbaijani ways of life. Attention to practices of hospitality can be seen in all human groups (Lashley, Lynch & Morrison 2000; Candea & Da Col 2012). Groups differ widely, however, in the relative importance given to hospitality among other practices (Morrison and O’Gorman 2006). It is of significance to me personally that while hospitality is valued within my own social groups it is rarely given the same level of reverence and pre-eminence that it is given by Azerbaijanis. This has made hospitality a particularly valuable lens through which to peer, seeking to better understand aspects of Azerbaijani ways of life which may not naturally be apparent to me. Felicity Heal’s description of English perspectives on hospitality ring true for me as a Canadian. “In our pantheon of social virtues hospitality occupies a modest, though honourable, place.” (2011: 1) Compare this “modest, though honourable place” to the lament of a close friend, reflecting upon the challenges faced by young people in the fast-changing social milieu of Azerbaijan today.

> My life has been robbed of purpose, not violently, but quietly. Life in the modern city has distanced us from one another, though we cling to what remains of our pride and reputation, struggling to earn a living, support our families and get ahead in life, we cannot offer our guests what we would like. This is shameful and makes all other things in life unenjoyable [V08-37].

The importance of hospitality for Azerbaijanis is not something theoretical. It is a very real part of their experience of life. It has been noted that hospitality can be a cliché, a trope evoked by exotic experience (Shryock 2012). But Azerbaijani ways of life attest to

a more significant embrace of hospitality than cliché or trope suffice to describe. My own awareness of the depths of this embrace began to take shape as I observed Azerbaijani experiences of Eurovision 2012. It was this observation which provided the impetus for this current work of research.

Over the course of the year between May 2011 when Azerbaijan achieved first place in Dusseldorf and May 2012 when Eurovision was hosted in the Republic's capital, Baku, staggering efforts were made on a national level to prepare for the event. More than 800 million US dollars were spent in preparations (Edwards 2012). Media coverage was extensive, not only in the country, but across the world. “Never before has Azerbaijan [generated] so much attention among international media” (Abbasov 2012). Internet queries on the country increased by 800% following the 2011 award (Ismayilov 2012: 834).

As this extensive public interest unfolded, a fascinating, though painful, disconnect was quickly revealed. It was revealed first in language, and then in experiences of the event itself. My own realization of this disconnect came as international media coverage of the event was reaching a feverish pitch. I was in a conversation with a fruit-seller in our neighbourhood [V12-9]. It was hard in those days for conversation not to find itself eventually winding towards discussion of Eurovision. As it did, he looked thoughtfully at me and asked me a question which took me aback. “Why don't they like us?”, he asked.

“Who?” I asked. “Foreigners” he replied. My mind was racing. I was aware of the heavy criticism that had been levelled at Azerbaijan in international media as preparations for Eurovision 2012 progressed. In media outside the Republic the event was strongly couched in considerations of politics (Merkel 2017) and economics (Groves 2012). For various reasons, Azerbaijan had been on a rough political road with the international

community even before Eurovision entered the picture. Eurovision had fuelled certain fires. But what caught my attention in the moment was the clearly personal experience this man was having of what I considered to be something quite beyond individuals, issues of nations and interests of a scale broader than the two of us. There was, in his question, an implication of personal rejection.

My instinct was to quickly assuage the situation by assuring him that one cannot believe everything that the media tells us, that there was much in Azerbaijan ways of life that is commendable and that we shouldn't let politics or the economic interests of others dictate how we feel about one another in daily life. This allowed the conversation to move into a more pleasant direction, but I was left with nagging questions of my own. Where did this obvious personal experience of rejection come from? Was it an isolated experience or was there something occurring on a higher level that I was simply unaware of?

With this experience fresh on my mind my attention was soon arrested as I was listening to an interview on Britain's Channel 4 (26 May 2012) with Azerbaijan's ambassador to the United Kingdom, Fakhraddin Gurbanov. “[Eurovision 2012 is] a great chance to reconnect with Europe culturally and socially”, he remarked. “You might have heard that Azerbaijani people are famous for their hospitality. We treat our guests in a very special manner and it is an honour for us to host thousands of fans from all across Europe.” Amidst the strong language of politics, economics, competition and performance swirling around Eurovision 2012 here was a distinct set of language being used to describe the character of the event. Here was the language of hospitality. I began to find that hospitality language was everywhere in the way Eurovision was discussed

within Azerbaijan, with an intensity that spoke to something foundational to Azerbaijanis' experience of the event.

In the global media reporting on large events like Eurovision, reference is often made to 'hosts' or 'host countries', and it is common for those attending an event to be referred to as 'guests'. But it was intriguing to me to follow how far the framework of hospitality was defining for Azerbaijanis in their expectations of the event. In media within the Republic, hospitality language featured front and centre. Performers and representatives were referred to as guests. Venues were described in the language of home and welcome. Invitation, reception, taking care, service and a wide range of language strongly associated with hospitality significantly defined how Eurovision 2012 was discussed in Azerbaijan.

This was also occurring beyond the media. At a more personal level, I remember a conversation with a taxi driver early in 2012 as we meandered back and forth through the streets of downtown Baku, making our way around the numerous closed roads and constructions sites connected to the upcoming Eurovision venue [V12-29]. "Your job has become a bit more complicated these days" I commented. With a sigh, he replied, "When guests are coming, the guest room must be prepared." Here was the language of hospitality, though not without lament.

As Eurovision 2012 unfolded, what was most disappointing for many Azerbaijanis was not that political and social issues within their country were drawn to light. They are used to politics. What was disappointing was how the gesture of welcome which had been made was not received as they expected good guests to receive it. The language of hospitality was front and centre to their experience. How they perceived themselves and

how they perceived the response of others was significantly connected to a frame of hospitality.

A few days after the Eurovision 2012 event a letter to Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev was published online. The author, Faiq Agayev (2012), used the language of hospitality throughout, to describe the presence of the media, attendees and the event itself. In his official summation, specifically geared to celebrate those things which the country seeks to be publicly proud about, Mr. Agayev spoke of the event as "an experience of excitement and joy". This was after the event was finished. There was an obvious ring of the joy of hosting. And it rung like the best of dinner toasts. The president was being commended for his hospitality, as the head of the country. The politics in the letter were clear, and that seemed to have been the point. At the highest levels what was being praised and toasted was hospitality, lauded specifically in the language of hospitality.

Following these observations of Eurovision 2012, I began to observe in numerous other spheres of politics, commerce, education, and even cuisine, a strong appeal to principles of hospitality in the logics applied to interpersonal arrangements of various kinds. Hospitality appeared to be intricately tied to how Azerbaijanis view and practice social relationships. It is here that the central curiosity of this study found its inspiration. If hospitality carries such weight for Azerbaijanis, then to understand what it means to be Azerbaijani is foundationally connected to an understanding of how hospitality is understood and practiced within Azerbaijani ways of life.

Hospitality has a distinctly multi-scalar character. Hospitality language lends itself well to studies on ways of life, particularly because it moves readily between individually-oriented interpersonal interactions and group-oriented socio-political engagements (Frost

and Selwyn 2018). I have chosen not to fully explore the political aspects of hospitality within the scope of this thesis. This has been a methodological as well as pragmatic choice, a choice of scope and focus.

In *Breaking Hospitality Apart*, Andrew Shryock writes of the "yearnings" within anthropological writing for "cultural order[s] in which better care is taken by human beings for one another" (2012: 21). But there is more than yearning in this study. There is, here, a genuine Heideggerian concern to engage with what it means to be Azerbaijani and with the possibilities this may carry for anthropological understanding of human relationships. At the heart of this concern is a recognition of hospitality's significance in Azerbaijani ways of life.

This study has been driven by a desire to discover how hospitality as expressed in Azerbaijani ways of life can help us all think differently about ourselves and our relationships. In the words of Michel Foucault,

> What would be the value of the passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeableness and not, in one way or another and to the extent possible, in the knower's straying afield of himself … to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known? (1992: 8-9)

Journeys of Illumination

For a foreigner to write about Azerbaijani ways of life is a presumptuous task. I recognize the character of "refractory representation" (Comaroff 1992: 9) which this task carries. It is through the lens of who I am that I see and represent to the best of my ability that which I have had the privilege to observe, experience and discuss in my life among those who call themselves Azerbaijanis. There is a fragility in academic narrative, in its inextricable ties to the writer, to the limited perspectives and experiences of a singular individual. But there is also a freedom in this singularity. It is a freedom of being offered a unique voice, for a specific time and place, to be expressed in all of its particularity.

Following in the footsteps of others, like Audrey Altstadt, Svante Cornell (2005, 2006, 2015), Betty Blair (1993-2019), and Taduesz Swietochowski (1995, 2011), who have established a sustained interpretive reflection on Azerbaijan, I have embarked on my own research journey with an acute appreciation for the complexity of Azerbaijani ways of life. Historical and political forces, waves of significant change and transition, rapid economic development, have all created an anthropological diversity that requires intentional recognition of a multiplicity of voices and particular experiences.

There is a small collection of international voices who have contributed to intellectual dialogue on ways of life in Azerbaijan over the last half century. This group of voices is not large, but it has been committed (Kurban 2018: 103). One of the challenges for this current study has been that the dialogue into which these voices have entered has not been particularly anthropological. It has been located within discussions of history, economics, politics and social development. Published voices from within Azerbaijan have largely joined these same streams of dialogue. Robust anthropological descriptions of Azerbaijani ways of life are not in abundance. Aspects of hospitality within these ways of life are even less represented. This has not, however, been a hindrance to the current study. Rather, it has directed it in particular ways.

I was sharing my angst with a colleague at the Ethnographic Institute of the Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences - angst regarding the existential limitations of research, the challenges of looking beyond oneself to not just see others, but to attempt to see their world as they do [V00-24]. He had spent a lifetime in research over a period that spanned both the Soviet and post-Soviet chapters of Azerbaijan's history. He was one of my mentors in my early years of research. He was particularly helpful to me as one coming into Azerbaijani ways of life. He had travelled significantly and had worked extensively

with foreign ethnographers who had come into Azerbaijan. He had observed various ways of conducting research and had helpful reflections on the experience of learning to conduct research within his national context. I was remarking one day in his office on the picturesque hill above what was then known as Kirov Park, now the Highland Park, that the vast majority of what has been published about the rich ways of life that are practiced in Azerbaijan has been produced by foreigners. “Where do you find your place in this significantly foreign dialogue?” I asked.

I expected him to answer with an anecdote, as was his custom. The anecdote was indeed forthcoming. But first, as he leaned forward, he responded with a personal comment and a smile. “There are many people who know more about us than we do ourselves. They enjoy what they know. I enjoy who I am.” The power of this comment lay in the complete authenticity of his joy. He then proceeded with his narrative.

He gestured toward a hand-woven carpet on the wall. “What do you see?” Looking at the intricately woven *Shirvan* I admired the various emblems and motifs, the *butas*[4], the jewels, flowing in symmetrical patterns. “These are beautiful patterns.” I replied.

“Do you see the threads?” he asked. From my place in the room the individual threads were not visible. “They are still there, as they have always been, from the beginning.” He leaned back. “Carpets are all about their threads, but the best carpets don't show their threads. If made well, a carpet is experienced in its unity. We threads know our place.”

This study has been a journey, a finding of my place as I have looked more closely at numerous individual threads of the carpet that is 'being Azerbaijani'. Three perspectives

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[4] The flame-shaped symbol of the *buta* is an ancient Azerbaijani symbol, often referred to as paisley in English. It features prominently in Azerbaijani art and handicrafts, such as carpets.

have stayed firmly with me throughout this journey. The first is a determination to honour the particular voice, the individuality of experience and the inseparability of experiences from those who live them. This has given great strength to my own pursuit of voice in research and has shaped my approach to research and interpretation in this study.

The second perspective is a recognition of the depth which personhood carries. An appreciation for the complexity which influences who a person has become stands as a foundation for the ways and means of this study.

The third perspective is a firm belief in the inter-subjectivity of being human, the inextricable place of others in the experiences of an individual, and the undeniable role that others have in shaping an individual's experience. There is an inherent tension between appreciation of particularity and inter-subjectivity which has distinctly shaped anthropology as a whole. “Anthropology sits uneasily on the tension between the individual and the social” (MacClancy 2007: 191). But it is this uneasy tension which also gives life to anthropological dialogue. Anthropological angst continues to drive the disciplinary pursuit for understanding of the depths and complexities of being human.

These perspectives regarding the particularity, complexity and inter-subjectivity of being human have significant genealogies in existential philosophy. Since the problematic character of existence, its finitude, its isolation and limitation, was given existential voice through the work and lives of Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), the human sciences have been challenged to grapple with 'being human' in significantly new ways. The philosophical umbrella of existentialism is defined by its shared tenets. Some of its proponents have embraced the existential label (Sartre, Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty) while others decidedly have not

(Heidegger, Camus). What unites them are recognizably similar methodological and philosophical perspectives.

One of the central tenets of existential philosophy has been appreciation for the lived character of existence, its intimate connection to individual lives, their situations and particularities. This has lent itself to authentic expression in the medium of narrative. Camus' *The Stranger* (1942) and *The Guest* (1957), Sartre's *Nausea* (1938), *The Flies* (1947), and *No Exit* (1947), Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883), Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* (1864) and Kierkegaard's philosophical grappling with the Abrahamic episode of sacrifice, in *Fear and Trembling* (1843), are all hallmarks of existential philosophy.

The existential umbrella celebrates the philosophical and reflective character of life, the working out of our existence in "fear and trembling" (Kierkegaard 1843). There is a distinct conception of teleological impetus within this working out of existence. Being human is defined by a practical striving for our existence (Leibniz & Morris 1965, Blumenfeld 1973), predicated on two strikingly opposing aspects of our experience, the great possibility offered by human freedom and the limitations of human finitude. Existential philosophy lives and moves within this experience of opposition between possibility and limitation.

A defining theme within existential writing has been the individual self and all that it means to be a particular person. Human existence is at once full of possibilities embodied by human choice and yet, continually faced with the limitations inherent in the contextually bound, situated character of the singular person. This experience of opposition is deeply anthropological and existential perspectives on human being bear significant weight in the discipline. At the heart of this disciplinary weight is the

existential experience of research itself. The passion of curiosity, altruism, and pursuit of possibilities which has driven the discipline to the furthest corners of the globe has been matched with the equally real experience of researcher fallibility, the ethical and moral hubris of speaking about others, issues of power and methodological conundrums of objectivity.

The existentiality of anthropology has become an anchor for me in the course of this research. There is a natural home for this study in the disciplinary niche of existential anthropology. In his *Between One and One Another*, Michael Jackson writes,

> As an anthropologist, I have never sought the kind of knowledge of others that purports to transcend the world of their experience, reducing human lives to cultural representations, innate imperatives, social rules, traditional values, or global processes; my interest is in the knowledge that may contribute to tolerant coexistence in a world of entrenched divisions and ineradicable differences. To this end one needs an ability both to think for oneself and to be open to the thinking of others, and a capacity for both self-analysis and social critique. (2012: 7)

In resonance with Jackson, I embrace the co-experiential character of research, the potential for anthropological study to celebrate diversity and to bridge divisions, to expand personal capacity for understanding and to open doors to discovery of what is good in human existence, alongside others.

Existential Anthropology

As a researcher it often seems that pressing questions are continuously descending and alighting on one's consciousness. Questions are not respecters of time or place. They come in the middle of the night, on a bus, while sitting on the beach, and even in the middle of a conversation about the weather. But it is not only questions which drive us to deeper reflection and study. It can also be answers.

It has been quite common, during my time among Azerbaijanis to be asked the question, “Why did you come to Azerbaijan?” This is a question of welcome, an invitation to share some of my life story. Over the years another question has become more frequent,

which, at first, was harder for me to answer. “What keeps you here in Azerbaijan?” This is a particularly personal question, directed towards personal motivations beyond research. I found myself providing a variety of responses to this question until a particular answer emerged that was most satisfying. “I like who I am here.”

My experience of Azerbaijani ways of life has been an experience of becoming. There is a personal story inside of which my research has run. I have come to realize that this is very much the nature of anthropological exploration. In his memoir, *The Accidental Anthropologist*, Michael Jackson writes of his life's journey through questions of belonging and place, which continually took him out of places, driven by the longings of an “impatient imagination...to reconnoitre the world” (2006: 10-11). He traces the roots of his anthropological curiosity to the desire to find in other places and the lives of others a sense of self and location. There is a growing recognition within anthropology of the lived character of research, the interconnectedness of the researcher with the ways of life to which anthropological reflection is directed (Turner 2005, Borneman & Hammoudi 2009, Vesperi & Waterston 2011). Alongside this recognition of the co-experience of research there is also a growing group of anthropologists who are embracing the interconnected character of being human itself.

Albert Piette refers to the depth of what it means to be human as a “volume of being”, a “unit that emerges against the backdrop of a context that has become secondary” (Piette 2017: 3-4). Piette has focused significantly in his life's work on the irreducibility of a human being, the complexity of all that makes a human, the particularity and individuality which is inherent to this complexity. In 2015, Albert Piette and Michael Jackson came together to publish *What is Existential Anthropology?* This was a work intended to bring together a constellation of concepts that they had been developing individually, Jackson

in his *Existential Anthropology* (2005) and Piette in his *Anthropologie Existentiale* (2009). Though they had each adopted different approaches to the exploration of existential perspectives in anthropology they identified their shared “assertion that, while individual acting, thinking, and feeling are always situated historically, socially, and environmentally, every person’s existence is characterized by projects, intentions, desires, and outcomes that outstrip and, in some sense, transform these prior conditions.” (M. Jackson & Piette 2015: 3)

Jackson (2017: 24-37) lists five themes which define existential anthropology. All of these reveal a recognition of existential tensions and a comfortability, even an embrace, of the character of human existence as being in the middle of these tensions.

The first is the theme of inter-subjectivity, “the relational character of human existence that Heidegger called 'being-in-the-world' (Dasein)” (M. Jackson 2017: 27). Husserl's original conception of this term grounds it.

> [O]ur relationships with the world of others and the world around are relations of inter-est, that is, they are modes of inter-existence, informed by a struggle for the wherewithal for life. We are, therefore, not stable or set pieces, with established and immutable essences, destinies, or identities; we are constantly changing, formed and reformed, in the course of our relationships with others and our struggle for whatever helps us sustain and find fulfilment in life. (M. Jackson 2017:28)

In Jackson's conception of this inter-connected character of human existence human beings are connected to one another, but also to objects and situations. Albert Piette has been consistently careful not to allow this inter-subjectivity to subsume all that makes up our conception of human existence. In his relentless focus on the “individual existent” (Piette 2015: 178), he brings into creative tension, alongside the inter-subjective character of human existence, the complexity of individuality. This resonates with Jackson's second and third themes, the complexity of human identities, and the irreducibility of this complexity.

“[T]he meaning of any human life cannot be reduced to the conceptual language with which we render it intelligible or manageable” (M. Jackson 2017: 32). Existential anthropology challenges anthropological conceptions of human existence that on the one hand homogenize groups of individuals as if they were all the same and on the other, simplify descriptions of these homogenously grouped individuals by proposing one aspect of human existence as more defining than the other. Much of anthropological writing has employed the concept of 'subject' to facilitate the segregation of select aspects of human existence, seeking to give priority or significance to one over the other. For Jackson, the contextually particular subject is a whole, only itself when taken for all of itself. “[N]either the personal nor the political, the particular or the abstract, senses of 'subjectivity' can be postulated as prior. They are mutually arising; each is the condition of the possibility of the other.” (M. Jackson 2017: 31)

Piette takes this holistic conception further through development of the concept of continuity, understanding individuals as they reveal themselves over time. In this concept of continuity Piette gives recognition to the developmental character of human identities. The complexity of being human is a dynamic concept, not a static one. Full embrace of the complexity of human existence and existants is progressive and must take into account the transformative role of the passing of time. For Piette, the study of being human is “the observation and description of the existence of human beings, of each human being in his or her individual singularity as he or she goes about living, being here-and-now, and continuing, each coming from various situations and moving toward other situations.” (2015: 179)

Jackson's fourth theme is the “paradox of plurality...our humanity is at once shared and singular...we both identify with others and differentiate ourselves from them” (M. Jackson

2017: 31). Here Jackson purposefully positions existential anthropology in the middle of the tension between inter-subjectivity and particularity. Michael Lambek refers to this as the "uncertainty of both/and" (2015: 59). This subjective tension of existence is the first of two central tensions into the middle of which existential anthropology intentionally places itself. The second tension is the formative tension. This comes out in Jackson's fifth theme, dynamic constitution.

Building on the concept of continuity, Jackson identifies a synchronized conception of the formation of human beings. As with the subjective tension, the formative tension in existential anthropology is a case of 'both/and'. "[H]uman existence involves a dynamic relationship between how we are constituted and how we constitute ourselves, between what is already there in the world into which we are born and what emerges in the course of our lives within that world" (M. Jackson 2017: 35).

These five themes, coming together across a web of subjective and formative tensions, provide a philosophical home for existential anthropology. This home has become a place which numerous others have been invited to inhabit, "to approach the philosophical question of existence in an anthropological manner...observing and describing moments of being and modes of human experience along lines suggested by existential anthropology" (Denizeau 2015: 214). As Denizeau notes, this is a particularly welcoming environment in which a wide variety of anthropologists have chosen to engage because it "is based less on theoretical foundations than on an epistemological project and posture." (2015 :214)

The Existential Journeys of this Study

The existential experience of opposition between possibility and limitation is clearly evident in existential anthropology's tensions. What existential anthropology seeks is best

understood as a path through these tensions, rather than a location within them. There is a strong belief in existential anthropology that research which seeks to ride, to be carried through human experiences, will lead to a better understanding of the fullness of what is true, of the complete picture of reality which, though beyond us in its entirety, can be illuminated in part. Albert Piette speaks of the work of existential anthropology as pursuing "bridge-descriptions...anthropologically compatible bridges to other descriptions" (2015: 182). These bridges allow for a bringing together of perspectives provided by different scales of reflection, various disciplinary interpretations as well as the diverse and particular experiences of individuals in their situated and specific contexts. In this 'bringing together' existential anthropology finds its contribution. In the search for 'paths through', paths to bridge perspectives of difference, existential anthropology makes an invitation. It invites multiple illuminations on the human condition, on the experiences of human existence.

This study has found strong resonance with existential anthropology's conception of the research 'journey of illumination' as a sustained reflection on multiple and diverse human experiences. At the heart of this resonance is a perspective that was gained early in the research process. My earliest attempts to find a way into the study of hospitality in Azerbaijani ways of life were centred on sequence and process. Where does hospitality begin? What are the steps that are carried out as it is offered? I had ample opportunity, in my years of life in Azerbaijan, prior to taking on this current study, to observe and participate in practices of hospitality. But, as I was shaping the direction of the current study, it quickly became apparent that these practices are not at the core of the place which hospitality holds in Azerbaijani ways of life.

Practices of hospitality have diversified within Azerbaijan as forces of change take effect. Urbanization, migration, demographic shifts, interaction with global media and numerous other factors have altered practices, but nonetheless, there continues to be something beyond practices which defines the role of hospitality in Azerbaijani ways of life. Beyond processes of invitation and reception there is something which connects hospitality to Azerbaijani experiences of life, as my observations of experiences like Eurovision 2012 first opened my eyes to see.

The character of this 'something' took shape for me in a conversation in the home of one of my close academic colleagues [V06-10]. They were one of our long-term family friends in Azerbaijan. We had experienced coming into our relationship with them first, as strangers, and then progressing through levels of acquaintance into friendship. As I began this study it was a comment from my colleague's wife that directed me towards a perspective more fruitful than process in understanding hospitality's place in Azerbaijani ways of life.

It had been a particularly busy week for her as a number of guests had been coming through their home. Some of them were family, others just academic colleagues of her husband, passing through. I was observing the various ways these different guests were received. I was focusing on what was driving differences of practice. After a particularly busy day she had a moment to sit down and I had the opportunity to ask her some questions about her experiences of hospitality. In the course of our conversation I asked her the question, “Where does hospitality begin?” She struggled to answer this question. So, I clarified a little more. “Does it begin with the arrival of the guest, or is there something earlier? What makes an event begin to be one of hospitality?” Her reply was

revealing of the character of hospitality in Azerbaijani ways of life. “Hospitality,” she replied, “doesn't begin with a moment, it begins with hospitable people.”

Here was a focus on practitioners, on persons. As I embraced existential perspectives, the appropriateness of this shift quickly became apparent to me. The primary locus of my research was not to be circumstances or events. It was to be persons. My methods of discovery needed to focus on the personal experiences of those who call themselves Azerbaijanis as they have participated in ways of hospitality. My research articulation, the organization and written expression of my data, needed to take clear forms of 'particular illumination', honouring the individuality and uniqueness of personal experiences. Clear attention was to be drawn, as well, to the 'shared illumination' these personal experiences offer, respecting the participatory character of hospitality experiences which necessarily involve multiple persons. And, to the 'cumulative illumination' these experiences can provide, appreciating the valuable contribution research can make in laying multiple discoveries alongside one another to gain a more complete picture of a wider whole.

The teleology of my interpretation, likewise, needed to have a personal, experiential character. The existential inquiry of the current study has at its core a sustained reflection on personal experiences of navigation, paths taken by Azerbaijanis, through the subjective and formative tensions of the relationships within which ways of hospitality operate. This sustained reflection is on the failures as well as the successes of these navigations, on the laments as well as the celebrations.

Being Azerbaijani

On the wall of the reception room of the Department for Immigration in Baku, the capital of the Republic of Azerbaijan, is a large plaque which reads, *Azərbaycanın dövlət*

müstəqilliyi əbədidir, dönməzdir və daimidir; “The independence of the Azerbaijani State is eternal, irreversible and permanent.” This quote, attributed to the late President of the Republic, Heydar Aliyev (1923-2003), stands next to the Azerbaijani national flag and a map of the nation. The flag carries the officially recognized design first introduced in 1918 and subsequently, with minor variations, adopted in 1991 by the new Republic. The map reflects the territory officially defined at the time of the Declaration of Independence in 1991.

In this single image, with its attendant quote, one finds a number of common symbols and perspectives on 'accounts of being Azerbaijani'. For many Azerbaijanis it is difficult to separate the concept of 'being Azerbaijani' from some association with the concept of statehood (Tokluoglu 2005: 722). Flags, borders, and political personalities are all common symbols connected to statehood. Imagined (Anderson 1983) or otherwise, the role of nation-states today is still important for defining how citizens represent themselves (Anttonen 2005).

Definitions of being Azerbaijani which are closely tied to the Azerbaijani nation-state are a common place for research on the Republic to begin, focusing strongly on political themes such as nationalism, ethnicity, foreign policy and development of government and civil practices (Shaffer 2002; Souleimanov 2013; Altstadt 2017). “[T]he nation remains a key unit of shared experience” (Inglehart & Baker, 2000: 37), shaping the values and perspectives of Azerbaijani citizens and neighbours alike (Mehdiyeva 2011: 15). There are, however, particular limitations to the extent which a nation-state can claim to comprehensively represent or define all of its citizens. The Azerbaijan that I have come to know, and my life-encounters with those who call themselves 'Azerbaijani' are not

sufficiently represented by the term or conception of nation-state alone. There is a distinct pluricentricity to the history and experience of 'being Azerbaijani'.

Employed within linguistics, to challenge perceptions of homogeneity (Clyne 2012, Soares da Silva 2014), the concept of pluricentricity has much to offer anthropology. Muhr (et al. 2015) defines linguistic pluricentricity in terms of the interplay between multiple representations of a language (occurrences), the extent of the differences between these representations (distance), the external recognition which is afforded these representations (status), the internal recognition which is afforded these representations (acceptance), and the depth to which these representations are connected to identity. As an anthropological concept, pluricentricity can be employed in an analogous manner to explore the interplay of varied expressions or representations that lie behind the perceptions of the 'being' of a group.

Within an anthropological conceptualization of pluricentricity, the nation-state can play a significant role in the provision of status for a group. The nation-state can also have significant influence on a group's identity (Barker 2004, Tokluoglu 2005, Eriksen 2010) and even the individual identity of a group's members (Minkov & Hofstede 2013, Militz & Schurr 2016). But the nation-state does not provide an exhaustive perspective on the history and experience of 'being Azerbaijani'.

As one reads more widely, beyond the influential works of broad historical review on Azerbaijan (Altstadt 2017, Cornell 2015, Swietochowski 2011, Bolukbasi 2014), there are a myriad of aspects to being Azerbaijani which emerge, deepening the initial perspectives provided by politico-historical works. These include biographical and literary perspectives as well as focused research on specific aspects of life experience. It is in the diversity of these representations (occurrences) and in their surprising complexity

and distinctiveness relative to one another (distance) that the pluricentricity of being Azerbaijani can be seen. These varied representations, alongside the externally defined influences of the nation-state, can be seen to contribute, in their own right, to the identity and internal validation (acceptance) of those who consider themselves to be Azerbaijani.

My research work has been an endeavour filled with collection and appreciation of a myriad of particular Azerbaijani stories. I have set a task for myself, however, to not simply 'display' these stories as exhibits, standing alone and unexamined. Though different in character from one another, particular stories benefit from arrangement, alongside one another. This arrangement allows for a different kind of appreciation to emerge. Reflection on elements which are shared, across particular stories can illuminate aspects of these stories which are difficult to see otherwise.

"Stand back", I was told. "Just a little bit further" [V12-15]. I was carefully examining a rich blue shard of *şəbəkə*[5] in one of the stained-glass panels of the *Khan Saray*, in Shekhi, a town in north-western Azerbaijan. The mid-day sun had lit up the walls of glass lining the magnificent 18th century manor. We had spent the morning in the workshop of one of Azerbaijan's leading *şəbəkə* artists. He had explained the nuances of colouring which went into the creation of each piece of *şəbəkə*. I was now looking closely to appreciate the unique tones of this particular piece of glass.

As I backed up, upon instruction, the guide's gentle voice continued. "Just a little bit further. Let the light bring them together." Stepping back a little more, I was finally caught up in the greater picture. The sunlight, filtered through the swaying leaves and branches of the great oaks in the courtyard, hit the wall, making each shard sparkle. It was the

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[5] Mosaics of stained glass, traditionally formed by inserting shards of glass into wooden frameworks.

shared illumination provided by the shards together which I was now experiencing. In this room of light, I was a witness to the shards and their compilation, to the parts and their combined impact.

In this written presentation of my research, I have chosen a particular term to describe my experience of the blend of particular and shared illuminations. I have employed the concept of 'ways of life', in its plural form, when identifying what I perceive to be elements of being which are shared, in significant ways, by Azerbaijanis. In Azerbaijani, I have used the term, *həyat yolları*, life paths (ways, journeys), to express this concept. The allusion to journey and physical motion comes through strongly in this Azerbaijani concept. I have found this to be a fruitful and appropriate conception of how Azerbaijanis themselves are experiencing the character and direction of their individual and shared lives.

The Possibilities of Hospitality

Approaching the table on which the banquet of hospitality has been laid, an image I have appreciatively appropriated from Matei Candea and Giovanni Da Col's *The Return of Hospitality* (2012), has been an experience, for me, of listening and frequent movement. I have mused, at times, with participants in my researching efforts, that I find myself continually getting up from the table, realizing that I am not sitting in the right place. Where is the place at this table for Azerbaijani ways of hospitality? Numerous colleagues, interviewees, co-researchers and conversation partners who have engaged with me in this work have noted, my task is more complex than the simple act of 'finding my own seat' can describe.

"You aren't just joining the party," said Arif, father of my one of my daughter's classmates [V12-30]. Crowds were on our mind as we stood in the school yard, waiting

to pick up our children. “You have arrived with your own guest list!” This is, in fact, the experience that I have had. I began my research journey in the pages of anthropology and philosophy, leaning into conversations in various places at the table. I listened to the exchanges between Jacques Derrida and Julian Pitt-Rivers on the impossibilities of hospitality (Pitt-Rivers 1968, Derrida 2000), virtuous toasts to alterity and exteriority from Emmanuel Levinas (1961), and classic tales of hosting and guesting from across the globe – among the Inuit of Baffin Island (Müller-Wille and Zumwalt 2014), across the islands of Melanesia (Malinowski 1922), on the Mongolian steppes (Humphrey 1987).

Large sections of the table were alive with conversations that touched on themes and experiences prevalent within Azerbaijani ways of hospitality. Voices of Mediterranean hospitality (Pitt-Rivers 1977; Boissevain 1979; Gilmore 1982, 1987; Albera, Blok and Bromberger 2005) spoke enlivenedly of spontaneity, abundance, the sanctity of the guest, and of hospitality in the face of enmity. Religious perspectives on hospitality provided insights into various moral and interpersonal implications of hospitality (Pohl 1999, Siddiqui 2015).

Philosophical soliloquies abound around the table. Some can be heard wherever one sits, some are more quiet, content to engage with careful listeners. Hospitality has been harnessed as a framework for diverse themes from migrancy (Molz and Gibson 2007), to power (Foucault 1969). It has been employed across a range of disciplines for its “cumulus” (Da Col 2019) of language that allows for analysis of offer and reception, presentation and internalization, giving and taking.

“You have arrived with your own guest list!” My challenge has been true to Arif’s assessment. Stepping into the discursive ecology of hospitality, I have attempted to bring my Azerbaijani colleagues and research participants with me, to seat them at the table

alongside me. To some extent I have managed to find room. I have engaged students, colleagues and close friends with some of the more poignant texts and accounts which cut across aspects of Azerbaijani ways of life. We have debated Levinas and Derrida. We have followed hosts and guests through the homes, gardens, marketplaces and public arenas of other places. But it has not been possible to fully engage the bulk of my research participants in each of these conversations.

When one has one's own guest list, it is time to set one's own table. Over the course of this project of researching, I have moved from attempts to seat Azerbaijani ways of hospitality in one or another place at the table of hospitality discourse, towards setting a table alongside. My participation in anthropological conversations on hospitality and hospitable ways of being have prepared me to engage in a new way around the uniquely Azerbaijani table. I have brought some of these conversations with me. They have provided a place from which to begin searching for language to describe Azerbaijani ways of hospitality in an anthropological manner.

I have made a concerted effort in my work to preference this more intimate table. I have been acutely aware that the concept of hospitality is easily employed to universalize various aspects of human engagement. Over these years, however, it has been my ever-growing experience that hospitality is a deeply emic concept for Azerbaijanis. In describing Azerbaijani ways of life, I have not found the need to mute etic conceptions of hospitality. Rather, I have found the opposite to have occurred. My conceptions of hospitality, in the broadest terms, have been intricately shaped by what I have experienced within Azerbaijani ways of hospitality. Azerbaijani ways of life have given me new understanding and new language for conversations at the longer table.

In the remainder of this section, I provide some reflection on three threads of conversation within the anthropology of hospitality that connect my research to wider disciplinary voices. I look first at hospitality as discussed in terms of its actors and roles, introducing the role of the witness alongside host and guest, and describing the process of witnessing which I have undertaken in this study.

I then review how hospitality is often approached in considerations of virtuosity and ethics, describing the evaluative character of this study and the representational genre of narrated ethnography that I have employed. I close with an exploration of the particularity that defines moments and spaces of hospitality, referencing the hermeneutic character of the study.

Bearing Witness to the Drama of Hospitality

Hospitality has proven to be a vibrant multi-disciplinary topic of conversation. A quick foray across academic domains reveals the language of hospitality in such diverse expressions as "host-guest chemistry" (Piñeiro et al 2007), "literary critic as host" (Miller 1977), "immigrant as guest" (Rosello 2001), and "spirituality as hospitality" (Visser 2007). At the heart of these conceptual appropriations is a recognition of particular characteristics embodied by the coming together of persons, objects, spaces, ideas. In these proximities, conceptual roles are assigned. Functions of offer and reception are delineated from those of entrance and acceptance. 'Taking in' is laid alongside 'coming in'. That which is already present meets that which is becoming present.

Within anthropology, definitions of hospitality often assign these functions to the prototypical roles of host and guest. To the host is ascribed such functions as "cordial reception, welcome and entertainment…kind and generous liberality" (Morrison and O'Gorman 2006: 3). The guest, is depicted as the one who asks for hospitality, enters into

offered relationships (Mauss 1966). These are simply prototypes, however. Listening in on particular anthropological conversations reveals distribution of functions between the host and the guest which is more nuanced. The dramatic engagement of hosts and guests has come to be understood as much for its paradoxes as for its norms (Candea and Da Col 2012: 3).

A brief survey of the field quickly illustrates the breadth of functional distribution across hospitality's roles. Mutuality of hospitality functions can be seen in the sharing of responsibility for 'liveliness' (Allerton 2012: 52), co-facilitation of the process of consumption (Curro 2020: 217), and exchange of gifts (Mauss 1966). Ambiguities of invitation and reception have been noted when spaces defy power of domain (Battaglia 2012), or when capacities and circumstances require blending of giving with receiving, offering with accepting. Blended hospitality circumstances have been explored in metaphysical relationships, for example. The iconic Mesopotamian narrative of Abraham hosting God himself beneath the oaks of Mamre places host and guest roles in this kind of blended light (Genesis 18, Selwyn 2000). The entrance of deity into the space of a mortal being is difficult to depict as a simple act of becoming a guest.

In each research context, though hospitality roles may be identified, functions must be revealed. Hospitality roles may be commonly shared, but the delineation of functions between these roles requires particular discovery. In the current study, this process of discovery required particular conversations and a diversity of sources. It has not been Levinas or Derrida, Malinowski or Pitt-Rivers around whom I have gathered with the majority of my research participants. Our conversations have, however, engaged deeply with alterity and familiarity, expressions of self and otherness, receptive encounters and challenging proximities, experienced as well as projected.

Though the pool of academic sources on Azerbaijani ways of life is small, I have found significant language and imagery for engaging around the table set for Azerbaijani ways of hospitality in art and literature, on the stage and on the cinematic screen - in the political and ideological struggles which unfold on the pages of Mirza Fatali Akhundzade's poetry, novels and dramas; in the search for identity and belonging across the ethnic, economic and geographic landscapes of Qurban Said's *Ali and Nino*; in the social commentary of Uzeyir Hajibeyov's *O Olmasin, Bu Olsun* (If Not That One, Then This One), *Arshin Mal Alan* (The Cloth Peddler) and numerous other popular depictions and explorations of Azerbaijani ways of life.

These depictions and explorations have spurred robust discussions around the character of hospitality roles across various dimensions and within different domains. Early recognition of the multi-scalar presence of hospitality in Azerbaijani ways of life gave invitation to the work of Tom Selwyn (2000). Selwyn's delineation of social and cultural, domestic and private, and commercial domains of hospitality has proven useful as a framework for understanding the spaces in which Azerbaijani hosts and guests make their presence with one another. Kevin O'Gorman's (2007) reflection on the threads and themes which cut across anthropologies of hospitality has also functioned as a productive guide. O'Gorman's 'dimensions of hospitality' have provided a checklist with which to begin conversations around popular as well as personal hospitality narratives.

As a guiding framework for my study, however, rather than to domains or dimensions, I have continued to return to roles within Azerbaijani ways of hospitality. In this process, I have realized the need for a broader set of roles. Explorations of hospitality as "honourable tradition, fundamental to human existence, stratified, diversified, and central to human endeavour" (O'Gorman 2007: 28-30) elicited narratives and reflections on

Azerbaijani ways of hospitality which pointed to a broader distribution of functions than the roles of host and guest could carry alone.

Anne Dufourmantelle (2011) conceptualized a more robust set of roles, proposing a third role in hospitality, which she referred to as “the witness”. The witness is the one who brings “scenes of hospitality” (Dufourmantelle 2011) together. The witness can be a space of hospitality, or a reference point for moral considerations. It can be a mediating individual, who may not be physically present in a particular hospitality moment. Safet Hadžimuhamedović identifies the figure of the “absent witness” (2018: 24) as this kind of grounding element in the Jewish celebration of Passover, at which an empty chair is left for the prophet Elijah.

Each of these roles - host, guest and witness – has been placed as a narrative focus for one of the chapters in this study. In addition to this, however, the role of witness has provided an important conception for me, as a researcher, of my own role in this academic narrative. I have been a ‘witness of’ Azerbaijani ways of hospitality. It was my initial proximity to these ways which prompted the desire to bear ‘witness to’ their significance. In the leading chapters of this study, I describe the process by which I set out on this journey from proximity into engagement. But, in bearing witness to Azerbaijani ways of hospitality, I have embarked on a further journey, one whose end is best understood as a horizon.

In this written presentation of my encounters with Azerbaijani ways of life I have been challenged to bear ‘witness for’ the significance of Azerbaijani ways of hospitality. These “spaces of encounter” (Krause 2005: 594) reveal ways of being that prompt advocacy and affirmation. This is not a work of activism, however. This is a work of attestation - to the transformative offer which arises from Azerbaijani ways of hospitality. The ultimate

testimony of this study is that it is a ‘witness by’ one who has received this transformative offer. This is the horizon towards which this study moves – that of ‘witness by’. This is an act of existential witness, to the persons Azerbaijanis are and become in their ways of hospitality, by the person into whom I have been transformed through encounters with these ways.

Negotiating the Virtues of Hospitality

“What does it mean to be a good Azerbaijani?” This catalytic question, an early guide on my personal journey of coming into Azerbaijani ways of life, often prompting a quick answer, has also continued to spark deeper questions. For multiple reasons, across multiple disciplinary contexts, hospitality has been posited as an answer to a broad range of questions. Hospitality may be a ready answer, but the character of the question is important to discern. This has been the shape of my research task - discovering the depth and character of the questions to which Azerbaijani ways of hospitality are the answer. In a moment of Azerbaijani hospitality, Rufat articulated some of the nuances of this journey ‘back’ to core questions [V10-43].

“What does it mean to be good?” Rufat was at the *mangal,* the open coal barbeque. I had asked him the question, ‘What does it mean to be a good Azerbaijani?’ He was focused on a particularly exquisite expression of Azerbaijani ways of hospitality – the fresh grill. Coals had been stoked, and he had just laid a set of skewers. The sizzle of *quyruq* (fatty tail of the lamb) and *tikələr* (pieces of meat) had turned all of our heads in his direction. It did not take me long to answer. Truly, what Rufat was creating deserved to be listed in the category of ‘good’. He was an expert at the grill, good at the task in which he was engaged. He was a picture of a good Azerbaijani host in that moment, with his guests expectantly seated, awaiting his provision. What he was preparing was

excellent, good quality, fresh meat, being cooked to delicious perfection. Goodness was present on multiple levels. “This is good.” I gestured around the glade. “In that case,” said Rufat. “Welcome to being a good Azerbaijani.”

Hospitality and ‘goodness’ have a mixed history. Hospitality has, on the one hand, been widely engaged as a subject of study and a metaphorical device for understanding interactions of various kinds, specifically because of its connection to virtuosity (Pitt-Rivers 1977; Da Col and Shryock 2017). It has also been the locus of much debate regarding the impossibility of achieving the very virtues it espouses (Derrida 2000, Wrobleweski 2012). Obligations (Mauss 1966), standards (Lashley, Lynch and Morrison 2007), rules (Sheringham and Daruwalla 2007), intentions and motives (Telfer 2011) and a wide variety of other moral and ethical language are difficult to separate from hospitality discourse. Hospitality “stands alongside forgiveness, confession, bearing witness, gift relations, mourning, justice, friendship” (Dikeç, Clark and Barnett 2009). These stand as pillars in conceptions of hospitality, alongside roles. This is where hospitality’s “zone of craft” (Humphrey 2012: 63) has emerged – in the complex “co-implications” (Marsden 2012: 117) that define the richness of the concept.

From within this zone of moral and ethical complexity, studies on hospitality have been able to pursue a broad range of purposes, with a variety of intentions. It has been important for me, in the current study, to maintain a clear picture of the character I desire for my research. There are numerous reflections, in this study, on what Azerbaijanis consider valuable in their ways of life and on the variety of evaluations which they make as they pursue these ways. This is not, however, a study of Azerbaijani ways of hospitality in moral or ethical terms. I have chosen, rather, to describe this as a study of the value which is created *by* hospitality in Azerbaijani ways of life.

I employ an ecology of terms in this written presentation which emphasizes construction rather than prescription. I use terms such as ‘negotiation’ and ‘navigation’ to describe Azerbaijani hospitable encounters. I am interested in the expectations to which hospitality gives expression in Azerbaijani ways of life. In this expectant mode of presentation, the picture of Azerbaijani ways of hospitality that I seek to paint in this study is that of a “social lens” (Lashley, Lynch and Morrison 2007: 8). I seek to understand Azerbaijani ways of life as defined by shared questions as much as shared answers.

Engaging with Azerbaijani ways of hospitality in evaluative terms has prompted my use of a particular representational genre which I have labelled ‘narrated ethnography’. The flow of this written presentation is structured around an anthology of Azerbaijani hospitality encounters. One could, in principle, extract these accounts and engage with them on one’s own, without any of the academic narrative which I have constructed on their foundation. The added value which I have sought to bring to this anthology is one of arrangement and engagement.

The order in which these accounts have been placed in relation to one another is intended to create a “genealogy of ideas” (Coleman, Hyatt and Kingsolver 2017; Nordstrom 2011) which is rooted in Azerbaijani lived experiences. My engagement with these experiential accounts takes the form of narration. Through narration I describe the manner in which I have come to understand the accounts, in their particulars but also in the interpretive trajectory which is created by bringing them together. This understanding has been achieved through various means. I have connected these accounts with conversations from within anthropology. I have also discussed these accounts with groups of Azerbaijanis. These connections and discussions have been compiled to produce the written presentation of this study – an anthology of Azerbaijani hospitality experiences

around which I provide academic connections, perspectives from Azerbaijanis and personal reflections, in order to offer a cohesive account of Azerbaijani ways of hospitality as I have come to know them.

This narrated ethnography has adopted a particular temporality, a character of lingering in its style. This is intentional. I have noted that Azerbaijanis have resonated readily with this style. Azerbaijani ways of hospitality lend themselves fully to lingering, to the creation of moments together in an unhurried manner. The use of stories and personal recognition as a foundation for articulating the character of Azerbaijan ways of being is a means of honouring the spirit of these ways as well as their content. This too is an act of preferencing the more intimate, smaller table around which Azerbaijani ways of life are discussed and shaped.

Due the highly dialogical and generative character of this work, it is important to note the linguistic media I employed in my engagements with Azerbaijanis. Conversations were conducted mostly in the languages of Azerbaijani and Russian. English was used occasionally, but far less frequently than Azerbaijani and Russian.

Defining the Particularities of Hospitality

"In that case, welcome to being a good Azerbaijani." I have initiated a number of conversations around this moment, its words, its setting, the aspects of 'goodness' that were being exhibited. As I will describe, in the following chapter, engaging Azerbaijanis in reflection on such moments has been a foundational method in my research. In my growing understanding of the persons who engage in Azerbaijani ways of hospitality, and the expectations with which they live, I have paid close attention to the character of particular moments of hospitable expression. In this study, I describe a place for hospitality within Azerbaijani ways of life that is deeper than events and singular

moments suffice to express. However, it is the experiences of particular persons, in particular places and particular times, that have revealed these deeper ways of being.

In *Extending Hospitality: Giving Space, Taking Time* (2009) Mustafa Dikeç, Nigel Clark and Clive Barnett draw attention to the manner in which the broad issues and concerns which hospitality is often called upon to address depend upon the particular experiences of lived moments. They make a call to an attentiveness in relation to the "temporalization and spatialization of hospitality", to the "where exactly" of our engagements and encounters, to the "'proximities' that provoke acts of hospitality [and inhospitality]" (Dikeç, Clark and Barnett 2009: 4, brackets mine). It is through descriptions of spaces and times that many of the functions of hospitality's actors come into view: liveliness (Allerton 2012), establishment of domain (Battaglia 2012), provision of security (Ritzer 2007), giving respect and honour (Pitt-Rivers 1954).

As I engage with the particular narratives, persons, objects and spaces that are shared in the current study, I do so with an awareness that with presentation of real spaces and real moments comes real risk. Moral and ethical questions related to my own role in this research come into play when particularity is invoked, in the telling of other people's stories, in the interpretation of others' intentions and concerns. With spaces comes the concept of boundaries. This too has grabbed the anthropological imagination - the relationship between boundaries and hospitality. With spatialities and temporalities come conceptions of definition and delineation. Spaces and times are not infinite. Moments and places of hospitality project themselves outward, encompassing, englobing (Da Col 2019), giving definition and providing opportunity. But there are limits to which the opportunity and definition of a given moment and place can be extended.

There is a place and time for each particular host, guest and witness. Though it may be difficult to define exactly when and where the projection of a particular role ceases to apply, recognition of the existence of limits to any particular projection is a staple of hospitality discourse (Derrida 2000, Sheringham and Daruwalla 2007: 34). But who has the right, the capacity, the sufficiency, to identify the exactments of hospitable boundaries?

I have employed a hospitable hermeneutic in this study, which seeks to honour particular narratives, persons, and spaces, while creating a space for reflection on the whole, the pluricentric concept of being Azerbaijani. I am aware that those whom I include within this projection of being draw various boundaries around this being. These boundaries enclose highly affective spaces. In the later chapters of this work, I approach some of these boundaries and the affectations which they engender.

Outline of the Study

The sticky notes and cue cards which have filled the white-boards, tables, and walls of my life over these years of writing have given clear testament to the importance of arrangement and placement in the structure of this narrated ethnography. Friends and colleagues have frequently been drawn into my situating efforts, as we have shared conversations, pots of tea and games of backgammon amidst backdrops of scribbled notes and outlines. This shared engagement has had a significant impact on my writing, and how I understand it. In this final section of the current chapter, I provide an overview of the character and content of the written presentation of my study. As I do so, I have been challenged by those in my research network to give due attention to considerations of encounter and history alongside alignment and structure.

"There is more meaning in a carpet than a buyer may understand." Various worlds of Azerbaijani artistic expression have entered discussions as I have engaged with others around my literary decisions. The world of carpets has been a particularly popular source of reference. Before one buys a carpet, one must first imagine its placement among the other objects and trappings of one's life – which table it will showcase, the manner in which it will complete a room, the light it will be positioned to catch. In writing, I have had an analogous experience. Each story has had to find its place. Stories of Azerbaijani hospitality have invited one another and risen to respond to one another within this study. Each has enlightened and illuminated, in a particular way, but has also entered into conversation with others. Incorporation of each narrative element has required evaluation of placement and relationship.

The language of arrangement alone, however, is not sufficient to describe the structural character of this work. Literary considerations of alignment and placement have been well-tempered by other personas, beyond that of the 'situating buyer'. It is in the vocabulary of diverse personas, in fact, that I have found some of my most fruitful interactions with Azerbaijanis around the written presentation of this study. "Let's look at this from the perspective of the 'weaver'." Or "How might a seller lay this out?" These personalized frames of reference have facilitated important insights on literary decisions.

The eight chapters of this work move a central argument forward from revelation towards attestation and extension. This is an account of "learning lives" (Sefton-Green and Erstad 2013: 1). It is structured to reveal the manner in which I discovered Azerbaijani ways of hospitality, learned to study them and learn from them, was a witness to aspects of their deeper meaning, and found the language to discuss this meaning and the character of my witness with Azerbaijanis. It is also an account of who I have become in this process

and the offer of transformation I am now seeking to mediate from Azerbaijani ways of life to others. As I do so, I want to affirm, along with my Azerbaijani colleagues, the importance of keeping multiple personalized perspectives in mind as one engages with this written work.

"There is more meaning in a carpet than a buyer may understand." I have spent considerable time in various spaces within the world of Azerbaijani carpets. I have enjoyed leisurely afternoons of enticement in the rooms and corridors of the carpet sellers of Baku's Old City, and in the personal spaces of rural homes and workshops. I have come to appreciate the process of *qarşılaşma*, the encounter, which one has as carpets are presented with a focused intention of discovering what is in one's heart. Carpet sellers are masters of revelation. As the buyer surveys carpets, the seller is surveying the buyer. Each encounter with a carpet is observed, informing what is unfurled next. Experiments are made with colours and shapes, textures and patterns. Objects of potential desire are left open as others are laid alongside them.

I affirm the persona of the seller in my writing of this study. While this work has a logical arrangement, it is also a collection of impassioning encounters. I do not assume to know the particular desires of my readers' hearts, but I have sought, across the arc of this written work, to place readers in proximity to specific stories and concepts, in recognition of the potential Azerbaijani ways of hospitality have to offer, to inspire certain appreciations.

In addition to the buyer and the seller, there is another persona which bears mention in this overview. It is the persona of the weaver. In any sphere of creative expression there is a depth of understanding that can only truly be grasped by those who have lived through histories of encounter. Each singular experience of a carpet, a steaming culinary dish, a

stringed melody, or a painted canvas can move one further along a journey of appreciation. It is only over time, however, as encounters are sustained, that these experiences can lead to something aptly labelled ‘understanding’. “What a weaver knows, her carpets will tell.” It is in a carpet that the knowledge of a weaver finds its testimony. Lifetimes of learning and craft, experience and technique, are distilled into acts of singular creation. The months over which a carpet takes shape bear witness to the years over which the person of the weaver has been formed.

In these pages, as academic narrative and anthropological appreciation unfold, it is my sincere hope that the ‘weavers’, whose lives I have shared, will not be lost, or go unnoticed. Azerbaijani ways of hospitality are a testimony to hospitable persons, to histories of learning and craft. “Come and see.” This is my offer. It is an offer that I mediate. It does not originate with me. I offer that which I have been given, and which I now relay.

“Come and see.” Maarif’s offer came as I was admiring the rich red yarn which Saadet, his daughter, was deftly knotting into the carpet [V14-69]. In front of me was volume two of Latif Kerimov’s *Azerbaijani Carpet* (1961). I had watched, over the week, as the sunbursts, flowers, and birds took shape across the loom. Saadet’s thread-count was exquisite. But it was the colours of the carpet which had enraptured me.

“You won’t find what you are looking for in the book,” said Maarif. I had been gleaning as much knowledge as I could from him about the carpets which filled the rooms of his home. I had come to recognize the particular furls and progressions that had clearly been passed down through the generations - the curve of a bird’s wings at the end of a motif, the burst of a colour for a brief moment in the middle of a rose.

“This is where it comes from.” Out in the mountain pasture Maarif knelt to show me the bright red roots of the *boyaqotu*, a madder plant. I would later learn the process by which these roots were powdered and used to dye Saadet’s yarn. This was a moment when my journey of appreciation for Saadet’s work gained a new depth. I was moving from being a ‘witness to’ Saadet’s work to becoming, in a small way, one who could appreciate that to which her work, itself, was a witness.

I have not been able, in these pages, to fully recount the “this is where it comes from”, which lies behind each of the stories and reflections which I share. I have, however, been intentional, in certain ways.

In the current chapter, *Chapter One: Introductions*, I invite readers into this narrated ethnography. I articulate the ethnographic question which has driven my research and the motivations with which I have engaged the question. I make a claim for the significance of hospitality within Azerbaijani ways of being. In preparation for exploring this claim I define some of the methods and concepts that underpin my chosen approach to my argumentation. I locate my research within existential anthropology. I present the structure of my argumentation, centred around the three hospitable figures of host, guest and witness, and state my intent to write from a position of one who has witnessed.

In *Chapter Two: Fragile Spaces,* I provide an overview of Azerbaijan as a research context. I consider a variety of lens through which Azerbaijanis look at the past and present. Reflection is given on experiences of the Soviet period and the transition away from this period which followed. Observations are then made regarding the growing demographic diversity which is present in Azerbaijan and the manner in which this diversity is finding public expression.

In *Chapter Three: Discovering an Ontological Hospitality* I describe the manner in which I 'came into' and 'came to know' Azerbaijanis ways of being. I engage significantly with the hermeneutical framework presented in Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (2004), articulating a set of postures which I have adopted in relation to my research methodology. I describe how these postures enabled me to pursue proximity to Azerbaijani ways of life and then negotiate invitation, coming to a shared understanding of life together. I establish the interpersonal trajectory of my research, as an act of witness, a work of one who has been given the gift of experience and now seeks to bear this in a faithful manner to others. I close the chapter with a description of the three methods I employed to engage with Azerbaijani ways of hospitality: articulation of vignettes, collection of narratives and facilitation of discussion groups. These methods align well with my methodological location within existential phenomenology.

In *Chapter Four: Terms of Reverence*, I explore some foundational aspects of the Azerbaijani conception of hospitality, *qonaqpərvərlik*. I look at the manner in which Azerbaijanis navigate hospitable trust, establishing hospitality as a state of co-existence within which hospitable persons entrust one another with preservation of hospitable conditions. This space of care is described as founded on the concepts of grace and trusteeship.

In *Chapter Five: Living Invitationally*, I look at the role of the host within Azerbaijani ways of hospitality. I identify the manner in which Azerbaijani hosts navigate invitation and power of domain through the practices of liveliness and abundance. I explore the ontological intensity of hospitality roles within Azerbaijan ways of life, illuminating a way of life that is constantly invitational and an abundance of being that is predicated on open access to one's person.

In *Chapter Six: In the Shade of Hospitality*, I enter into the mobile presence of the Azerbaijan guest. I present the Azerbaijani guest as a person formed on the way towards others. In the face of hospitality's deep interpersonal demands, I look at the manner in which Azerbaijanis look in particular ways to practices of hospitality for shelter in the midst of conflict, contradiction and dissonance.

In *Chapter Seven: A Life Observed*, I examine the character of the witness in Azerbaijani ways of hospitality. I describe the manner in which observant witness, alongside memorial witness, provides cohesion and coherence to these ways. I present the witness's role as that of 'looking outwards', bridging moments and spaces by testifying on behalf of hospitality and its participants. This testimony strengthens shared narratives of hospitable ways of being, celebrating them and creating spaces for them. In the face of significant ontological challenges, caused by change and disruption, it is the faithfulness of the witness, to be present, to bear, and to represent, which makes the conditions and practices of *qonaqpərvərlik* possible and fruitful.

In my final chapter, *Chapter Eight: Conclusions,* I complete this written presentation of my research and embrace my own role of witness. I reflect on the significant elements of Azerbaijani ways of hospitality which I have discovered. These reflections take the form of invitations, to those who read this work and have now become, themselves, bearers of this experience.

Chapter Two: Fragile Spaces

"Contexts are in our heads, not *out there*."
- R. M. Keesing, 1972: 29

"Fragility implies the possibility of breaking, if not handled with care."
- Glavind and Mogensen 2022: 1

In this chapter I provide an overview of Azerbaijan as a research context. I consider a variety of lens through which Azerbaijanis look at the past and present. Reflection is given on experiences of the Soviet period and the transition away from this period which followed. Observations are then made regarding the growing demographic diversity which is present in Azerbaijan and the manner in which this diversity is finding public expression. I close the chapter with a rationale for the use of the term 'Azerbaijani hospitality' in my written work.

* * * * *

A good introduction is a poignant experience of hospitality. My personal experience of the hospitality of introduction has evolved over the years that I have moved into Azerbaijani spaces. Early in my journey I was often introduced by short generalizations, with references to my origins or accomplishments. I was introduced as Canadian, as a Mennonite, as a professor, as a researcher. Sometimes elements of my past such as my education or things I had written were referenced. Those who introduced me were limited to these generalizations by nature of the limited extent of our shared past and the limited connections I had to Azerbaijani ways of life. There was little to drawn upon to bridge the relational and experiential distance between me and those to whom I was being introduced.

In later years, introductions became more personal with references to a myriad of ways in which I had a shared past with the one introducing me or with those to whom I was being introduced. Humorous experiences, projects taken on together and moments where I had engaged in Azerbaijani ways of life were now frequently mentioned. Introductions had become more relationally concerned. I experienced firsthand the manner in which introduction is enriched and enabled by depth of relational history.

In the current chapter I provide an introduction to the past which undergirds Azerbaijani ways of life. I will be mediating an introduction to elements of the past which are held in the imaginations of Azerbaijanis as they move through the worlds they inhabit. There is considerable presumption in this endeavour, common to the making of introductions. I have deep relational connections to Azerbaijani ways of life as I have experienced them over the last three decades. But I have a more distant relational connection to the past which Azerbaijanis share with one another. I also have a more distant relational connection to readers of my work. As I host this space of introduction, I am cognizant of my relational and epistemic limitations.

The pool of information from which introductions are drawn is limited by the experiences of the one introducing. I can only introduce my readers to a description of moments in the past as I have been able to engage with them. These engagements have been vicarious as I rely upon the writings and recollections of others. The subject of my introduction is at the mercy of my mediation of these voices. I provide this introduction along with an exhortation. I exhort readers to receive this acquaintance to past moments as one might receive the initial conversations in a new relationship. Allow me to introduce you to these moments as I have come to know them, and as I have chosen to interpret them. But please, do not stop there. This is just a beginning. It is my hope that what I have written in these pages will arouse an interest in readers which will

lead to further engagement, further reading, further conversations, personal efforts to get to know Azerbaijani ways of life for oneself, as they have been and as they are currently unfolding.

I enter into three discursive spaces in this chapter. I begin with perspectives on Azerbaijan's Soviet past which are common to my interlocutors, including how I have come to know this past and how I have come to interpret it. I then look at the existential limitations of this research. Lastly, I explore the concept of Azerbaijani hospitality and my intent in using the term. I wish to provide some perspectives on the pages which follow that will help readers connect to the later chapters of this work. It is my intent to place readers in the path of what is to come, to arouse curiosity with a capacity for empathy and with enough critical understanding to weigh what is shared alongside personal life experiences.

Sharing History

Azerbaijan is one of the three nations which comprise the South Caucasus. It is situated on the southwestern shores of the Caspian sea with the Russian Federation to its north and Iran to the south. The population of the country as of 2022 was just over 10 million. Roughly 57% of the population lives in urban areas, with the majority located in the coastal area which includes and surrounds the capital of Baku.

Map 1: The South Caucasus (Georgia Today 2023)

When I first arrived in Azerbaijan in the late 90s it was a matter of humour that if one would ask people for directions in Baku, they would often provide instructions such as, "go down former Stalin Avenue", or "turn past former Yarmochnaya". The names of streets, parks, and metro stations were rapidly being changed, as new heroes were honoured, new events memorialized. Narratives were being renewed in support of the new independent identity of the Republic of Azerbaijan. But relocation of events and persons into new narratives was occurring faster than many were able to keep up with. They noted the acts of relocation but still referred to old locational references in everyday life. It was a time of narrative transition. Relocation was occurring as ripples across society, rather than as singular moments.

My early experiences, of standing amongst the ripples of relocation and transition, have provided me with an important perspective. When I first entered into Azerbaijani spaces I was one who was familiar only with the present. I knew the names of locations only as they were at the moment I encountered them. But those with whom I was engaging knew these places in a

significantly different way. They knew them as what they were, and as now having been changed. I stood as one to whom Azerbaijani ways of life needed to be introduced. I was one with whom knowledge needed to be shared, precisely because I was not one who had shared, with Azerbaijanis, the experiences which had provided this knowledge.

This is now the character of the task I endeavour to accomplish in the current chapter. I seek to connect readers with a sense of the past which has led to the experiences and perspectives laid out in my work. I will be engaging in the act of sharing, of providing knowledge to those who have not shared my experiences or the experiences of Azerbaijanis.

This chapter is not an attempt at 'a history', in the authoritative singular, of Azerbaijan. Several of these have been written (Goltz 1999, De Waal 2003, Swietochowski 1995, Bolukbasi 2014, Cornell 2015). This chapter is more akin to a gallery, a series of photographs. These snapshots represent aspects of the past which lend themselves to understanding aspects of the present. They are spaces of witness, connected to one another by the present. Though their origins are from different times, they share being a part of Azerbaijani narratives today. What they bring now creates a collage which gets interpreted and negotiated by Azerbaijanis, and others, in different ways.

It is common for Azerbaijan's present realities to be framed with reference to its history as part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. It has now been more than three decades since Azerbaijan declared its independence from the Union in 1991. Nonetheless, the social, economic and geo-political experiences of Azerbaijanis over these three decades have been significantly shaped by ways of life that were established in the Soviet period; Current aspirations, conditions and challenges cannot be fully understood without a perspective on Azerbaijan's Soviet past and the changes which followed. "To study present-day Azeri society without an awareness of the

vicissitudes of its twentieth century history would not adequately explain the immense complexities found there." (Heyat 2013: 25)

Azerbaijan joined the USSR in 1922 as part of the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic and was finally given an independent status as one of the 15 members of the Union in 1936. This was a status which came at the end of a complicated series of political shifts and transitions. It began in 1917 when, in the aftermath of World War I, as the Ottoman empire collapsed and the Russian empire became embroiled in struggles for power, Azerbaijan, along with Georgia and Armenia declared a shared independence. Formation of this amalgamated state, the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic was not surprising as the members had significant shared history as part of the Caucasian Viceroyalty within the Russian Empire. But this shared history was one which Azerbaijan carried in its own unique manner. When the opportunity arose, Azerbaijan seized the moment and for a brief period from 1918-1920 it declared itself as a sovereign state.

Map 2: Azerbaijan within the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

In my conversations with Azerbaijanis the First Republic has often been mentioned. It is common for various aspects of this period of Azerbaijan's past to be celebrated. It is considered by many to have laid important foundations on which the nation has continued to develop in the post-Soviet period. It was the first republic in the Muslim world (Cornell 2015: 23). It was one of the first nations in the world to give women the right to vote (UNICEF 2018). And it represented a moment when Azerbaijan, in the midst of numerous geo-political and socio-cultural complexities was able to navigate its own path and establish its own unique identity. These navigations continue to be relevant today.

One of these navigations has been the relationship between Azerbaijan, Armenia and the ethnically Armenian population of the region of Nagorno-Karabakh. As I write this chapter significant changes have occurred in this relationship. The perspectives reflected in my research conversations are from a time prior to Azerbaijan regaining political control of this region in 2023.

Map 3: Azerbaijan, Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh (Al Jazeera 2020)

Nagorno-Karabakh has been a disputed territory for centuries. It is a geographic region within which, prior to 2023, a large percentage of the population were Armenian by ethnicity. Contention in relation to this region has centred on political control over the region. The dispute pre-dates global conventions related to nation state borders. As these conventions have evolved, the Nagorno-Karabakh region has been at the centre of contentions between Armenia and Azerbaijan in relation to the definition and recognition of state borders. In the volatile years between 1917 and 1924, several precedents were established in relation to Nagorno-Karabakh.

First, Russia was established as an outside party who was interested in the geo-political implications of control over Nagorno-Karabakh. As Azerbaijan and Armenia joined the USSR, the decision was made that Nagorno-Karabakh would fall within the recognized borders of Azerbaijan. As Azerbaijan and Armenia emerged from the Soviet period, Russia's influence would continue to be important.

Second, control of the Nagorno-Karabakh was established as a matter of utmost national importance for both Armenia and Azerbaijan. It became a focal point for conceptions and presentations of identity and sovereignty in relation to other nations on the global stage. This continued into the Soviet and post-Soviet periods.

As the strength of Soviet control over the Caucasus began to wane in the late 1980s, contention over Nagorno-Karabakh quickly arose. Armenia and Azerbaijan sought once again to establish state borders, and a war ensued over Nagorno-Karabakh. This time Armenia received the political and military support of Russia, leading to Armenian control over Nagorno-Karabakh and several surrounding regions of Azerbaijan which became the status-quo for the next three decades.

In 2020 Azerbaijan began to reclaim control of the territory by military means, finally achieving full control in 2023. A large percentage of the ethnically Armenian population have since left Nagorno-Karabakh.

As I will discuss further in the chapters that follow, the relationship between Azerbaijan and Armenia hangs like a dark cloud over reflections on interpersonal postures and relational perspectives. It is a source of lament and a difficult situation to integrate into relationally dependent narratives such as hospitality.

There are numerous continuities between Azerbaijani ways of life today and the Soviet period. Azerbaijanis born in the 1990s or later and non-Azerbaijanis who have come to the country only in post-Soviet times may not be aware of these continuities. Systems for education and health are two spheres in which continuities are readily apparent. As I have travelled to other countries which were also part of the USSR, I have noticed strong similarities in the way that education and health systems operate. I have come to recognize the Soviet origins of these similarities.

In some ways these continuities provide a welcome stability as generational transitions occur. There is a shared history of experience that younger generations are being brought into. But these systems were designed with service to the needs of the state as a primary objective. Over the last three decades Azerbaijan has been transitioning into a milieu in which individuals have more autonomy to define their place in society and the contributions they wish to make to the people and contexts around them. Alongside the stability which systemic continuities are providing to Azerbaijanis, there is a growing misalignment with what some might want from these systems.

An example from the sphere of education is the manner in which university entrance is managed. The Soviet approach to tertiary education was to channel university students into professions according to priorities which the state had identified would best meet the needs of the state. A state-level examination was administered to all university applicants. Based on their results, applicants were placed into a university and a program chosen by the state. Today, this is still the general approach taken by public universities. Those with stronger entrance exam

results are offered places in physics or mathematics. Those with weaker entrance exam results are offered places in the humanities or education.

The result is that one often finds a geographer, for example, who, when asked how they "chose" their profession, will answer that this was the sphere of vocation they were told they could get into, based on their university entrance exam results. Many who received government tertiary education have chosen not to follow their given profession, because it is not something they really want to do. I have had a number of experiences, when taking a taxi, for example, in which the driver reveals that he has a PhD in one or another field but prefers to be driving for a living.

This disconnect has led to a growing interest in private educational institutions. Young Azerbaijanis who decide they would like to enter into a profession other than that offered by the state now have the opportunity to choose a sphere of study on their own. But this comes with a cost. Private education is significantly more expensive.

Similar dynamics have occurred within the sphere of health. The official government health system is supposed to provide free or affordable health care to all. This is a carryover from the socialized medicine of the Soviet period. Today, however, this has created a situation in which government healthcare workers are given low wages and government centres of care struggle to keep up with advancements in technology and development of facilities. It can be challenging to receive affordable, quality healthcare in these conditions. As with education, this has spawned a large number of privatized health institutions. Access to private education or healthcare has become a growing areas of difference among Azerbaijanis.

Other continuities have adapted more naturally. In the 1990s and early 2000s trade and economic migration between Azerbaijan and other previous member states of the USSR were significant. The Soviet economy operated with intentional geographical distribution of locations

for production, processing and consumption. Car parts could be made in Azerbaijan, sent to Ukraine to be placed into vehicles which would then be shipped to Russia to be sold. When the Union broke up, some of these trade arrangements continued. Factories in Ukraine still needed car parts and Russians still needed cars. The relationships needed to support this trade already existed and were easier to continue than to build new ones.

Employment possibilities also followed lines of previous relationship. When young Azerbaijanis were looking for work, they could easily travel to larger cities in Kazakhstan, Ukraine or Russia. It was common for Azerbaijanis to have relatives or acquaintance already in these places and local populations were accustomed to individuals from these other "close-neighbours" migrating for work.

A significant change which has occurred within Azerbaijani society is the strength of these ties. Over time, the natural connections between locations of production and locations of manufacturing or consumption have shifted. Azerbaijanis may now have connections in Turkey, Germany or The United States. Trade and migration have shifted. Along with these shifts have come a variety of changes. New relationships have created new lines of influence. Ways of life and being as practiced in these new places are now meeting Azerbaijani ways and practices.

The oil and gas industry has been one of the strongest drivers of this change. Azerbaijan's entrance into the world oil market has provided a strong boost to the overall economy. More than half of the nation's GDP is generated from the fossil fuel industry. Large embassies have been established by nations who have invested billions of dollars into this industry in Azerbaijan. Businesses from all over the world have come to the country on the tail of the oil and gas market. This has given Azerbaijanis more experiences of difference than they have had in the past. These experiences of difference accentuate the choices they now need to make. Will they carve their own path through the world? Will they adopt the models of others?

The modern oil and gas boom has fuelled narratives of prosperity and modernity. But it has also placed a challenge on traditions and practices of the past. Old ways don't die hard. Ways of thinking and operating still reveal that change is coming in ripples, not all at once. Azerbaijanis have moved on from the question of what they were moving away from. They are now engaging deeply with the question of what they are moving towards. And others have opinions of their own. As the nation of Azerbaijan has explored relationships with Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, there have been a variety of responses.

There has been a process of learning what particular others would prefer Azerbaijan to be like. Government and citizens both have had to then decide how they want to respond to these preferences. This a generative process as individuals and groups lean into or find ways to resist opportunities to expand their perceptions and responses. (Merleau-Ponty 1962) My research has been shaped by my own growing understanding of this repertoire of perception and response which Azerbaijanis have been building in their engagements with one another and the world. They have bene making choices and the range of these choices has been expanding.

Within Azerbaijani society inequalities have been accentuated over the last three decades. There is a divide between urban and rural opportunities. Urban areas have received more attention in development efforts. This has driven a steady process of urbanization, particularly to Baku and the Absheron peninsula. This is a stark change from the Soviet period when agriculture and manual labour was available all across the country and population distribution was less starkly divided between urban and rural. With this movement has come shifts in perspectives. There is more variety in the way Azerbaijanis look at differences – gender differences, age differences, cultural differences, economic differences.

The topic of hospitality is particularly important in this milieu of transition and movement. How are those who are different to be received? Especially when difference continues to grow.

How are conceptions of invitation and reception to look when the horizon on which strangers stand comes closer and closer? Azerbaijanis are grappling with the question of what should remain and what should change. In this written work I make the claim that it is the Azerbaijani concept of hospitality which is their biggest asset in this time of transition. It is what anchors them and what is worth continuing to preserve.

Map 4: Global Location of Azerbaijan

Existential Boundaries

“But what kind of a journey are you on?” We had been discussing my experience of research. Shirin had noted my enamorment with the concept of journey as I described my work. If one conceives of oneself as embarked upon a journey, it does indeed matter what kind of journey is in mind; Whether it is a journey towards a destination or a return back to one’s origins; If it is a journey of hope or one which has been forced. I have settled on the concept of quest to describe the character of the journey which this research has represented for me.

Quest has been used by others to describe the anthropological task, the character of the discipline (Keesing 1987). It has been used within the discipline to depict the character of that which we are seeking, our “quest for moral understanding” (Edel and Edel 2010), our “quest for relevance” (Bunzi 2008). Quest incorporates directionality, searching, and posture towards that which is being sought. Quest is created by the juxtaposition of seeker and sought, of locatedness and mobility. Quest requires navigation. This is the character of my research. I have been on a journey with Azerbaijanis, learning their ways of navigating the worlds they inhabit. This written work is an account of what I have discovered and who I have become along the way.

This has not been a solitary quest. The term for companion in Azerbaijani, *yoldaş,* way-friend, has become an important concept on my quest for a greater understanding of the ways of being that Azerbaijanis embrace. This has been a quest with others, defined by those with whom I have engaged over the course of this research. The conceptual and epistemic terrain across which I have moved on this journey has been dependent on the hermeneutical geography defined by my relationships. I have entered into an interpretive community with whom I have conversed and reflected.

By choosing those with whom I have engaged I have defined my interpretive community, placing this commentary as a footnote to all that I have written: “this is true for those with whom I have spoken, to the extent that they have expressed it”. I am sharing what I have received. But I am also taking my quest further. What I am seeking is something that I can give back to my way-friends. I wish to add value to what I have been given by “supplementing” (Derrida 1976), making an “addition from the outside…supplying what is missing and in this way is already inscribed within that to which it is added. (Bernasconi 2015) There are existential rewards in this endeavour for us as a community: the potential that we will be empowered to become something new and beautiful having been together and reflected together.

The individuals and groups with whom I have journeyed in my research have been diverse but more diversity exists among Azerbaijanis than my interpretive community can represent. I make claims in this written work which project what I have learned from my research partners towards statements regarding wider Azerbaijani ways of life. This is a fragile bridge but I can aid readers whom I am leading across this bridge to understand the ways in which this bridge has been constructed. This will allow for a more careful reception of what I have to say.

In Chapter Three I articulate the philosophical motivations which have informed my research. I explain the manner in which I have preferenced phenomenological methods, individuals stories and personal navigations. In the current chapter, in this spirit of aiding readers across my interpretive bridge I will share a few perspectives on the diversity which is present among Azerbaijanis on the wider scale of nation. In this section I provide some observations in relation to religion and gender.

The geographic region within which Azerbaijan is located has been one of rich interaction between languages, ideologies, economic systems and religious affiliations. Tourism promotions frequently evoke the image of Azerbaijan as the 'Land of Fire', with images of whirling torches in the hands of robed dancers, flaming altars set against the backdrop of snow-covered mountains and stories from centuries past when the waters of the Baku Bay could be lit on fire by a simple spark. The oil and gas which sit just below the surface along the Caspian sea shores of Azerbaijan have long attracted pilgrims and entrepreneurs to the region. Among these have been proponents of the Zoroastrian faith. Linguistic and literary accounts make reference to Zoroastrian identity and practice in the region as early as 600 BCE (Stausberg and Vevaina 2015).

Zoroastrian roots in Persian geographic (Grenet 2015) and linguistic (Hintze 2015) worlds provide natural connections to certain orientations of faith among Azerbaijanis of today. Associations with Shia denominations of Islam are common among Azerbaijanis. It is estimated

that 97% of Azerbaijanis associate themselves with some form of the Islamic faith. (Yunusov 2004) Of these 85% are Shia. These denominations incorporate practices and perspectives which originated and continue to be most widely practiced within regions of the Indo-Iranian socio-linguistic sphere, where Zoroastrianism has strong historical roots. In spite of the fact that the advent of Islam was one of the major factors leading to the decline of Zoroastrianism in the region, there is a continuity of socio-linguistic heritage which provides a cohesion between the two faiths and those who hold to them.

Numerous symbols and practices remain common among Azerbaijanis, with roots from Zoroastrian traditions. One of these is the *buta,* the paisley flame symbol which can be found on carpets, paintings, architectural surfaces and clothing throughout Azerbaijan. Zoroastrian influences can also be seen in the enduring traditions of *Novruz*, the spring equinox festival, during which rituals like jumping over pyres, and the lighting of *xonça* (edible Novruz table decorations) candles are practiced. *Novruz* is arguably the most widely shared calendric celebration for those who practice Azerbaijani ways of life.

Religious affiliation and adherence have become diversified in Azerbaijan today. This is especially visible among the younger generation. Public expression of various forms of Islamic traditions can vary. Fashion and devotion have come to reflect the diversity of interactions which Azerbaijanis now have with others. For women, this diversity is often expressed through style of dress. On the streets of Baku one can see women who are fully covered from head to toe, or with Turkish-style headscarves around their heads. In the same spaces one can see the latest European fashions.

In my university classes I have noticed a significant shift in the visibility and vocality of diversity among young people. When I first began teaching it was uncommon for individuals to make public aspects about themselves that might set them apart from others. Today, it is not

uncommon for students to introduce themselves quickly with reference to aspects of who they are that may differentiate them from others.

As I have built relationships with Azerbaijanis it has been important for me to navigate the potential interpersonal and politico-social effects of differences between myself and others in relation to faith and religion. For some, faith and religion are simply personal matters without poignancy or relevance to other spheres of life. For others, faith and religion are assumed to be the foundation on which associations and alignments of various kinds are built.

I hold strongly to convictions and associations that are often described as Christian. I have had meaningful relationships with Azerbaijanis who hold to a variety of faiths and denominational affiliations. In these relationships I am aware that we are not alone. The Caucasus is a region in which faith and religion have been a source of deep historical bonding for some, and a source of contention and division for others (Kohl, Kozelsky & Ben-Yehuda 2007). Faith and religion have been intricately woven into narratives of the past and the present. As I have come into Azerbaijani ways of being I have been acutely aware that these narratives precede us and continue to be written all around us. In navigating these narratives together, we have sometimes chosen to put them aside. At other times, we have looked for moments to go deeper, to take our relationships from the periphery of these narratives and move them inward, establishing stronger places from which to relate.

My research has culminated in the telling of an academic narrative. My disciplinary location within existential anthropology has been a guide for my narrative choices. I have focused on the manner in which Azerbaijanis steer through narratives rather than on specific narratives themselves. These narratives have shifted over the years and will likely do so again. I have made choices to limit my coverage of particular political or religious narratives in order to focus on the character of Azerbaijani navigations through the narratives with which they engage.

While religious association is an aspect which young people are becoming more ready to present, other facets of being are also growing in presentation. Gender choices, and expressions of one's gender are becoming more publicly expressed. Azerbaijan has seen significant changes in the last three decades in relation to perspectives and practices related to gender. However, while public expression is diversifying there are still clear differences in how gender is experienced in Azerbaijan.

With regard to gender opportunity comparisons, in 2020 Azerbaijan was reported to be meeting 50% of the indicators needed to monitor the United Nations Development Goals (UNWomen 2020). In its *Azerbaijan: Country Gender Assessment* (2019), the Asian Development Bank reported that women represented 48% of the labour force but were mostly employed within low-paid sectors of the economy, contributing to just 27% of GDP. Gender differences are clearly present in occupational distribution in Azerbaijan as women represent nearly 74% of workers in the field of education and 76% of workers in health and social services. Women's wages as of this 2019 report were reported to be 50% of those of men.

In *Azeri Masculinities and Making Men in Azerbaijan (*2017), Lala Mahmudova writes of the "paths" which men take in the formation and maintenance of their "place in society as a man". (2017: v) The concept of paths taken is helpful as gender expression is observed in Azerbaijan. The role of gender in 'placing' individuals into the groups of which they are a part is evolving within Azerbaijani ways of life. From her own experiences of childhood and becoming a woman within Azerbaijani ways of life, Mahmudova provides this picture of where Azerbaijanis have come from, what she refers to as "traditional" within these ways:

> When it comes to social life and gender relations within the country, there is a large degree of segregation between men's and women's activities. This separation can be smaller in city centers and the capital city of Baku itself, but as one goes into the periphery of the country it is more noticeable. Men are traditionally considered superior to women and children. Families are run by men. Even when there are no older men present like a father or grandfather, [a] young son in the household will be

> the head of the family, even if there is a mother before him. The conservative mentality and patriarchal notions restrict women`s freedom to go off to study, live outside of the family by herself, travel, go off to vacation or live abroad. All decisions have to be made by the 'head of the family,' and most of the time the decision leads to women`s immobility. Male members of the family are usually free to decide what they want to do: travel, study or when to have a family. But young male members of the family are not free to do whatever they want. They too have to get the permission of the older generation. Male children of the family are praised and welcomed. Both, mother and father in the families think that they [are raising] a soldier and the family`s future support (*arkha, dayaq*) by having sons instead of daughters. Having many sons is a source of pride, while having many daughters is a heavy load." (2017: 12)

It is notable in this description that traditionality in conceptions and expressions of gender interacts with other existential elements – age, relational roles and functions, and economic expectations. What Mahmudova describes resonates in significant ways with my own experiences and observations of Azerbaijani ways of life. However, I have opened myself and my research to a commitment. A commitment to preference life-stories over historical norms (Kohli 1981, Harrison 2008). My conceptions of Azerbaijani ways of life have been shaped in the manner of a mosaic (Becker 2008). This mosaic looks in some places like the traditional image of what Mahmudova and others have described. But it is also a mosaic which is not done and to which pieces continue to be added.

Social and religious diversity among Azerbaijanis has been relevant to my research in various ways. Most importantly, it has accentuated questions of cohesion and integration, particularly in relation to relational dynamics. Hospitality is a relational concept. The manner in which individuals and groups see themselves as differentiated can be expected to affect the postures they take in relation to others. Gender, economics, religion, age, and urbanization, along with a range of other demographic factors have an effect on the manner in which individuals and groups welcome or choose not to welcome one another; accept invitation from or choose not to accept invitation from one another.

I am aware that there will be boundaries to the validity of the propositions I present in this written work. These boundaries will fall among those who call themselves Azerbaijani. There will be some Azerbaijanis who do not find what I propose to resonate with their own sense of being. Each of these boundaries is important, particularly for those who fall on less represented sides. I do not engage significantly in this work with the full variety of boundaries which exist. Where recognition of diversity is lacking, I once again encourage others to add their own voices to what is just a beginning towards a deeper understanding of Azerbaijani ways of hospitality.

With the phenomenological methods I have chosen to employ in this research I have taken a perspective articulated by Arjun Appadurai. Appadurai proposes an engagement with particularities that considers context as a “figure” with which individuals and groups engage, rather than just the “ground” on which they perform (1995: 207). In this work I am seeking to construct an image of a figure that I refer to as Azerbaijani hospitality. I expect that every individual or group who claims personal association with Azerbaijani ways of life will relate to this figure in their own way. This figure of Azerbaijani hospitality is not the only player in the drama of life with which Azerbaijanis engage. I do propose, however, that it is a figure which is ubiquitously present and to which attention is continuously given.

I am proposing that Azerbaijani hospitality is a dynamic concept to which my research partners each have been relating in their own way. Based on what I have learned from my research community I am describing similarities in how interactions occur with this figure. From an existential perspective I expect the growing demographic diversity among Azerbaijanis to create a growing diversity of interactions with this figure. It is my desire, in describing Azerbaijani hospitality, as I have observed it, to encourage more interaction by others with the figure as I have described it. These interactions will reveal more about the figure itself, enriching our shared picture of its character.

Azerbaijani Hospitality

In *The Anthropological Lens* (2004), James Peacock draws on the concepts from photography of "harsh light" and "soft focus" to describe two integrated perspectives which guide anthropological research practices. The concept of harsh light refers to the anthropologist's endeavour to engage with raw experiences, persons, events. Full depiction, with all particularities and details on display is the purpose of harsh light. Soft focus refers to the anthropologist's endeavour to see details and particularities as they fit into wider pictures, seeking "to glimpse foreground and background all at once, even including themselves in the picture. Aware that any object, any act is a convergence of myriad forces, they endeavor to capture the whole field, necessarily sacrificing precision of focus for breadth of vision." (Peacock 2004: 145)

As I have become a student of the interactions between Azerbaijanis and the figure of *qonaqpərvərlik*, Azerbaijani hospitality, it is soft focus which instructed me. My choice of the term 'Azerbaijani hospitality' has been an intentional linguistic connection between hospitality and the unique manner in which Azerbaijanis experience it and express it. I have come to see *qonaqpərvərlik* as the lightscape (Bille and Sorensen 2007) within which my interpretive community sees the world around them and through which they move.

Azerbaijani hospitality is the term I have chosen as an English translation for *qonaqpərvərlik*. In Chapter Four I present a linguistic analysis of *qonaqpərvərlik* and its collocational employment. But the term has become more than a linguistic stand-in over the course of my research journey. As I have employed this term, it has evolved within my own conception into the full figure that you will see described in these pages. It is not a comparative term, meant to nationalize the concept of hospitality, to claim pre-eminence or even singularity of Azerbaijani conceptions of interpersonal reception and invitation. These perspectives or practices may be present in other places for other people. I propose in my conclusion that this is quite likely so.

This term, as it has developed in my understanding, is an expression of sharedness, a connection of belonging. It is not hospitality which belongs (Gadamer 2004) to Azerbaijanis but Azerbaijanis who find their belonging in hospitality. This notion of hospitality as a frame for understanding sensibilities of belonging finds resonance with the work of Julian Pitt-Rivers (2012) and Andrew Shryock (2004), among others.

It is not to a broad sense of hospitality, however, in which Azerbaijanis find their belonging. It is a particular understanding of what hospitality means that continues to draw towards its light. It is a drawing that is occurring, not an arriving. The figure of Azerbaijani hospitality is an aspiration. This aspiration can be challenging to pursue. In Chapter Six I reflect on the manner in which Azerbaijanis can get lost in the relational geography of hospitality. In such cases the figure of Azerbaijani hospitality can become a shelter from the harsh light of aspirational demands.

The particular conception of hospitality which draws Azerbaijanis towards it is what I have discovered on my quest and am sharing here in these pages. I have discovered a relational beauty, as described by Junichiro Tanizaki, a "beauty not in the thing itself but in the patterns of the shadows, the light and darkness, that one thing against another creates." (2001: 46) Azerbaijani hospitality is something that becomes visible as it is engaged with, grappled with, struggled towards, grasped at.

Chapter Three: Discovering an Ontological Hospitality

> Unlike borders, which can be crossed…and boundaries, which can be transgressed, frontiers… cannot be crossed. They mark a change in ontological register. They postulate a beyond that is, by its very nature, unreachable in fact and in representation.
>
> - Vincent Crapanzano (2004:14)

> We had climbed most of the day through the Iori Uplands of eastern Georgia, passing through the David Gareja monastic complex, and across into the Keshikchidag Reserve of western Azerbaijan. Our journey had begun within the mutually recognized national territory of the Republic of Georgia. At some point, however, we had crossed from this place of clarity and consensus into a much more ambiguous space. Georgia and Azerbaijan have not yet completed the process of delineation and demarcation of their borders in this region. As the sun set below the rock-hewn, muralled caves behind us, we looked out, from the place to which we had ascended, at a sweeping vista of Azerbaijan below us. Though clearly visible, however, it was inaccessible. We could go no further. Below us, at some point, clarity and mutual recognition returned as undisputed territorial sovereignty of the Republic of Azerbaijan gained sway. Though no formal barrier had been erected, crossing this border was not allowed. No welcome could be extended in this place of unknowing. To make this crossing, we needed to descend to places of invitation. Vantage points of perspective had to be abandoned, positions of mutuality sought.
>
> - Personal journal (April 2014)

Coming into Azerbaijan has been a journey that began with my physical entrance but has become a mode of being, a lived experience of reorientation which can be well described as re-searching, a seeking once again, pursuing a new understanding which facilitates a new way of living. I have come to frame my re-searching, my efforts to learn how to participate in Azerbaijani ways of life, as a process of becoming.

I have described my research journey as a constellation of particular invitations, some to which I respond and some which I offer. In this chapter I describe the character of these invitations and respond to one particular invitation from within anthropology, to speak into epistemological concerns. My response to disciplinary concerns takes the form of an invitation to the voice of Hans-Georg Gadamer. I identify three research postures, I have

found in Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* (2004): humility, appreciation, and openness. I articulate the manner in which these postures have influenced my research methodology.

Following the identification of these postures, I describe the invitational sources and tools I employed to gain a deeper understanding of hospitality in Azerbaijani ways of life. The first of these I have taken as an invitation from Azerbaijanis for interpretation - a collection of vignettes of my own experiences among Azerbaijanis. In response to this, I have shaped two invitations to Azerbaijanis, to engage with me more deeply in my interpretive process - collection of personal narratives and work with discussion groups. I close the chapter with a reflection on the manner in which my methods align methodologically within existential phenomenology.

* * * * *

Experiences of coming into Azerbaijan across physical borders can be surprisingly varied and nuanced. My first experience of passing through Azerbaijan's physical border was at what is colloquially known as the Red Bridge Crossing, so named because of the iconic 17th century, red-brick bridge spanning the Khrami river which stands between the Republics of Georgia and Azerbaijan. Traveling on foot, I had joined the flow of traders, farmers, and residents for whom the crossing was a regular affair. In the early 2000's this was a relatively porous border. Though clearly demarcated, politically and geographically, it was a crossing that was socially and economically ambivalent. Until 2006, there was a bazaar that actually spanned the border, facilitating trade without much inter-national consideration.

Crossing the border is a commonality of life for many within the region. I remember a brief conversation with a middle-aged woman who was walking behind me as we crossed

[V09-32]. I had approached her to confirm that I was standing in the right line. In our brief conversation I came to know a bit of the purpose of her journey. She was a resident of an ethnically Azerbaijani village located in Georgia. Her cousin, who lives in Azerbaijan, had come over as part of a wedding party, and had forgotten her purse. The woman was planning to return the purse and be back home by evening. Just in front of us were two men, engaged in heated conversation with one other, both with their children close by. They were discussing the rising costs of education for their children. The two men had come over the border to pick up their children who were staying with relatives during the week, to study in Georgian language schools. They were returning home to Azerbaijan for the weekend.

As we passed through the building where documents of identification were to be presented it was apparent that most of those passing through this point were not detained or questioned at all. They showed their passports or, in most cases, national identification cards, and went on their way through. I, on the other hand, was more fully engaged. When it became clear that I was not Georgian or Azerbaijani a different protocol was enacted. First the route of my journey was queried, and then my intentions. Where had I come from? Had I ever been to Armenia? Why was I coming into Azerbaijan? Who was I visiting? How long would I stay?

In later years, as I began the current research project, I was processing some of my early experiences in Azerbaijan with colleagues at the Diplomatic Academy in Baku. This border crossing experience came into the conversation. I shared that, though I had felt welcome at all points in the process of entering into Azerbaijan, I experienced a distinct sense of a yet-unknown depth to the context I was coming into.

“But you understand, don't you?” one colleague commented [D15-3]. “*Bu Azərbaycandır.*” “This is Azerbaijan.” This is a phrase I have so often heard. It is a phrase commonly used by Azerbaijanis with one another. Whether expressed in lament or celebration, it is a statement of shared understanding and shared experience. I realized that the shared aspect of this understanding and experience was something I have been progressively entering into. Coming into Azerbaijan was a choice I had made many years ago. I had entered without much knowledge of Azerbaijani ways of life, of the concerns of those who call themselves Azerbaijanis within the realities of their lives. Physical entrance was not difficult. But, understanding the character of what I had entered into was a much more complex endeavour. Coming into Azerbaijan was a journey that had only just begun with my physical entrance.

As I have lived life among Azerbaijanis, I have come to more fully understand that coming into Azerbaijan has been for me what Philip Descola describes as a mode of being, a lived experience of reorientation towards new constellations of “inferences...made about the kinds of beings the world is made of and how they relate to each other.”(Descola 2014: 273) This lived experience of reorientation can be well described as a re-searching, a seeking once again, pursuing a new understanding which facilitates a new way of living. It is precisely the lived character of this re-searching which has redeemed for me the concept of research.

I have struggled to find appropriate language, among Azerbaijanis, to discuss the concept of research. The most common term used for scholarly research, *tədqiqat*, comes with a complicated history. The Azerbaijani experience of *tədqiqat* includes a significant history of others, who have not lived Azerbaijanis’ ways of life, describing these ways of life as they perceive them and for purposes that suit their own needs and interests. Global

voices of anthropological experience have provided caution for the effects which such historical experiences can have (Tuhiwai Smith 2021). Though the past through which Azerbaijanis have lived does not entirely define them, it is a significant part of what they and I have faced as we shape our present together.

I have come to frame my re-searching, my efforts to learn how to participate in Azerbaijani ways of life, as a process of becoming. I have found a palette of personal, transformational language to communicate my intent and my practice in research. Following humorous attempts to employ language which, on the surface seemed invitingly transformational, such as *çevirmək*, to turn or to change, and *dönmək*, to transform, which carried, as I soon discovered, strong overtones of political revolution, I settled on the term *araşdırmaq*, to seek, to explore. As an *araşdırıcı*, a seeker, I have placed myself into a position of *öyrənən*, a learner. In more figurative moments, I have described myself as a *şagird*, a pupil', a disciple, of Azerbaijanis in their ways of life.

The current research project cannot be separated from my broader journey of coming into life among Azerbaijanis. It is, itself, an endeavour of 'coming into', a microcosm of my wider journey. What uniquely defines this project, within my journey, is a constellation of particular invitations, some to which I respond and some which I offer. In this chapter I describe the character of these invitations. I respond, first, to a particular invitation from within anthropology to speak into epistemological concerns. This takes the form of an invitation to the voice of Hans-Georg Gadamer. I propose three postures, articulated by Gadamer in his *Truth and Method* (2004), as a response to disciplinary concerns.

Following the identification of these postures, I describe the invitational sources and tools I employed to gain a deeper understanding of hospitality in Azerbaijani ways of life.

The first of these I have taken as an invitation from Azerbaijanis for interpretation, a collection of vignettes of my own experiences among Azerbaijanis. In response to this, I have shaped two invitations to Azerbaijanis, to engage with me more deeply in my interpretive process - collection of personal narratives and work with discussion groups. My use of these sources and tools progressed somewhat chronologically within my re-searching process, building on one another functionally.

I close this chapter with a reflection on my methodological alignment with the postures and practices of existential phenomenology. This reflection seeks to engage with considerations and expectations that are prevalent around the longer table of anthropological dialogue.

Mediating Research: Pursuing Proximity and Negotiating Invitation

Xoş gəlmişsiniz; It is pleasant that you have come. This is the Azerbaijani welcome, posted in metre high letters at border crossings, on banners hanging on the walls of airports, along national highways. These are the words sung as one enters into a home, an office, a cafe, or even as one is invited to join a friend on a park bench on a warm summer evening. They are words of offer, to share and take part, to move from presence into participation.

Azerbaijani welcome easily extends across a wide "diversity of hospitalities" (Molz & Gibson 2007:2), from individual friendships to international relations. The concept of "intellectual hospitality" (Kaufman 2001, Bennet 2003) has been employed to consider "how the deployment of the concept of hospitality in one disciplinary context may provide insights in another." (Molz & Gibson 2007: 2) My own research, however, has not led me to frame my study of hospitality in Azerbaijani ways of life in terms of intellectual hospitality. I have chosen to consider hospitality as its stands within the unity of

Azerbaijani ways of life. This could be described as looking for the cohesion between hospitalities, an 'ontological hospitality', a conceptualization of hospitality as something across the full breadth of Azerbaijani lifeworlds.

Though welcome has been a ubiquitous element of my experience of Azerbaijani ways of life, there is a fragility and vulnerability within it which I have come to know over time. Azerbaijani welcome is an expression of the pleasant experience of one's presence by another and a desire to deepen relational connections. It is an invitation to cross over from proximity to inclusion, to assume a role within an interpersonal space, a space created at the moment one's presence is made known. With the offer comes expectation. Once invited it is expected that one will act honourably in the interpersonal space which has been opened, though, there is no guarantee that this expectation will be met.

Hospitality is often discussed in terms of exclusion and inclusion (Derrida 1999a, 1999b; Levinas 2013). But, in more refined terms, I have come to understand hospitality as a process which is most active once proximity has been achieved, once borders and boundaries are approached. Joost Fontein in his *Graves, ruins, and belonging: towards an anthropology of proximity*, identifies the important role of proximity in transforming dichotomies of "radical ontological difference" into meaningful spaces, where differences can be understood through how they co-exist (Fontein 2011). The exclusion-inclusion dichotomy of alterity gives borders and boundaries a central role in understanding interpersonal relationships. But it is proximity which shapes interpersonal spaces into the unique form that can be called spaces of hospitality. It is from spaces of proximity that decisions to exclude or include occur, that the interpersonal character of hospitality spaces becomes clear. It is when proximity is achieved that assessment can be made - Is it

pleasant that you have come? It is from spaces of proximity that decisions to enforce borders are made. It is, as well, from spaces of proximity that invitation occurs.

Hospitality begins when persons become able to imagine a frontier (Crapanzano 2004), a place and moment, which they could occupy together. In moments of invitation, hospitality becomes a concrete space to be achieved, by particular persons. Invitation can only occur once proximity, the minimal state of interpersonal potential, has been achieved. Interpersonal spaces of hospitality have been differentiated from other spaces of hospitable interaction such as institutional or international (Molz & Gibson 2007: 6). This is a beneficial distinction when seeking to understand the particularities of various hospitality discourses. With a focus on the unity of Azerbaijani ways of life, this research considers a wide variety of interpersonal spaces of different levels, discovering what is common without neglecting what makes them different.

Research, like hospitality, is commonly discussed in exclusionary and inclusionary terms. Some of the deepest concerns within anthropology have been rooted in experiences of exclusion, of subalternization (Guha 1982, Spivak 1988), othering (Derrida and Bass 1978, Fabian 1983, Levinas 1987), and exclusionary conceptualizations of "culture" (Abu-Lughod 1991). The potential for research to highlight and maintain difference, through language and practice, conceptualization and methods, makes exclusion a relevant concern within anthropology. I have embraced a more hospitable conceptualization of research than a simple dichotomy of exclusion and inclusion can serve. I will describe this concept of research within the present chapter. It is a mobile concept, centred on achieving proximity, and negotiating invitation.

Seeking proximity has taken different forms in my re-search process. It has often required no more than simple acts of approach, seating myself down next to someone on

a crowded beach, accepting an offer to drink tea with a local policeman, catching up with a student after a lecture. But it has also required, at times, more complex requests, for shelter on a difficult journey, to be told stories of personal pain, to participate in private celebrations. In these simple as well as complex acts, I have been faced with the deep responsibility to honour the interpersonal spaces into which I have entered. But this is not as straight forward an endeavour as a re-searcher may wish it to be.

There is a significant invitation offered by the discipline of anthropology to address the ethical, methodological and contextual complexities inherent to research relationships. The perspectives and practices of the discipline continue to change alongside the worlds around them. Within a discipline that is "by definition intersubjective" (Čargonja 2013: 19), it is heartening to observe the particular angst which anthropologists have experienced as the intersubjective effects of research have become more clearly understood. Concern is a proper response.

The methodology and methods I have employed in my research have embraced the disciplinary space within which they fit. They have done so in the form of responses to concerns within the discipline that have gained particular prevalence because of significant changes in the worlds that anthropology is engaging. Each of these concerns relates to the capacity of research endeavours to honour the interpersonal spaces in which they occur.

In this chapter I address anthropology's epistemological concern - honouring interpersonal spaces of research by representing them accurately. There is a significant history within anthropology of addressing these concerns as matters of method (Teddlie & Yu 2007, Bernard 2011) or procedural design (Creswell 2018), imbuing researchers with a responsibility to mitigate for epistemological challenges. Research practice is held

as a means to reduce the negative effects of these challenges. The conceptions of research methodology which embrace mitigation have contributed in laudable ways to the discipline, calling out prejudices and assumptions. Anthropology has too often followed in step with a global history in which power, privilege, and various forms of discriminatory differentiation have provided opportunity for research to be a tool to deepen interpersonal divides, to the advantage of some and not others (Cheater 2005, Mehdiyeva 2011). But, addressing disciplinary concerns by stepping back, regulating and controlling research practices, creates risks of another kind. At risk is the integrity of the interpersonal character of research.

In what has been labelled an ontological turn (Carrithers et al. 2010, Holbraad & Pedersen 2018) within anthropology, transformative conceptions of research spaces have come to complement conceptions which orient themselves towards mitigation. The "complex negotiations between people and objects" (Heywood 2017) which are at the heart of research spaces have come to be appreciated as modalities, in themselves, for re-searching. Research practices are recognized as a means of stimulating conditions for all persons within research contexts to rediscover ways of living, precisely as they interact (Lambek 2015: 71). Research is conceived of as an act of mediation, a bringing together. It is precisely what can be created when together that is the purpose of research. Research is a process of becoming, through interaction with others, something new, as "transformation...becomes something we experience as personal - as 'ours'". (M. Jackson 2013: 16)

Transformative conceptions of research take the intersubjectivity of research spaces as both the means and the ends of research. It is the persons, and objects (M. Jackson 2013, Arendt 2018), within research spaces which are acting on one another, intentionally as

well as unintentionally, to drive the process of searching, learning and changing. It is these same persons, and objects, who are themselves seeking the "outcomes" (Latour 2008) of this process.

Existential perspectives in anthropology have found a natural resonance with this juxtaposition in research, of means and ends, action and interaction, influence and mutual transformation. As research embraces an appreciation for persons, for what happens to them, and what happens between them within the process of re-searching, method and approach become more cognizant of personal and interpersonal postures.

As my approach to the current research project has developed, the concept of research postures has been foundational. Laurent Denizeau (2015: 214-215) describes the ability of postures within research to transform individual, inner "moments of being, ...the flux and subtle shadings of lived experience" (M. Jackson 2005: xiii), into encounters of shared meaning, allowing for the persons involved to re-search and re-imagine the world which they have shared.

One of my favourite photographs from my early years in Azerbaijan often reminds me of how postures powerfully transform experiences into opportunities to rediscover the world, allowing moments of life to spark reorientation towards new forms of participation in new ways of life. It was a cool, fall afternoon [E01-11]. We had spent the day paragliding in the Khirdalan hills outside Baku. It had been perfect on all accounts. The wind had been just right, coming off the waters of the Caspian Sea, warming as they rose over the sun-baked sandstone cliffs from which we had flown. Each climb up the cliff side had taken several hours but had been well worth the effort as we enjoyed the leisurely descents. Just before our final flight, we had paused for a memorable moment.

Though we had each carried a significant amount of weight up on our backs, with our chutes, and various equipment, Kamran, the senior pilot among us, had also carried up some provisions. He had come ready to host a celebration of our day together. I was surprised to see him pull a bottle out of his pack along with fresh bread, meats and cheeses and even some olives. It had been enough for me to pack in a little water along with all the weight I had been carrying. But Kamran was obviously eager to be able to host this moment for which he had carefully prepared. As we were enjoying the time together, we took the picture. It remains a picture, for me, of some of the core aspects of Azerbaijani hospitality. It also stands, for me, as a reminder of how postures of re-searching made this moment one which I still describe as contributing to a deepening of my ability to participate meaningfully in Azerbaijani ways of life.

In order to experience more than simple observation in this moment, and to move beyond description or analysis, to learning and becoming more able to participate, I remember engaging in a particularly intentional manner. This intentionality of coming into an interpersonal space can be described as a set of postures, a set of expectations and commitments in relation to self, others and the context, which are taken up, prior to the 'event' (Woolf & Schulkind 1985, M. Jackson 2005, Denizeau 2015), and then taken into the event, acting as a guide for how interpersonal spaces are navigated. It was not until I engaged in the process of this current project that I took steps to clearly articulate what my personal postures in re-searching Azerbaijani ways of life have become. The presence of a postured approach to research was already evident, however, as I look at key moments in the transformation of my personal conceptions of research.

I have noted, for example, that there was an intentionality, as I entered into that moment on the Khirdalan cliffs, to honour the interpersonal space in which we had spent

the day. I was committed to the 'we' of this space, to our shared experience, to the learning and growth that we all could gain from the event. I came in with the expectation that all of us, in the space, would have a mixed experience of things which were natural to us as well as those that were unfamiliar. I was committed to orienting myself towards actions and responses that honoured others' desires and interests within the space. I was not, however, passively allowing the event to simply unfold. I was also committed to finding ways of expressing my own interests and being open about how I was experiencing the moment. I wanted to learn more about Kamran, about the others in our party, about Azerbaijani ways of life. I also wanted to have Kamran, and others in the moment, learn about me, and the challenges I was experiencing in learning Azerbaijani ways of life. I wanted them to know a little about what was different in this moment from what I was used to.

Most importantly, I wanted to contribute to us all shaping our actions with one another in ways that were mutually beneficial, not just for our relationships with one another, but in ways that would help us interact more richly with others in similar contexts. I wanted us all to grow and be transformed by what we experienced in this event. I wanted Kamran, through his experience of this event, with me, to be better able to host others who were not familiar with Azerbaijani hospitality practices. I wanted to learn, through my experience of this event, to be a better guest as I practiced Azerbaijani ways of life.

Equally, I wanted to learn how to be a better host, learning from these experiences of being a guest, entering the frontier, imagining myself as such a host. Throughout this moment, I was cognizant of the potential for Kamran, and me, as well as our other colleagues with whom we were sharing this event to better understand how to communicate with one another, to learn from one another. I was also aware that what we

learned in this moment, and how we were transformed, was something we could share with others. This was a moment of re-searching, and it was intentional. This intentionality was shaped by postures.

In the process of articulating the postures which define my approach to re-searching, I have found the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer to provide a fruitful framework. In particular, I have found myself returning to Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (2004), his most significant contribution to what he eventually called Philosophical Hermeneutics (1973). I have found three postures in Gadamer's work which continue to guide me as I have carried out this re-searching project. They have been influential in shaping my response to anthropology's epistemological concern - honouring interpersonal spaces of research by representing them accurately.

These postures are at the core of my response to the invitation I have taken from the discipline of anthropology, to intentionally research in an appropriate manner. They are the expectations and commitments with which I have come into interpersonal spaces of research. I have employed these postures within a transformative conception of research. I will elaborate on the postures which I have taken from Gadamer's work in the following sections. Each elaboration will be introduced with a narrative reflection.

In the section that immediately follows I will also articulate the perspectives which I have come to hold on the concept of ontology.

Research as an Ontological Endeavour: Epistemological Concern and Invitation

Though smaller, more intimate moments of hospitality, such as tea with a friend, or a small lunch in the hills, have been a steady staple in my experience of Azerbaijani ways of life, there have also been significant moments of larger scale hospitality. Weddings are among the most important hospitality events in Azerbaijani ways of life (Yalcin-

Heckmann 2001). They are large, elaborate affairs, playing an important role in cementing interpersonal relationships. Over the years, in various organizational roles, it has been a joy to be invited to quite a few weddings of colleagues, employees, and clients. *Həmişə toyda*; May you always be at a wedding. This celebratory wish, shared when meeting up at weddings in Azerbaijan, can feel like a self-fulfilling prophecy at times.

Amidst the revelry, of toasts, dancing, music, and tables full of food which enrich Azerbaijani weddings, there is a special gem for which I always eagerly await. Often considered to be one of the more basic dishes offered in the parade of culinary delights, there are few things I enjoy as much as piping hot *lule* kebab wrapped in fresh *lavash*.[1] *Lule* and *lavash* mean something to me. I enjoy them. But this enjoyment is more than just a taste or combination of flavours. There is a history I have of this dish. This history is both unique to me, but also in significant ways, shared by others who have experienced it in similar ways. I have even shared many of these experiences with others, such that we are part of one another's history of enjoyment. “Remember that *lule* at Aysun's wedding?” This is a question which arises from an event as well as a relationship, from a moment within which enjoyment was co-created and co-experienced (Sutton 2001).

Looking at pictures of myself at numerous weddings in my early years in Azerbaijan I struggle to remember the time when such pleasures as caviar, *lule*, and *ash*[2] were new to me, items to be gently probed from the edges, tasted gingerly with some reserve. They are now foods I look forward to when preparing for a wedding. I know when these

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[1] *Lule kebab* are roasted patties of ground meat and fat, pressed around a *shish,* a roasting stick, and grilled over an open fire. *Lavash* is a thin flat bread cooked on a dry pan.

[2] Often referred to as plov or pilaf, *ash* is the final savoury dish at an Azerbaijani wedding. It is always brought out with significant flare, accompanied by special music, and even dancing. It is a rice dish, seasoned with saffron and butter, topped with a sauce of onions, spices, dried fruits and nuts, and finally, crowned with pieces of succulent meat.

"culinary encounters" (Herzfeld 2016: 33) will occur within the ceremony. I know how to engage them. When I am with others who have experienced Azerbaijani ways of life I can reminisce about foods, and the places in which I have most enjoyed them. These dishes and specific instances of their consumption have become part of who I am. I am no longer that person who did not know what *lule* was. I am no longer that person who listened to conversations among Azerbaijanis about the experience of weekend celebrations, unable to share my own experiences of the delicacies they had enjoyed. I now share with Azerbaijanis what Maris Gillette has termed, "foodways" (2016: 48-73), the practices and associations of a group in relation to food. I have become someone whose ways of life have now incorporated and found meaning in experiences which are common to Azerbaijanis.

In his *Truth and Method* (2004), Hans-Georg Gadamer speaks of this transformation of being, through engagement with new ways of life, as the opening up of our "hermeneutic universe" (2004: xxiii). Hermeneutics, "the phenomenon of understanding and of the correct interpretation of what has been understood" (2004: xx) was foundational to Gadamer's conception of human experience of life. The aims of research within the human sciences are subsumed by Gadamer into this wider conception of hermeneutics. He conceives of research in the human sciences as the delineation of a particular project of exploration into human ways of life. These ways of life are hermeneutical processes, described by Gadamer in the language of experience, and experiences (Weinsheimer & Marshall 2004: xiii-xiv).

What flows out of Gadamer's work is an ontological understanding of being human, and an ontological conception of research, a conception of both as processes of seeking to understand which shape the seeker. For Gadamer, being human is defined as a

continual process of becoming, of formation, (*Bildung*). This formation happens naturally as human beings affect and are affected by their contexts and one another. This formative process is the means by which human beings become who they are. It is also, itself, the definition of what it means to be a particular human being. To be a human being is to be the particular being that one is at any given time, replete with the history (tradition) that has led to the "thematic continuity" of this being (Frazier 2009: 59) as well as the limitations and opportunities which this creates for engagement with the present world.

This perspective of being as 'in process' and 'of the process' is expressed by Gadamer through the concept of belonging. Being human is a lived, on-going experience of becoming, an incorporation of all that one experiences into who one is. It is also a continual living into one's experience of the now, not separate from what has shaped one's being (history, tradition) but rather, as an expression of one's being which is entirely true to what one has become along with all of its sources (Weinsheimer & Marshall 2004: xiii). This continual experience of becoming and the authentic expression of who one has become is what Gadamerian belonging entails - the integrated experience of one's formative past with one's expression in the present (Warnke 2014: 347).

Within this ontological conception of being human, Gadamer builds a perspective on the intentional project of becoming that is research in the human sciences. Gadamer presents research as a microcosm of human life. Though the scope of a research endeavour is far less than the entirety of human experience, it is, nonetheless, still a subset of this experience. Gadamer's challenge to the human sciences is to engage in research in a manner that fully appreciates the ontological character of research, reflective of the ontological character of being human.

Ontology has arisen in my work as an etic term, to describe my research methods and perspectives. Over time, I have discovered that it has also become important for me ethnographically, in my understanding of Azerbaijani ways of hospitality. Ontology has grown in importance as a term which runs deeply through my emerging perspectives on anthropology, on being human, on the manner in which being human is experienced and described. Gadamer's work has played a significant role in this emergence.

The concept of ontology has both emerged and insurged within anthropology. It has created interest in relation to the conceptual possibilities it offers. It has also generated considerable critique. Both interest and critique have been significantly rooted in definition. In his contribution to one of the livelier debates on ontology's definition and use, which was presented in *Critique of Anthropology* (Carrithers et al. 2010), Matei Candea proposes a particular value for ontology as an anthropological conception. For Candea, the language of ontology highlights the relational character of ethnographic engagement. It is with this particular aspect of ontology, as a concept, which I have found my own perspectives resonate. I define ontology as the relational character of being.

Interestingly, it has been in the process of seeking emic expressions for this quite etic term that I have found useful language for establishing my own conceptions. I have not found the Azerbaijani term for ontology, *ontologiya*, to be helpful in research discussions. It is a term which needed to be defined before it could be useful. In exploring the concept with my research participants, however, I found a range of emic terms which readily arose to affirm my use of the term. Two terms in particular have been fruitful. The first is the concept of *kök*, root. The other is *toxu*, texture or fabric. Both of these communicate relationality in ways of being. They fit well within my own growing resonance with Gadamer's conception of being as belonging, as a formative, intentional, transformational

process. I was able to spur dialogue around Azerbaijani experiences of *varlığın kökü*, the root of being, and *varlıq toxuması*, the texture and fabric of being, of life as it is experienced and lived, as it unfolds and is created.

I have found in Gadamer's work a dynamic conception of ontology. A conception of ways of life as connected, rooted in one another - a state of being but also a process of becoming, an understanding of human ways of being as a fabric which is being woven while it is being lived. Jessica Frazier notes (2009: 50-55) that in Gadamer's conception of ontology, "being is a verb". Being is not separate from doing, objects are not delineated from their presentation or manifestation.

The place of Gadamer's work within the social sciences has become evident in the proximities it has invited. The most well-known of these is the dialogue engendered by the interaction of his work with that of Jacque Derrida. In their construction-reconstruction of the "Gadamer-Derrida Encounter" (1989) Diane Michelfelder and Robert Palmer analyse the influence which these two seminal thinkers had on one another and how, together, they moved philosophy and practice within the social sciences forward in significant ways. Michelfelder & Palmer's anthology brings together more than twenty texts through which Gadamer and Derrida are brought into intellectual proximity with one another. This compilation includes Gadamer and Derrida's interactions with one another, prepared for the symposium on "Text and Interpretation" of April 1981, along with a series of responses made by Gadamer to Derrida, following this symposium. In addition, it includes a series of reflections from more than a dozen other scholars, each seeking to illuminate philosophical invitations, and exclusions, which they have found as the works of Gadamer and Derrida have been brought into shared intellectual spaces.

Since these two "powerful currents" (Michelfelder & Palmer 1989: 1) were brought together, interest in their interaction has not abated.

Much of the interest in bringing these scholars together has stemmed from the significant philosophical differences between the influential traditions for which they have become recognized. Gadamer and Derrida were representatives of

> two of the most significant continental philosophical orientations of the twentieth century: hermeneutics, deeply rooted in German nineteenth-century philosophy; and post-structuralism, a movement that burst upon the French scene after the Second World War… [they] were respectively acknowledged to be the leading spokespersons of hermeneutics and deconstruction. (Bernstein 2008: 577)

But, in their proximity, more than difference can be found. One of the most significant perspectives which Gadamer and Derrida shared was an appreciation for the foundational character of human limitation, and the demands which this limitation places on the experience of being human as well as practices of research.

Both Derrida and Gadamer understood interpersonal spaces as "scenes of finitude" (Michelfelder & Palmer 1989: 1), though they proposed significantly different responses to this finitude. They shared a recognition that interpersonal spaces carry with them the paradox of togetherness in the face of difference. They both recognized the risks inherent in the process of 'coming to' the other, which is a prerequisite for creating interpersonal spaces – offering invitations which may be misguided, receiving invitations which may be less than virtuous. They both recognized that this is a necessarily managed process fraught with potential for failure, challenged by the limitations of the persons involved. And they shared an understanding of the demand which such risky interactions make on all parties, to commit to practices of learning – listening, and often sacrifice.

> I expose myself to the other, putting my own interests at risk, in order to let the other be heard and understood (Gadamer), to let the other come (Derrida), to let the other lay claim to me... In order to understand each other, we must ask each other to listen and we must try to be understood. (Caputo 2002: 513)

Hospitality was a subject on which Derrida chose to write a significant amount. It is through his later works "that hospitality has emerged as a theoretical and normative frame of contemporary analysis in the humanities and social sciences." (Dikeç, Clark and Barnett 2009: 2). It is surprising, in light of Gadamer's clear philosophical commitment to privileging the other that hospitality did not naturally fall within his own attention. It would, no doubt, have been a topic on which Gadamer and Derrida would have found much to discuss. True to his deconstructionist encampment, Derrida found hospitality to be rife with paradox, making its virtuous practice an impossibility (Derrida 2000, Derrida & Dufourmantelle 2000). Within this paradox, however, he established the most basic of understandings, with regard to interpersonal spaces, with which Gadamer would most certainly agree – that hospitality is "an interruption of the self" (Westmoreland 2008: 1).

Hospitality carries with it the prerequisite of stepping out of what is 'self', moving towards the other, in pursuit of the other, first towards proximity and then towards negotiation of invitation. For Gadamer, this is the character of all interpersonal spaces. Gadamerian interpersonal spaces are journeyed spaces, mobile endeavours, spaces which, unlike Derrida's "limited hospitality" (Wrobleski 2012), are full of virtuous possibility, made possible by pursuing others. This is the Gadamerian conception of research spaces – spaces of possibility, spaces of pursuit, spaces in which self is interrupted, but also engaged, possibly even transformed.

Gadamer's ontological conception of research provides a strong foundation for transformative, participatory research practices. It provides a particular significance to the persons involved in research, to their experience of research, and to the relationships which are created between them, by research. This personal, experiential orientation provides fruitful ground from which to address anthropology's epistemological concern.

Humility: Responding to Limitation and Longing in Research

An integral part of this research project has been opportunities to engage with Azerbaijanis around my evolving interpretations of their ways of life. As I have shared my experiences and explored their significance, there has been a constantly running protocol in my mind, “Is this really what is going on?” I have presented various versions of this question to Azerbaijanis, as I have analysed my reflections, with them. “Does this describe what you see as going on? Would you agree that this is the way it is?”

Many of my interpretations have been challenged, some confirmed, others given back to me to ponder further. What has been notable, over these years, is the number of reflections I have presented which, rather than with confirmation or rebuttal, have been met with agnostic surprise. “I never thought about it that way.” “That's interesting, I need to pay more attention to that.” “Well, that is something I never noticed.”

Most interesting, however, has been the frequency with which Azerbaijanis have responded to my interpretations with concern. “Is that really us? Is that the way we are?” This concern, alongside agnosticism, critique and confirmation, has driven my perspectives on research and shaped the manner in which I have conducted my study of Azerbaijani ways of life. It is difficult to escape the weight which research-related concerns carry in shaping approaches to research conduct and presentation (Lassiter 2005).

In the current project I recognize that I am mediating more than just my own process of understanding. I am seeking to mediate differing voices in my research, adopting research approaches which create a space for these different voices, allowing them to speak with one another and then speaking back to them as a collective. Research postures

are my response to anthropological voices of concern and Azerbaijani voices of testimony to ways of life.

Anthropological concern often vacillates between issues of factual integrity and contextual authority. Barbara Johnston refers to this dichotomy as a conflict revolving around perspectives on the “social meaning of doing anthropology” (Johnston 2010: 235). On the one hand are concerns related to voice and intent. Whose purposes are served by research and its findings? Whose voices make the presentation? On the other hand, sit concerns for a particular character of representation, for consistency with reality, for alignment of some kind between the research context and its presentation.

Separating these two spheres of concern is of particular epistemological interest for research methodologies that focus on “objectivity” (Daston & Galison 2010) as a goal, linking accuracy to an absence of things personal - agendas, intentions, interests (Zeitlyn 2009). Epistemology is often separated from moral or ethical concerns. Epistemological concerns come to be defined by conceptions of objectivity, in opposition to subjectivity (Pels 2014), bias (Emerson et al. 2020), or personal motivations which may drive research. But is this appropriate? Answering this question comes down to one's views on the validity of a claim as something separate from the intent of its presentation.

In the initial stages of the first research project in which I was engaged in Azerbaijan, I remember gaining a perspective on research which has been helpful in establishing research postures that adequately address concerns of voice and intent as well as objective accuracy. This experience highlighted, for me, the character and significance of disciplinary and contextual concerns within research. The project was a sociolinguistic research initiative with the Azerbaijani National Academy of Sciences, looking at patterns of language use in Azerbaijan. We had prepared for an important meeting at a conference

sponsored by the Academy. A senior member of the Azerbaijani president's cabinet was to be present at this conference and we had arranged to meet with him during one of the recesses to discuss our research.

One of the key questions we had prepared to ask was “What are some of the challenges and concerns within ethnographic studies in Azerbaijan that you would like to see us address?” His response, when we presented the question provided an important reflection for me on the integral relationship between research voice, intent and integrity. He responded with a question of his own. “What do you hope for in your time here in Azerbaijan” [V99-8]?

At first, we felt he was dodging our question. But there was something deeper in his redirection which became clear as the conversation progressed. Several times over the next half hour he returned to the Azerbaijani concept of *arzu*, which encompasses a broad conceptual constellation around hope, dream, longing, or desire. He was clearly a skilled politician and negotiator, positioning himself to answer our question in a manner that would most fruitfully position us to address issues towards which we could actually contribute.

It was a good while before our conversation finally made its way to an articulation of the challenges and concerns that he wanted to see us address in our research. He queried from different angles our hopes and longings, and then moved to an assessment of our capacity. This was all done masterfully and intentionally. “How do you feel you are positioned to achieve your desired goals? What do you feel you can offer to ethnographic research and practice in Azerbaijan? What is your *qabiliyyət* (ability, capacity, skill, competence)?”

Having facilitated a clear articulation of our desires and assessment of our capacity to pursue these desires, he took one final step. He began to articulate for us his own *arzular*, his hopes, dreams, longings, desires, in relation to ethnographic research in Azerbaijan. What became clear is that there were significant differences between his hopes and dreams and our own. We had expressed our research desires to obtain knowledge about Azerbaijan, and to make information about Azerbaijan better known to the wider world. His interests were more institutionally and relationally oriented. He expressed interest in strong research partnerships, support for the work of national researchers and projects, in shared publication and deeper possibilities for national researchers to participate in research conferences in international settings.

He proceeded to then lay out what he considered to be the most relevant concerns for us to be aware of. These concerns lay in the space between our *qabiliyyət*, our ability, capacity, skill, competence, and the *arzular*, the hopes, dreams, longings, desires, which he had expressed. Notably, it was not the space between our capacity and our hopes into which he placed his concerns. He placed his concerns in the space between his own hopes and dreams and our capacity. In this space, he found his concerns. This principle has stuck with me and has become an important conceptual model for me in understanding how research communities understand the central concerns which demand address. Concerns emerge within the space that lies between hopes and capacities, between longings and limitations.

Approaches to research which embrace mitigation have made their primary epistemological concern reducing the influence which voice and intent may have on research. Their concern is for rigorous employment of methods that provide presentation which is consistent and aligned with the actual subject of study but do not serve a

particular intent or preference any particular voice. This concern lies between a longing for objectively aligned representation of observed phenomena and recognition of the limitations to achieving this which are inherent to the particularities of a researcher's own motivations, personal perspectives and the nature of the researcher's relationship with subjects of study. In these approaches epistemology entails an act of justification. Methods of research must prove their ability to mitigate for forces of subjectivity, voice, and interpretation.

But research concerns are different for those who view voice and intent as connected to the validity of a presentation, not separate. Epistemological concerns in this case are focused on "phenomenological validity" (Toren & Pina-Cabral 2011), clear articulation of the relevance of a fact for a clearly identified intention. Further validity is provided for a claim if presentation provides a space for a diversity of voices for whom the outcomes of research are relevant (Lassiter 2005). Epistemological concern in this case is not focused on mitigation but on transparency and correlation, not on reducing "the entanglement between the definition of fieldwork, the actors that participate in it, and the production and ownership of knowledge" (Bowles and Guglielmo 2015: 3) but incorporating it all into the practice and presentation of research. This concern lies between a longing for shared understanding and the limitations to achieving this which exist in spaces of interpersonal disconnection.

Transformative approaches to research, which embrace the persons involved in research and are concerned for what happens to them, not just by or through them, carry epistemological concerns for transparency and correlation. Transformative approaches to research are naturally ontological. Transformative research is a constellational concept, encompassing interpretation, voice, and intent within a process of personal change -

change in the persons within a research context. It is here that the relevance of Gadamer's work for my own development of research postures has had the most influence.

Gadamer (2004) proposes that the goal of research is to embrace a natural human process, that of 'coming to know through shared understanding'. The task of research is this embrace. Gadamer's conception of the natural human process of 'coming to know through shared understanding' is founded on two coincidental principles. First, humans are ontologically limited, by virtue of the finite character of our being. This limitation plays out epistemologically as we face our inability to know all things, in every way. It also plays out in numerous other ways, directly related to our finitudinal existence - in our limited capacity to be present and our limited perspective from which to experience, to name a few.

Conceptions of human limitation are foundational to much of existential philosophy. Existential writers who have engaged with Gadamer (Wachterhauser 1999, Dallmayr 2009) have done so because they resonate with his response to human limitation, not just his conception of the limitation itself. Here, Gadamer's second epistemological principle is key. For Gadamer, the proper human response to finitude of being is 'seeking others'. It is in the presence of others, in interaction with others, in the experience of becoming who one is becoming, with others, that human finitude finds opportunity. Gadamer's answer to epistemological concern within the human sciences is pursuit of inclusion and diversity.

Humility represents well the constellation of concepts that Gadamer builds around human finitude and the appropriate response to limitation which research needs to embrace. Humility, within Gadamer's work, can be described as a posture of confidence and acceptance of who one has become through what one has experienced, which allows

coming into new experiences with hope and expectation that this self can become more. I have greatly desired such a posture as I have engaged in my research. It is a posture which has shaped my view of self and my view of interpersonal spaces, shaping how I enter into and interact within these spaces. There are three aspects relevant to a research posture of humility which I have found in Gadamer's work: humility is selfless; yet it inspires confidence in self; and it is hopeful, inspired to interpersonal commitment.

Since Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), researchers within the human sciences have been "fascinated (even obsessed) with the idea of the incommensurability of paradigms, languages, frame works, and horizons." (Bernstein 2008: 584) The incommensurability of knowledge of the other and research practices has been a particular fascination for anthropologists and philosophers (Foucault 1970, Said 1978, Fabian 1983, Derrida 1999b). Discussions of incommensurability in research endeavours have been closely connected to conceptions of attainment and access to knowledge. When the limitations of being human are placed alongside the "abyss" (Derrida and Bass 1978) between researcher and the different other, knowledge of the other can be deemed 'unattainable', 'inaccessible'. This inaccessibility is a characteristic applied to knowledge, to that which research is seeking to know. It is an epistemological assessment. It postures researchers as "finders, not seekers" (Neitzsche 1997: 9).

Within a Gadamerian conception of research, the ontological concept of insufficiency stands in opposition to epistemological assessments of incommensurability and inaccessibility. Gadamer did not conceptualize the Derridian abyss between self and other as a problem faced by research but rather as the frontier in which research naturally resides. From this perspective, the critical challenge faced by research is an ontological one – the insufficiency of the researcher, to know, in isolation. Foundational to the

journey across the frontier of research is a researcher's self-recognition of insufficiency. The research journey begins with the humble denial of self. Ontologically, this goes beyond a cognitive recognition of insufficient knowledge. Gadamerian denial of self is a recognition of insufficiency of being. Seeking the other is a process of becoming a self which is different than at present. The present self must give itself up "to the emergence of something else" (Gadamer 2004: xvii).

But the humble denial of self is not an abandonment of self altogether. It is not akin to Nietzsche's forgetfulness of being, but rather a 'resting in being'. While the researcher may be insufficient for what research demands, this is not equivalent to irrelevance. Humility in research recognizes the value of self, even though it is not enough, on its own. Gadamer's selfless seeker is not paralyzed by self-insufficiency but, is confident, embracing *phronesis*, "practical wisdom" (Aristotle, Ross & Browne 2019; Heidegger, Macquarrie & Robbinson 2013; Gadamer 2004: 560). Practical wisdom is a willingness, in the face of personal insufficiency to start the research journey, to trust "the luminosity of a situation in which one must comport oneself even though it may never be fully illuminated" (Figal and Sikes 2004: 22).

This selfless, yet confident, comporting of oneself in the partially-illuminated frontier of research requires a reframing of the goals of research. Research becomes less about detached accuracy than about experience. Honest research is not akin to the repainting of a painting - that is forgery and will never match up to the original. The attempt itself is impossible and what is produced cannot honestly claim exact representation. Research is most accurate when it is recognized for what it is - not a repainting, but an experience of the painting (Gadamer 2004: 49-61). In this recognition, a researcher truly grasps their place in the frontier of research, not as the creator of the research space or the controller,

but as one among others within the frontier of which the researcher is more than simply "capable of being a part", a frontier by which the researcher is naturally "contained" (Grondin 2003: 18, Gadamer 2004: 87). The researcher is not apart from research. While accuracy in its entirety is not to be found by the researcher, the picture includes the researcher, in fact, as an integral part.

The complexity of maintaining a humble confidence to seek the other in the face of humble recognition of one's own limitations has been at the heart of numerous critiques of Gadamer's conception of research. It is here that Derrida found what he considered to be an irreconcilable tension, *aporia*, in Gadamer's hermeneutics (Derrida 1976, Bernstein 2008: 587). If the extent to which research can aspire is proximal experience of the other, then research is unable to do more than disrupt the researcher, leading away from understanding the other towards an ever increasing inward-looking, self-oriented understanding. Research becomes more akin to a prayer, than a task of understanding, a wish that things would be different, without any real possibility of making them so (Caputo 1997: 24).

Gadamer's response to this aporia of unending self-oriented understanding, devoid of, and indeed unable to ever include, the other takes the form of a transformative lament for something beyond self. Gadamer's humble self mourns the absence of that which it does not yet know (Gadamer 2004: 294), of which it is not yet a part (Gadamer 2004: 158). Though all "understanding is ultimately self-understanding" (Gadamer 2004: 251), this self-understanding is not immutable and self-contained. It is, by nature, affected by that with which it attains proximity. Here is the final aspect of humility as a research posture. Humility is hopeful, expectant, recognizing the possibility that is offered by the other. The humble researcher is inexorably committed to interpersonal proximity, to the

“scientific integrity” of this commitment, to a trust in the transformation which interpersonal proximity makes possible (Gadamer 2004: xxv-xxvi).

Over the course of this study, I have striven for a posture of humility, in this Gadamerian sense, to respond to anthropology's epistemological concern for honouring the best interests of interpersonal spaces by representing them accurately. Pursuit of this posture has been a transformational journey. I do not claim to have fully matured in this posture, but I am grateful for the space which my research has provided for me to grow towards humble engagement with Azerbaijanis and their ways of life.

The research methods that I have chosen, which are described in more detail in the final section of this chapter, were chosen so as to provide rich opportunities to achieve proximity with Azerbaijani ways of life. In the moments of proximity which I have achieved, it has been my desire to experience these ways of life, with Azerbaijanis. I have not endeavoured to understand these experiences on my own. An important part of the shared character of these experiences has been coming to a shared understanding of their meaning. These are the aspects of a research posture of humility which have guided me in my chosen methods: seeking proximity, experiencing Azerbaijani ways of life alongside Azerbaijanis, and seeking a shared understanding, with Azerbaijanis, of these experiences.

Appreciation: Affirming Existential Value

Coming into Azerbaijani ways of life, becoming one who knows these ways as my own, has forced me onto the front lines of disciplinary and ontological concern. Three years into this project, I found myself in the library of the National Academy of Sciences, explaining to a new archivist the nature of my work [V17-78]. I was applying for access to a collection of newspapers edited by the late Zeynalabdin Taghiyev. As I shared about

my research, she asked a few polite questions, and helped me fill out the various forms which were required. As we were nearing the end of the process, she asked a question. “Do you like us?”

I did not immediately grasp the depth of the question, the character of the longings and concerns behind it. “Yes,” I replied. “I am learning a lot from Azerbaijani practices of hospitality.”

She continued to probe. “But do you like our hospitality?”

Numerous reflections on Azerbaijani ways of life have emerged from this brief conversation. Some of them I have been able to pursue with the archivist herself. Some have significantly shaped the course of my research methodology and methods. Among these reflections, a strong sense of identification with others, which was clear in this episode, has been important to address at several junctures in my research. ‘Being Azerbaijani’ is a concept that weaves together present and historical experiences of presence and domain, senses and perceptions of identification and interpersonal associations.

But it was a methodological reflection which seemed to be most relevant as I left this conversation. As I began to understand the intent of her questioning, I realized that the archivist was responding to the experience of 'being studied' (J. Jackson 2013: 11-12). She wanted to know my evaluation of Azerbaijani practices of hospitality, my assessment of their acceptability, how they measured up to what I would consider to be good, to be admirable.

Over the years of this research, I have been challenged to become more cognizant and responsive to the Azerbaijani history of ‘being studied’ and the close connection of Azerbaijani experiences of the intentions and voices behind this history. When I first

became involved in research in Azerbaijan, I recognized a clear history of ethnographic study, highly influenced by Russian practice and communities. Ethnographic Studies is the disciplinary category within which anthropological research is located within the National Academy of Sciences and other research institutions in the country. As Nathaniel Knight describes the Russian ethnographic tradition, it has been, since its conception in the late 19th century,

> above all, a science of the particular… Central to the ethnographic endeavor [is] the concept of narodnost, the essence of ethnic distinctiveness. The task of the ethnographer… [is[to catalogue and describe the features of narodnost in their native setting, 'where they are and as they are,' so that out of the seemingly chaotic assemblage of individual traits a harmonious picture would emerge, revealing the connections among the individual, the nation, and all of humanity. (Knight 2008: 84-85)

This descriptive, ethno-national tradition still undergirds, in significant ways, anthropological expectations among Azerbaijani academics. These stand alongside a small body of anthropological studies which have been published outside of Azerbaijan, from within European and Anglo-American anthropological traditions.

As I have read anthropological writing on Azerbaijani ways of life, I have observed the manner with which Azerbaijanis have responded. When we have passed beyond politeness and traditional tendencies, there has been a clear sense that the intent of these writings is experienced as important. I have engaged frequently with the concept of *qiymətləndirmək* (evaluation, appraisal, appreciation), and related language. Notably, these writers have not been described as having a particular appraisal or evaluation of the particular ethnographic aspects they have studied. Rather, their writing is experienced as an assessment of overall Azerbaijani-ness.

Interactions around these assessment experiences reveal the character of how they are received: *Bizi qiymətləndirmirlər*; They don't appreciate us; *Aydındir, bizi necə saydıqları*; It is clear, how they count us. *Bizi dəyərələndirirlər*; They value us. Intentions are paramount to the experience of being researched.

"Do you like us? Do you like to be with us?" It is answers to these questions which provide much more legitimacy to research and its findings, for Azerbaijanis, than "Can you describe us?" At the heart of the question, "Do you understand us?" is "Do you appreciate us?

I have delved into other collections of writings on Azerbaijan, literary works and post-Soviet global voices, in disciplines other than anthropology such as political studies and economics. I have read these, with an eye to intent and voice. I have presented similar questions to Azerbaijanis in relation to these collections. "What difference do you think it makes that these individuals with these intentions have presented these interpretations?"

From the responses I have received it has become apparent to me that the intent and voice of these writings is not irrelevant to their reception. Beyond moral intentions Azerbaijanis are experiencing the epistemological intentions (Roessler 2013) of these works: "We understand that we are being evaluated by these standards." The experience is more than that of moral judgment. There is a feeling of being evaluated on an existential level.

Anthropology has significant disciplinary concern in relation to the feelings a researcher has towards the subject of study (Kingsolver 2004, Fluehr-Lobban 2013). As is to be expected, over the extended years that I have been coming into my own understanding of Azerbaijani ways of life, I have gained a history of personal struggles and joys. My experiences of Azerbaijani ways of life have come with a wide variety of emotions, personal evaluations and impressions. In these reflections I have become aware of my need to clearly understand my research posture in relation to my intentions.

I have come to describe this posture as one of appreciation. Appreciation is a posture found in Gadamer's conception of the existential value of that which is different from

oneself. Appreciation is recognition of the acceptability of the existence of that which is different, and an attraction to the potential which it holds for enriching the being of self. Gadamer's philosophy was driven by a relentless pursuit of difference. For Gadamer, it is experience of difference which creates awareness of self, of how one has been formed.

> …not the Thou but the truth of what the Thou says to us...the truth of that becomes visible to me only through the Thou, and only by letting myself be told something by it. It would not deserve the interest we take in it if it did not have something to teach us that we could not know ourselves (Gadamer 2004: xxxii).

Re-searching begins with an appreciation for the importance of that which is not currently part of our being, that which we have not yet experienced, that which is different. Appreciation is a crucial posture within Gadamer's conception of research as ‘pursuit of the other’. This pursuit is characterized by a graciousness towards the world outside oneself, in recognition of its legitimacy and in anticipation of its offer.

Appreciation is an ontological posture which correlates to the acceptance of self. It is an acceptance of the other's existence, the other’s being. It does not require an assessment of what this being entails. It is a recognition of the other's existence which does not challenge the restful, hopeful state of the self. Appreciation is not utilitarian. The value of the other is not contingent on being of use to self. It “leads beyond what man knows and experiences immediately. It consists in learning to affirm what is different from oneself and to find universal viewpoints from which one can grasp the thing, ‘the objective thing in its freedom,’ without selfish interest” (Gadamer 2004: 12).

Appreciation provides an important response to anthropology's epistemological concern for honouring interpersonal spaces of research by representing them accurately. Appreciation lays the grounding for actively entering into interpersonal spaces, with others. It is an honourable posture, in its assumption of the meaningfulness of the other.

This meaningfulness is not dependent on what occurs as research unfolds. The other is recognized as having meaning because of who they are.

Where humility is a posture of general recognition and expectation, appreciation is specific. It is a posture which makes a research project possible, in a given place and time. My efforts to develop a posture of appreciation, in this Gadamerian sense, have been a guide for my choice of research methods. In my pursuit of proximity and co-experience of Azerbaijani ways of life I have paid close attention to the character of my *qiymətləndirmə*, my evaluations, through each re-searching experience. I have made considerations of appreciation an important part of my self-reflection throughout the research process. The challenge continually before me has been, "What is enabling or hindering my appreciation of the existential value of 'being Azerbaijani'?"

Openness: Embracing Epistemic Faith

The journey of a researcher into a subject of study is an experience of difference, but it also an experience of the manner in which difference is understood. This distinction, between difference and the variety of ways in which difference can be understood is an important epistemological delineation which continues to concern anthropology. What is the appropriate manner for a researcher to enter into contexts of difference? And how is the difference which is encountered to be understood?

Development of my research postures towards ways in which difference can be understood has closely paralleled my experience of what I have come to refer to as the 'layered' character of hospitality in Azerbaijani ways of life. Azerbaijani hospitality often requires negotiation of multiple, co-occurring interpersonal scenarios. My experiences of these simultaneous negotiations have given me a deep appreciation for the particular 'logic' (Mootz and Taylor 2011: 2) of Azerbaijani hospitality, for the frames within which

Azerbaijani hospitality is understood within Azerbaijani ways of life. One of my more elaborate experiences of this 'layered logic' was at the home of Nariman, a close academic colleague [V00-20].

It was a sunny Sunday afternoon. We had been invited by Nariman, to his home for a meal. This was a semi-formal affair. William, the senior member of our research team had returned from several weeks away from Azerbaijan. It was he who had negotiated our project relationships with the National Academy of Sciences. When he was in town, Nariman was always eager to host our team.

The table was set beneath the trees in Nariman's courtyard. We were seated, with William at the head. Nariman placed himself at the other end of the table. From there he had easy access to the entranceway of the home, where the hot food was being prepared. As his wife, and niece, brought out the fresh dishes, Nariman was able to communicate with them regarding our needs while also playing the important role of lively, engaged host.

It was a lovely afternoon meal, as we had expected. An hour or so after we arrived the event began to take on 'layers'. At the far end of the courtyard a voice came through the gateway, "Teacher, greetings". It was Nariman's nephew, Anar, a graduate student whom we had come to recognize was being apprenticed by his uncle into an academic career. We all rose to greet Anar. After the usual round of shaking hands and inquiring after each other's well-being, Nariman walked with Anar to a corner of the courtyard. They had a brief conversation, Anar handed Nariman some papers and then seated himself at a small table, just beyond our direct view, in a shaded alcove under the grape vines. A fresh pot of tea was placed in front of Anar and Nariman returned to our table. The whole process took less than five minutes, during which time Nariman's wife, Melek, had come out,

taking the moment when Nariman was engaged with Anar, to linger a while by our table, to see how we were enjoying the meal.

Ten minutes later, there was another voice at the gate. An administrator from the central office of the Academy and his assistant were there. They entered the courtyard and Nariman briefly introduced us to them. The introduction was clearly polite. There was no expectation that we would linger in our conversation. Nariman excused himself for "just a moment" and lead the new guests into the house. As he left, Anar seated himself at our table. While Nariman was gone, Anar was a gracious host. He facilitated conversation and even initiated a few toasts.

Nariman was engaged with his administrative guests for quite a while. While he was gone, at least two other guests came to the gate. Anar met them at the gate, but neither of them came in. Each time Anar left the table, Melek was there to be with us until he returned.

After a while, Nariman and the other guests came out of the house. They acknowledged us and were led to the gate. Having seen them off, Nariman returned to our table. We were now finished the main meal. Anar seated himself next to Nariman at the end of the table and we all enjoyed several pots of tea together, with Melek's home-made *mürəbbə,* jam, and fresh fruit.

This was an experience of seamless Azerbaijani hosting. Nariman and his family were clearly fluent in a shared logic of hospitality. They were able to play their appropriate roles within multiple interpersonal interactions, managing each interaction in a manner that also allowed for co-occurring interactions to be simultaneously managed. They were able to do this together, relying on one another to play shifting roles, to fulfil objectives for which, clearly, they had a shared understanding.

In my conversations with Nariman I have returned to this event many times. The logic which was at play in this experience was rich. The particularly layered character of the event reveals fascinating aspects of Azerbaijani conceptions of being a guest, being a host, and the distributed functions within a hosting community. I learned, after the event, that Anar had been invited that day specifically because Nariman suspected the administrative guests were going to drop by. Anar had been invited to be a part of the hosting community, as 'host on call'. I have also had numerous opportunities to observe, in similar layered hospitality situations, the role of senior female members of a hosting community, such as Melek.

Even after many years of participation in Azerbaijani ways of life, I am not fluent in the logic of Azerbaijani hospitality. But I continue to learn the 'rules of the game' (Gadamer 2004: 107). I have been a 'host on call', myself, on numerous occasions. I have also learned ways of being a good guest when a host has found themselves unable to manage co-occurring interactions with guests. This learning has required a particular posture towards the frames in which Azerbaijanis understand hospitality. I have come to describe this posture as openness.

Openness is the third posture which has shaped my response to anthropology's epistemological concern for honouring interpersonal spaces of research by representing them accurately. Openness is a recognition that a subject of research cannot be adequately understood solely within the frames of understanding that a researcher brings with them. Openness postures the researcher to seek understanding of the subject of research along with a new understanding of the logic within which the subject resides.

Seeking new frames of understanding was central to Hans-Georg Gadamer's conception of research. It was the strength of his belief in the power of a subject of study

(*Sache*) to transform previously held frames of understanding which drove his philosophy. For Gadamer, research was,

> a three-way relation: one person comes to an understanding with another about something they thus both understand. When two people 'understand each other' (*sich verstehen*), they always do so with respect to something. That something is never just an opinion (*Meinung, Gemeinte*), as when two people merely 'exchange views'. When we understand what someone says to us, we understand not just that person (his 'psychology', for instance), nor just his or her 'view', but we seriously consider whether that way of looking at a subject has some validity for us too. (Weinsheimer & Marshall 2004: xiii-xiv).

In order to 'seriously consider whether a new way of looking at a subject has some validity' all parties in a research process must open themselves to the subject and to one another. This openness is epistemological in character. It requires what Jonathan Ichikawa refers to as 'epistemic faith', "a disposition to believe or infer according to particular methods, despite a kind of tendency to perceive an epistemic shortcoming in that method" (Ichikawa 2020: 1). Openness as a research posture embraces epistemic faith. It guides a conception of research as a process of "listen[ing] to the other in the belief that he could be right" (Grondin 2003: 250).

Openness is a posture of welcome, recognizing the significant contribution to a researcher's "epistemic deficiency" (Ichikawa 2020: 130) which can be made by that which is different. What is offered by the subject of study is taken as an "epistemic virtue" (Freedman 2017), an increased potential for understanding.

Openness directly relates to anthropology's epistemological concern, believing it is possible that the other has what I am missing in order to obtain a more complete understanding of a subject of study. Re-searching must assume there is something valuable which is not yet what I have. Unless I believe that I don't currently have what I seek, my research is a farce, a charade.

On my journey of coming into Azerbaijan taking a posture of openness has been a particularly difficult turn to take. Openness demands a willingness to move, out of

proximity into something closer. I am often reminded of my limitations in understanding Azerbaijani ways of life. A posture of humility is frequently called out, simply by personal experiences of finitude. Proximity is enough for a posture of humility to be formed. As life has occurred, in a whirl around me, I am continually aware of all that I still do not know, what I still do not understand.

Proximity has also been sufficient to inspire appreciation, observing the rhythms of Azerbaijani ways of life, learning to suspend existential judgments. But openness requires a willingness to enter in. Without openness, invitations into new ways of life cannot be accepted. My experience of Azerbaijani dancing has provided a simple illustration for me of the importance of a posture of openness as I have moved from proximity to participation in Azerbaijani ways of life.

The first time I was invited to step onto the whirling dance floor of an Azerbaijani wedding I remember my thoughts, about four seconds into the moment [E99-6]. I had been pulled out of my seat, by the brother of the groom, and tossed into the joyous fray. In that quick moment of invitation, I had moved from rapturous engagement with a bite of fresh Absheron tomato, creamy white goat cheese and a sprig of aromatic red basil to the centre of the room. It took my mind a few seconds to catch up with the fact that I was no longer seated, looking in on the blur of tapping feet and swooping arms. Mere proximity to the dance floor was far behind me. The thoughts on my mind were not reflective or contemplative. I was not musing on “How do I feel about what is going on?” or “That’s interesting, let me analyse the manner in which this just happened.” My racing mind was telling my body, “Move your feet, man!”, “Snap those arms!”

I had watched Azerbaijani dancing, often from up close. It was clearly quite different from any dancing I was familiar with. I imagined in my head how my feet would need to

move, how my body would need to turn, though I was quite sure my own gyrations would look different. I even imagined how it might be enjoyable. Recognizing my lack of skill and maintaining an optimistic expectation for the experience of Azerbaijani dancing were not enough, however, for me to actually dance. I had to make a decision. I had to become someone who was dancing.

This decision, to become someone, is at the heart of a research posture of openness. Openness is an ontological commitment. Participation in ways of life is not possible until this ontological turn has been made. I must be willing to become someone who dances like Azerbaijanis dance, someone who eats like Azerbaijanis eat, someone who speaks like Azerbaijanis speak.

The ontological character of research commitments has strengthened, for me, ontological perspectives on my subject of study. I have committed to ways of research that suit a study of ways of life. In order to discover Azerbaijani ways of being, I have committed to becoming. My commitment to study the place of Azerbaijani hospitality within Azerbaijani ways of life has required a commitment to find my own place within these ways.

Getting the Story: Methods for Seeking Co-Experience

I tightened up the buttons of my jacket and put my hands in my pockets. I turned my back to the stiff breeze coming in from the Caspian Sea. Leaning on the long wall which stretched off into the distance, I looked back at the city of Baku. Just beyond the cobblestones and trees of the boulevard were the walls of the Old City, the Maiden's Tower, the close-knit procession of sandstone-walled houses, rising to the crest on which the Shirvan Shah Palace complex sat. Stretching up the hillside, dwarfing this millennium of architectural witness were monuments of more recent times, the Presidential Offices,

rows of modern high-rises, the Flame Towers. A history of the city, mirroring larger histories of nations and peoples, was on display.

Looking down the boulevard itself, I was reminded of the multiplicity of particular stories that move across Azerbaijani landscapes. Three young teens in jeans and t-shirts whistled by on rollerblades. They weaved around a family, a long-bearded father-figure accompanied by several ladies, dressed in hijab. Along the rocky side of the seawall were fishermen, dressed to keep out the wet of the splashing waves. Suited men clustered around café tables, enjoying steaming pots of tea. Parents and children, from various walks of life, played in the shaded areas beneath the trees.

How is one to describe the plurality of these ways of life, of the manner in which Azerbaijanis "move through the world" (Campbell and Lassiter 2015: 1)? In this final section of the current chapter, I describe the methods by which I gathered Azerbaijani stories and attempted to discern various aspects of the shared ways of life which they have revealed. The 'craft' of my study has been in the choosing of particular stories, articulating individual experiences. My research methods have involved moving through the worlds which Azerbaijanis inhabit, employing various forms of collaborative ethnography (Lassiter 2005, Campbell and Lassiter 2015).

The progression of time has been a significant aspect in my choice of research methods. The types of stories I have collected can be seen to build on one another. The reflection and engagement I have engendered around collected narratives have become more focused and complex over the course of my study. There has been a hermeneutic character to the progression of my methods.

In the remainder of this section, I describe the three methods I have employed to gain insight into the place of hospitality in Azerbaijani ways of life: collection of vignettes,

short experiences and narratives which revealed various facets of Azerbaijani ways of hospitality; collection of longer narratives, specifically told to recount experiences of hospitality (and inhospitality); and dialogues with groups, intentional meetings with Azerbaijanis to reflect on my data. I then close this chapter with a discussion on the way my chosen methodology and methods have aligned my work with the perspectives and practices of existential phenomenology.

Vignettes

The vignette is what has continued to pull me into anthropology. Vignettes represent, for me, some of the best which anthropological research and writing has to offer the world, moving it beyond an identity as a discipline of text (Clifford and Marcus 2010) along its journey into becoming a discipline of story. The term, vignette, can carry an aura of informality and inexactness, often standing in opposition to an ideal of "thick description" (Geertz 1973). It is important, therefore, to understand what is meant by the concept of vignette and the specific role which vignettes are playing in a given research project.

I have defined a vignette as a recorded account of an event which facilitates further study and discussion (Hazel 1995: 2, Hill 1997: 177). My vignettes have typically taken the form of short descriptions that in some way illustrate aspects of Azerbaijani ways of life which I want to explore more deeply, or which function as supportive reference points for arguments or claims (Hughes 2008).

The story of how my collection of vignettes developed follows closely the story of my coming into Azerbaijani ways of life, and my coming into anthropological participation. I developed close friendships in my first few years in Azerbaijan (1999-2002). It was during these years that I began to collect my first anthropological data which was stored, primarily, as vignettes. In most of these early encounters I was an active participant. In

some, however, my participation was simply as an observer. Though many of my vignettes do not meet the rigorous demands necessary to be labelled, "ethnographic encounters" (Hockey and Forsey 2012, Ingold 2014), there are certainly elements of an ethnographization of encounters within them, as they represent "everyday engagement across difference" (Faier and Rofel 2014: 363).

Vignettes were the foundation of my initial research, revealing the threads and themes which fed my continued exploration into the multiple facets of Azerbaijani ways of being. They provided guidance to an informed sampling methodology. They were foundational to a purposive, informed sampling approach. Informed sampling is a method of choosing research subjects which is based on the researcher's perception of gaps in what is known about the total pool of possible subjects. Subjects are chosen so as to obtain information which fills in these gaps. (Tiessen 2003: 24)

My collection of vignettes provided "illustrative inferences" (Wood and Christy 1999) about what is possible in Azerbaijani ways of hospitality, though not necessarily about the particular prevalence or relevance individual occurrences may have. My initial anthology covered a range of things I found interesting. From within these "accumulating encounters" (HadžiMuhamedović 2018: x), I eventually selected vignettes relating to aspects of hospitality. As I did so, I began to realize how widespread hospitality was within Azerbaijani ways of life.

I was outside of Azerbaijan for several years, 2002-2004, and returned married. It was interesting to be able to look at Azerbaijan in a different light than when I had first come. In the years that I was gone considerable change had occurred. The oil boom was now in full swing. I had spent some time in other post-Soviet countries during my time away and was able to look at Azerbaijan from additional reference points. Being married, I now

developed different kinds of relationships. This opened up new horizons. In 2005 I founded a small language and culture development centre and was the director there for 6 years until 2011. In this position I experienced a different side of Azerbaijan. I dealt a lot with government agencies as well as private corporations. I was deep into Azerbaijani life in very new ways. Our first daughter was born in 2007 and we began to learn what it was to be parents in Azerbaijan. It was during this period that I collected my second set of data, also stored as vignettes.

The use of vignettes is generally understood to have the purpose of 'leading to something else'. This can be an introduction to a concept or theme. It can also be as a stimulus for discussions or research engagements. I have ended up using my vignettes in both ways. They have proved helpful as literary tools in my writing. But they have also ended up being instrumental in my use of methods that involve deeper engagement – particularly discussion group work, serving to simplify points of exploration in order to "disentangle the complexities and conflicts present in everyday life" (Hughes 2008: 920). Vignettes shaped my discernment of the character of my subject and my research frame, the spaces in which I came to apprehend, not just comprehend. Vignettes were a doorway into my encounter with Azerbaijani ways of life and hospitality.

The vignettes which have been included in this written work were chosen for the specific manner in which they illustrated key aspects of the unfolding academic narrative and for the manner in which they prompted dialogue on key topics relevant to my study.

Narratives

"Tell me a story." Anar saw the look in my eyes, read the room and with a grin on his face, cued the group to action [D16-6]. Laughter ensued. My calling card had been played.

Collecting stories had become a staple of my research practice. So much so, that it had become an aspect of the way I interacted with Azerbaijanis on a regular basis.

My goal in collecting stories, chronologically connected accounts of an event/action or series of events/actions (Czarniawaska 2012: 17), was to listen so as to understand real life experiences. I was seeking themes and foundations. Most often these came across as succinct articulations of a concept or perspective. It was these articulations which ended up at the core of my anthological selections. Many of the narratives in which they occurred were longer, but they found their poignancy around these central articulations.

In *Living with Stories* (2008) William Schneider employs the language of "curation" to describe the process of collecting and then laying stories alongside one another, so as to understand both the meaning they carry individually, but also the meaning they create together. One could distinguish between 'stories' as individual accounts and 'narratives' as the broader arcs of meaning that are created by the compilation of stories, over time. I have found such a clear distinction difficult to maintain, however. Individual stories have been highly influential for my understanding of broader narratives within Azerbaijani ways of life. Stories have been an important means of discovering these broader narratives. And within individual stories, threads of broader narratives play foundational roles, without which the stories would lack much of their cohesion and coherence. There is a critical synergy and ecology which stories and narratives share.

In my curation of narrative compilations, I often elicited stories in groups and was able to use the stories to elicit or illuminate others. These 'interactive elicitation' sessions differed from the work I did with discussion groups in that I was focused on gathering narratives. Interpretation was a secondary goal. The questions I asked were not

interpretive. They were focused specifically on eliciting and fleshing out narratives, entering into the conversations within which stories were being told.

I collected stories in two time periods. The first was the period of 2009-2014 during which I engaged with a widely distributed field, gathering stories from individuals across Azerbaijan, encompassing aspects of rural as well as urban contexts, a variety of generational experiences and differing ways in which life interacts with gender. During the years of 2014-2018 I collected a second set of narratives, focused on hospitality experiences, from individuals and groups in a specific region of Baku, around the Neftichilar and Khazar subway stations.

Most of the narratives were sought out, though they remained original, personal and unscripted. As with the vignettes, there was a 'guided' (Behar 1996) character to my collection of stories. As narrative threads emerged, I went looking for certain kinds of stories, and worked to follow these threads into the stories of varied individuals.

The manner in which stories were told, in particular, the language they employed, was an important element of focus for me. One of my guiding methodological principles was to facilitate a process of "emic discovery" (Tracy 2020: 28), by which Azerbaijani articulations of hospitality experiences provided language to express broader etic concepts within anthropology. I was seeking to avoid a tyranny of etic emplotment – my own application of a metanarrative across emic stories. I was much more interested in the discovery of an emic enplotment – the broader narrative threads which individual stories were revealing. It is these broader narrative threads which have more naturally created a bridge between Azerbaijani ways of hospitality and those of others. The architecture of my academic narrative has relied heavily on these emic expressions of ontological plot.

A close colleague of mine once made the helpful distinction between methods of interacting with fields of research that rely upon ‘throwing’ oneself into the fray, and methods which rely much more on ‘catching’ what comes one’s way [D14-5]. There was a definite posture of ‘watching and listening while narratives were revealed’ (Czarniawska 2004: 23) in my approach to narrative collection.

The language of illumination has resonated with me, methodologically, from the earliest days of my research. I have described, to Azerbaijanis, when asked what purpose I am seeking in my collection of stories, my desire to shine light on Azerbaijani experiences so as to allow those experiences to shine as a light. Engaging with Azerbaijani stories has truly felt to me like ‘walking into rooms of light’. In the stories which have been shared with me I have come to recognize the ‘constitution of the Azerbaijani world’ (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 72, Zahavi 2012: 2). There is a clear intentionality which runs through these stories, revealing spaces and objects as they intersect with persons, creating experiences.

Looking at Azerbaijani ways of life through the lens of a collection of narratives allowed for the pluricentricity of these ways to be more clearly seen, providing “stretches of experience” (Cerbone 2012: 10), which could unfold naturally, not disconnected from wider narratives, but also not dependent on them for validity. Each “distinct but mutually reinforcing account” (Siewert 2012: 57) was able to illuminate both inwardly and outwardly. Stories helped individuals process and articulate their personal experiences. They also revealed threads and themes which cut across stories, across lives. Stories contributed to particular illumination as well as cumulative illumination within my research.

Alongside one another stories shone light upon continuities, resonances and harmonies, as well as dissonances and disputes. This phenomenological blend revealed layers of experience within individual stories and, with similar significance, it revealed a critical sociality to the process of storytelling and story collection. All of the stories in my collection were told to me, as interpersonal exchanges. Many of them were told in the presence of others and could be described as being told to the group. As these stories were requested, inspired, elicited, they became public. This was an experience in itself. The decision was made by the teller to articulate, but as the articulation occurred, it was experienced for its personal and interpersonal force. Tellers and listeners would often experience the process of storying as one of 'coming to grips with their surroundings' (Siewert 2012: 58). The storytelling itself was part of this coming to grips. This was a deeply meaningful and humbling aspect of the narrative collection process. I was allowed to be present as moments were grappled with, as meaning was articulated. These were important moments of trust and vulnerability.

Narratives pulled strongly on the character of witness throughout my study. They called upon a willingness of tellers to testify about their experiences. They also revealed the role of these testimonies in wider narratives, and the role of testimony and witness, in general, within the wider narrative of Azerbaijani ways of hospitality. Through it all, a strong focus on narrative collection made me a particular witness to the events and persons being recounted, in their blended temporality – in the context of their telling, but also to a significant extent, in the revelation they provided of moments beyond the present. I was allowed to enter into the historically-effected consciousness (Gadamer 2004) of Azerbaijani ways of hospitality. Azerbaijani narratives provided a unique 'mode of knowing' (Czarniawska 2004) in relation to Azerbaijani ways of hospitality.

Storytelling created verdant spaces of epistemological generativity. The content and style of my research and its presentation has been significantly shaped by these verdant spaces.

The narratives which have been included in this written work were chosen for the specific manner in which they illustrated key aspects of the unfolding academic narrative and for the manner in which they prompted dialogue on key topics relevant to my study.

Discussion Groups

My engagement with discussion groups was the most collaborative of my methods. My work with these groups functioned much like the methods often described with the term focus group (Bloor 2001, Fern 2001, Hennink 2014). While I benefited from the insights and experiences of others on the use of focus groups, I did not fully adopt a formalized focus group methodology.

The participants in my discussion groups were Azerbaijanis. The clearly stated goal of our discussions was to engage with my collected narratives and vignettes, providing reflection on the materials themselves but also on my developing interpretations. Frequently, additional narratives were generated in discussion group sessions. The basic format of our sessions was for us to start with a narrative or vignette, for me to propose some broad questions to begin and then for the group to take the conversation forward. Sessions could run from 90 minutes to several hours. We often shared an extended time over tea or a meal together.

As groups met over time, it was greatly valuable to see them begin to find a shared set of language and conception (Goebert and Rosenthal 2001). In order to keep the critical function of these groups strong, I was constantly looking for ways to elicit different perspectives. This was done through reintroduction of certain questions, or introduction of a question in a different way. "Counter-narratives" (Giroux 1996), stories which

challenged assumed realities or paradigms, were a good tool for this. I would occasionally engage a group with a narrative that seemed to challenge the direction the group was moving in.

At times, I used literary narratives as potential counter-narratives. These were safe to work with and were well known. Safety was provided by the fact that most of these narratives were temporally distanced from participants. Any criticism which may have been generated was then not directed at known individuals so much as at ideas or stereotypes. There is a recognized precedent for this approach in the Soviet practice of satirical commentary through literature, cinema and art. Soviet-era movies and literature were a good source of counter-narrative.

It was important to move beyond these counter-narratives, however, to get to reflection on current narratives. I use the plural here because this was an important message which I repeated for myself and to the participants of the discussion groups. We were not looking for singular narratives but rather the manner in which particulars, when laid alongside one another revealed aspects (though not totalities) of sharedness.

Shared illumination was the level of interpretation I focused on most. Cumulative illumination, bringing in etic conceptions, occurred in my use of metaphors and images. These were helpful, but I used them mostly to prompt shared illumination. If these proved fruitful, this was an indication of the value of the etic concept. It should be noted that I have not found unanimous agreement on all aspects of my interpretation. That is the burden of the researcher. I was, however, able to arrive at a robust confidence in my abduction. My analysis is etic, in the end. I view this as a contribution to, hopefully not a replacement for, fully emic interpretations.

I engaged with a wide variety of discussion groups but there were a few in particular that operated with significant deliberation. In addition to these more deliberate groups I also worked with others, often meeting multiple times with the same participants, but there was not a formalized group commitment in these latter gatherings. My work with the more formally gathered discussion groups provided a foundation for my wider engagement with less formally defined groups. This wider engagement with groups should be recognized as an important aspect of my work and can be viewed as a subset of my discussion group work.

My choice to formalize at least a few of my groups was specifically methodological. It allowed me to develop my group work methods. All group work benefited from this formalization. Four aspects on which I placed particular focus in my work with formalized groups were the following:

- Identity - We agreed to be a group.
- Focus - Our goals were defined and agreed upon.
- Culture - Our ways of working together were intentionally shaped together.
- Time - We committed to working together over time. Groups met multiple times, all groups kept meeting though membership varied – one or two members may have not been present at particular moments.

Facilitation of the discussion groups required significant growth in my own capacities and skills as a researcher. It was here that I experienced aspects of anthropological work that touch on advocacy and politics. I gained a new appreciation for the nuances of anthropological work, a growing realization that "the ethnographic is always political" (McGranohan 2020: 104). I learned to pull on aspects of Azerbaijani interpersonal spaces, some of which I will discuss further in my chapters on hospitality roles, such as shadow

hosting, using the voice of those in a group who are good at creating safety, cueing and inviting assistance in facilitating the health of our shared spaces. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006: 200) touch on the value of drawing on the skills and resources of group members to query one another and work with one another's ideas – moving from a 'hub' sense where everyone is working with the facilitator to a 'web' where the group is all engaging in various ways with one another. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) refer to this as harnessing the "synergistic" character of group work.

As Monique Hennink notes

> "it is the group environment that brings out the variety of perspectives, but the interactive discussion that prompts rationalizations, explicit reasoning, and focused examples, thereby uncovering various facets and nuances of the issues that are simply not available by interviewing an individual participant" (Hennink 2014: 3).

Krueger and Casey (2009) promote an intentionally low level of facilitator engagement, putting maximum emphasis on the interaction of members with one another. I took this seriously. I made it my goal to create particularly Azerbaijani interpersonal spaces, with various practices that lend themselves to interaction. I worked specifically on the building of group culture within each group. This involved articulation of ground rules for how we would engage one another, and core practices – listening, asking good questions of one another, putting on different hats (*papaqlar*).

I also worked on my relationships with group members outside of discussion sessions, meeting, to move safety forward, to understand what was challenging safety. This too is an Azerbaijani interpersonal practice – consensus building in distributed spaces, a highly facilitated process, culminating in large group results, but following more individualized and personalized steps on the way. This whole process brought me into the periphery of peace studies, diplomacy, and conflict resolution. The result has moved us all beyond a simple refractory representation towards a presentation that is now open for Azerbaijanis

to peer into, as we have all engaged with the task of "putting complex worlds into words and the role of ethnographic inquiry within this process" (Niewohner and Scheffer 2010: 2).

Naturally, my methods for engaging with personal and interpersonal experiences of Azerbaijani ways of life were dependent on the manner in which I moved through the worlds in which these ways are practiced. I recognize that the extension and validity of my observations regarding Azerbaijani ways of life are limited by the scope of my own engagement across the breadth of diversity which exists among Azerbaijanis. Most of my interaction, for example, has been within working class and middle-class socio-economic contexts. I have not had many opportunities to engage extensively with those who are significantly challenged economically, or with those who are significantly wealthy. Likewise, I have spent the bulk of time among Azerbaijanis in urban settings. Though I have travelled around Azerbaijan and have engaged with those living in rural settings, this has most often been for days or weeks, and I have always been a guest in these situations.

In spite of the limitations and specific scope of my research experience, I have been reassured by the responses I have received as research participants and colleagues have read my final work. I have taken considerable time, in the latter stages of my research, to engage with Azerbaijanis around my claims and observations.

An Existential Phenomenology

In this chapter I have described the philosophical and anthropological perspectives which have shaped my research methodology and methods, placing them in alignment with existential phenomenology (Husserl 1982, Gadamer 2004, M. Jackson 2005, Heidegger 2013). I have articulated the manner in which I sought proximity to Azerbaijani ways of

life with a desire to receive invitation to participate in these ways. My research methods were predicated on a set of postures, inspired by the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer.

These postures included humility - confidence and acceptance of who one has become through what one has experienced, allowing one to come into new experiences with hope and expectation that this self can become more. They also included appreciation - recognition of the acceptability of the existence of that which is different, and an attraction to the potential which it holds for enriching the being of self. Lastly, they included openness – seeking to understand the subject of research along with a new understanding of the logic within which it resides.

I have described the manner in which I set my research focus on an ontological hospitality, hospitality as it stands within the unity of Azerbaijani ways of life. I have then described the phenomenological methods by which I entered in to shared experience of Azerbaijani ways of life – articulating vignettes, gathering narratives and facilitating discussion groups.

Phenomenological approaches to research have made a valuable contribution to the discipline of anthropology (Desjarlais and Throop 2011: 88), particularly in the last 30 years. These approaches have accentuated the power of demonstration in articulating experiences which are difficult to simply define (Rehorick & Bentz 2009). In this chapter I have reflected on the value of my chosen research methods for demonstrating Azerbaijani ways of being, and the manner in which these demonstrations provide a window into defining and explaining the meaning of these ways (Zeitlyn 2004: 452). I have described the existential character of my phenomenological practices, to “awaken a sense of wonder about the order of what is ordinary, [to be] offered as an invitation to the person who is open to it” (van Manen 2002: 49).

Though my data entered into my personal records as text, this was not a work of textual analysis. My methods were qualitative, looking to the identification of themes, elements of resonance (Piantanida 2008; Gadamer 1976) and relevance. Choice to record was, itself, the first stage of qualitative choice I made all throughout my work. This was an interpretive, hermeneutical process, a weighing of experiences for "dissonance" and "consonance" (Draper 2001). Stories, observations and discussions became data as moments of recognition occurred. My research was a process of developing and exercising my capacity to explore, and then to synthesize. I was in search of data that expanded my understanding of the Azerbaijani hospitable being.

When my personal experiences and the experiences of others were recognized for the clarity they offered to my understanding, they were taken in and processed as data. Importantly, I did not rely, alone, on my own sense of clarity, or my own capacity for recognition. Rigor (Saumure and Given 2008) was given to my research methods through practices of dialogue. Alongside recognition of resonance, confirmation of relevance was an important methodological objective in my work.

In my choice of data, on my hermeneutical journey of understanding, and finally, in the articulation of my understanding of the Azerbaijani hospitable being, I engaged Azerbaijanis. The result has been a highly collaborative and reflexive work. Seeking to address the "intersubjective asymmetries" (Throop 2014: 74) of research, I have not established a "summative account" (Throop 2014: 75) of Azerbaijani ways of being but rather an 'accountable summary' – a careful, intentional handling of shared experiences from start to finish, with particular attention given to presentation as a means of ethical care.

I am summarizing back to Azerbaijanis what I have heard and experienced in my time among them, providing "not so much a conversation analysis but rather an analysis inspired by it" (Zeitlyn 2004: 452). I am not playing back to Azerbaijanis a recording of what I have seen and heard. Rather, I am taking what I have heard and experienced and gifting it back to them in a coherent form. One of my colleagues, on reading my finished work, summed it up in this way: "You have seen us, and you have helped us see ourselves." The first was not sufficient for me, without the second.

I have chosen a simple system of reference for identifying the data which was ultimately placed into this narrated ethnography. A full list of these references can be found in the appendix. The goal of these references is to provide a connection between my academic narrative and the historical flow of ethnographic moments as they came to me. They did not come to me in the same order as they have occurred in my written presentation. I wish to honour the hermeneutical process in which I have engaged with Azerbaijanis by giving recognition to the journey of discovery. I have labeled each piece of referenced data according to its type, year of occurrence and historical place in the flow of recorded experiences from that year. Vignettes have been labeled with a V, narratives with an N, moments from discussion group work with a D, and general ethnographic moments with an E.

There is a particular kind of experience that I am seeking to provide for my readers through this work. It can be helpfully illustrated in an image of artistic presentation. I had the pleasant experience, several years ago, to attend an exhibition in the Shirvan Shah Palace inside the Old City of Baku. The heart of the exhibition was a display of Azerbaijani paintings from the 18th to the 20th centuries. Moving beneath the arches and through the halls of the palace, each painting facilitated a moment of experience, taking

the viewer back to particular historical moments. The exhibition, however, had been designed to provide an overall experience, achieved specifically through collection of the chosen works, their arrangement in relation to one another and the space by which we were all embraced. This was not an attempt to display a comprehensive collection of Azerbaijani art. It was not even a claim to "this is all ,of Azerbaijani art, that you really need to see." The intention was to provide an experience of key expressions from within the broad pool of Azerbaijani art which would expand our broader appreciation and understanding of that comprehensive collection.

This has been, for me, a fruitful image of my own intentions. I am seeking to present a gallery of moments from within the large, diversified, pluricentric space of Azerbaijani ways of being, in a manner that can be recognized by Azerbaijanis. I have included specific moments from within my personal journey of coming into these ways of being. I do hope I have left adequate space in this room for others to be brought in. Some of the spaces which I have left open are simply a result of my own limited scope of experience. Other spaces have been more intentionally left open – I have not delved deeply into political dimensions, for example.

In the next four chapters I provide the bulk of my ethnographic exhibition. This begins with the following chapter in which I provide a framework through which hospitality roles can be understood within Azerbaijani ways of being.

Chapter Four: Terms of Reverence

> "The worth of a people can be measured not by what they have accumulated but only by how they treat one another."
>
> - Dunlop and Fountain-Blacklidge (2004: 2)

In this chapter I explore the character of the Azerbaijani experience of hospitality. I open with a narrative that has illuminated my understanding of the manner in which Azerbaijanis navigate hospitable trust. Reflecting on this narrative, I move from an overview of anthropological engagement with the subject of hospitality towards identification of a particular place within this engagement in which Azerbaijani ways of hospitality are most welcome. This space of welcome is presented as an ontological one, where hospitality is understood as a condition to be sustained. I describe how I have come to understand Azerbaijani hospitality as a state of co-existence within which hospitable persons entrust one another with preservation of hospitable conditions. In the final section of this chapter, I present an etymological analysis of the Azerbaijani concept of hospitality, *qonaqpərvərlik.* I then look at the manner in which *qonaqpərvərlik* operates within interpersonal frameworks of trusteeship, in which interpersonal roles are 'entrusted' to individuals as honoured 'privileges'. I propose that gracious trust is the foundational character of *qonaqpərvərlik*.

* * * * *

It was instinctual, an almost imperceptible twitch. I thought I was fully committed, but, in the moment of sensual overload, I waivered [V13-14]. My foot had lifted from the gas

pedal. Out of the corner of my eye I could see Elman nod, with a grin, to the driver of the black Mercedes which quickly pulled into the space in front of us, created by my unfortunate pause. I was forced to an abrupt halt as I now had no choice but to engage the brakes. The apropos Azerbaijani maxim rang in my head - *Tərəddüd edən itir*; He who hesitates is lost. As the courageous Mercedes pilot, without skipping a beat, continued at full speed to weave in and out of the traffic ahead of us, Elman leaned back in his seat. We would be stuck here for a while.

Getting behind the wheel of a vehicle and entering into the world of Azerbaijani driving can be a particularly visceral experience of pursuing personal objectives alongside others. There is a clear dependence on personal skills and performance in this pursuit. But movement towards one's objectives requires continual awareness of others who are pursuing their own objectives, within the shared space of the paths which all are restrained to move within. The ultimate goal, one's destination, is dwarfed in importance by immediate demands for negotiation, adjustment, interaction, response and engagement. "Trust the process," Elman has often told me. "We all want the same thing."

My experiences of Azerbaijani ways of life have been richly punctuated by observance of and participation in pursuits of various kinds. Some pursuits occur in highly social, loosely defined contexts such as driving. Others are more ritualized, performed within personal contexts, such as visits and pilgrimages to *pirs*, "shrines". Elman's admonition has given me an important anchor for coming into an understanding of the character of Azerbaijani pursuits. "Trust the process." There is a significant experiential and contextual perspective in this advice. It is a call to a Gadamerian abandonment of self, to enter into the 'belonging' that a pursuit entails for its participants. This is a conception of

pursuits as defined by more than goals alone - pursuits as a full experience of the process in which participants engage along the way to their objective.

I have been chided, over the years, on my journey of coming into Azerbaijani ways of life, for missing the second half of Elman's call to belonging. I continue to be reminded, and experience first-hand, that Azerbaijanis arrive at trust in processes from a more foundational point of departure, a prior assumption, that, "we all want the same thing". This is the location from which navigation occurs through the topographical contours of Azerbaijani ways of life. Processes are to be trusted on the basis of trust in persons - in their commitment to navigating paths through life, with one another. Trusting the process is advisable only if one first trusts that "we all want the same thing".

In the present chapter I explore the character of the Azerbaijani experience of *qonaqpərvərlik*, hospitality. I open with a narrative that has come to illuminate, in particular ways, my understanding of the manner in which Azerbaijanis navigate hospitable trust. It is a narrative that stands, richly, in the space between 'trust in hospitality's processes' and 'trust in the shared character of the desires within hospitable persons'.

Reflecting on this narrative, I move from an overview of anthropological engagement with the subject of hospitality towards identification of a particular place within this engagement in which Azerbaijani ways of hospitality are most welcome. This space of welcome is presented as an ontological one, where hospitality is understood as a condition to be sustained. I describe how I have come to understand Azerbaijani hospitality as a state of co-existence within which hospitable persons entrust one another with preservation of hospitable conditions.

The last section of this chapter is taken up with an analysis of the Azerbaijani concept of hospitality, *qonaqpərvərlik.* I begin my analysis with etymological considerations but make the claim that it is ultimately collocation which is most helpful in understanding the Azerbaijani experience of *qonaqpərvərlik*. I place Azerbaijani hospitality within a broader understanding of interpersonal relationships, building on the concept of 'trusteeship' (Benedict 1946). Within interpersonal frameworks of trusteeship, interpersonal roles are 'entrusted' to individuals as honoured 'privileges'. I propose that gracious trust is the foundational character of *qonaqpərvərlik*.

Continuities and Conditions of Hospitality

Sevda's Account

Sevda was a woman, in her 40s, a journalist, living in Baku, who had moved to the city as a child with her family, from one of the central districts of Azerbaijan, Kurdemir. We had been talking about her experiences of coming to the capital, adjusting to urban schooling, living in a neighbourhood where she and her family were newcomers, and then, her experiences over the years as she grew up. Sevda had married a man whose family was from her home town in Kurdemir district. He also had moved to Baku before they were married. They were now living in Baku where they had raised their own children. We were in a small group with four of Sevda's work colleagues, at a news station office, after work, around a pot of tea and *pakhlava* which she had brought from home. She was sharing with us her stories of having guests over to her house [N16-8].

Some of these stories were quite humorous. Sevda's husband's younger brother, who was also married, lived in the same *məhəllə*[3] as Sevda and her husband, Azer. Azer's brother lived with his parents (Sevda’s parents-in-law) who were retired. The parents rarely dropped by for a meal. They would always prefer for Azer and his family to come over to their place. But, sometimes, on holidays such as *Novruz* or New Year's, they would all come over to Sevda and Azer's place, for a visit. Since these were special occasions, Sevda really worked hard to have good food prepared and to make sure the house was in good order. Her mother-in-law liked to “inspect the barracks”, Sevda said. As life will have it, it was not uncommon for one of the children to be up to something the moment grandma arrived. If it wasn't the crash of a sugar bowl as the guests appeared it was a cake, with a bite out it, sitting in the middle of the central table. As much as she wanted to respect her in-laws, their visits were often what Sevda called, “high attention” affairs.

Sevda had been sharing about the different kinds of guests they received in her home, from in-laws, to guests from her husband's work, guests from their home region and even guests from outside Azerbaijan. Near the end of a story about a particularly satisfying hosting experience she sighed. She had worked hard to receive one of her husband's work colleagues and his family. The evening had been a success but she noted that she had had to really “pay attention” to so many of the aspects of preparation and to how she behaved while the guests were present. She enjoyed the effort but, as we were reflecting together she noted that on these kinds of occasions she felt different. I had asked her to talk about that. The Azerbaijani term *xarici*, foreign, outside, or external, came up. In this context

[3] Often translated as 'neighbourhood', *məhəllə* is a blend between geographic proximities and social networks. In urban settings it is associated with the Soviet 'block' system in which buildings were grouped. Colloquially *məhəllə* is used to refer to the group of people with whom one shares daily life.

Sevda said, “I sometimes feel like the *xarici* is in here.” She pointed at herself and then went on to explain.

In numerous hospitality experiences Sevda found herself having to, in her words, “remember” or “remind herself” what she was supposed to do, whether it was cooking food a certain way or laying out the dishes in a certain manner, or even, how present she herself should be in the room where the main guests were being received. She was aware of how various guests expected to be received and more and more she was finding that she had to switch frequently between various *qaydalar*, rules. The *qaydalar* for receiving her in-laws were fairly “traditional”, with common Azerbaijani dishes needing to be prepared and with her own presence being limited in the main room where the guests were being served, at least during the time of a major meal. When guests from her husband's work came, the expectations were mixed. In many cases she was expected to eat with the guests, and she could experiment with a variety of dishes. Sometimes when close friends came she mentioned that they even ordered in some *kebab* from a *təndir* shop in the neighbourhood.[4]

From among all of this variety of practices Sevda identified that some were traditionally considered to be 'Azerbaijani'. She was quick to share her recognition that her ability to perform these traditional practices, to make certain foods, to conduct herself in certain ways, was something that dictated how well she was perceived by others as having been a good host, at least in some contexts. She was experiencing, however, that her own daily practices and preferences were drifting away from these traditional

[4] An Azerbaijani *təndir* is a clay oven. It is traditional to bake bread or meat in these ovens. *Kebab* are bite-sized pieces of roasted meat which can be cooked over open coals or in an oven.

practices, at times. She was becoming a *xarici* in some of the contexts in which she was experiencing hospitality.

Sevda recounted for us the growing number of moments when she experienced herself as a stranger in her own contexts, a stranger to the practices with which she had grown up, a stranger to much of the growing diversity around her. Her experience of this strangeness was expressed as an emerging feeling of 'becoming'. She was becoming the stranger. The *xarici* was within her.

Spaces of Hospitality

The image of the stranger has provided a well-worn tether for anthropology's longings and concerns in relation to hospitality. It is an image which is central to the manner in which hospitality "names the experience of the other" (Boudou 2012:270). The stranger stands on the horizon of anthropology's interpersonal imagination, beyond which proximity to the other ceases to exist. This zone of proximity, illuminated at its perimeter by the stranger, has become a central foundation for my understanding of Azerbaijani ways of hospitality. The character of this zone has unfolded for me through narratives like Sevda's, through the language and images of the narratives themselves, but also in the process of analysing these narratives with others.

In a seminar I was leading in 2017, we had been discussing a presentation I had made which included Sevda's account, along with other narratives of Azerbaijani hospitality experiences. As we engaged with the figure of the stranger, one of the Azerbaijani participants completed a lengthy reflection on his own experiences with the remark, "Hospitality is what lies between us and strangers" [D17-19]. This remark has provided me with a valuable framework for understanding anthropological perspectives on hospitality and the particular place within these perspectives for Azerbaijani ways of

hospitality. It has led me to look beyond hospitality as defined by acts or practices, towards conceptions of hospitality as a space between participants, within which acts or practices happen. It has also led me to understand the manner in which hospitality shapes the character of Azerbaijani interpersonal spaces. As I reflect, here, on Sevda's account, I do so in order to provide a background for the latter part of this chapter in which I describe the Azerbaijani interpersonal space of *qonaqpərvərlik*.

Continuities of Presence and Self

Sevda's account revolves around the home. It has been my experience that hospitality narratives from the domestic domain most readily evoke self-reflection among Azerbaijanis. For this reason, it has been tempting to think of Azerbaijani ways of hospitality as projections of the home onto social, cultural and even commercial domains. There is a definite "home-based" (O'Gorman 2007: 22) character to Azerbaijani hospitality language. However, the relationship between the domestic domain of hospitality and other domains is better understood as one of continuity than pre-eminence. "Of course, we tell more stories about hospitality in our homes," I have been told, particularly by women. "That's where we spend most of our lives." "But rest assured," said Gunel, as we discussed hospitality's connection to various life spaces. "Hospitality goes with us. We don't leave it at home" [D17-19].

Though one narrative cannot speak to all aspects of hospitable practice within ways of life, Sevda's account reveals, in a small way, the manner in which domains of Azerbaijani hospitality feed into one another. Guests come into her home, from domains in which relationships have been established for non-domestic purposes, such as her husband's place of work. Some provision, though laid out in the home, finds its material source outside the home, such as a bakery. As I will describe in later chapters, Azerbaijani ways

of life do strongly differentiate between the domestic and public worlds. This differentiation, however, is understood by Azerbaijanis to embrace a continuity of hospitable presence across domains. Azerbaijani ways of hospitality are not ‘left at home’. These ways are a thread that cuts across the entirety of life.

In addition to continuity of hospitable presence across domains, Sevda’s account touches on continuity of personal experience across moments of hospitality. Her experience of drifting between that which is “us” and the horizon on which the stranger stands, is described as an internal peregrination. Satisfaction with her choices, her selection of personal practices in given moments of particular hospitality, is described in transformative language. There is a moral tethering in Sevda’s account, in her reports of constant awareness of the expectations of others. Sevda does not describe herself as inhabiting the fixed end of the tether, however. Her personal continuity has the form of a journey, across consecutive moments of particular hospitality. On this journey, she, herself, is the point of continuity. She inhabits the mobile end of the tether.

There is a horizon which clearly encircles Sevda’s journey of ‘becoming’. In her account, she notes her experience of moving further away from the expectations of some ‘others’, yet closer to those of different ‘others’. Sevda describes her experience of ‘becoming a stranger’ as an ontological experience of personal change. This can be interpreted as an experience of discontinuity, of dissonance between practices and relationships ‘as they once were’ and those that ‘now are’. But this apparent discontinuity may be better understood in terms of directionality. At any given moment, Sevda’s choices are embodied as an existential continuity of self. She is who she is at any given moment. This is the person she has become; the personhood she is now living out. This directionality, expressed at any given moment by a coherent, though mobile self has been

a key conception for me as I have come into an understanding of Azerbaijani ways of hospitality.

In one of my university discussion groups, I engaged a group of students around Azerbaijani narratives of hospitable negotiation, like Sevda’s account. We focused particularly on the place of limitations in Azerbaijani ways of hospitality. One of the themes to which we frequently returned was that of ‘becoming’. Undoubtedly influenced by the stage of life which the students were in, all of them being in their early twenties, personal ontological mobility was front and centre to their shared conception of what hospitality entails.

Ontological mobility is a common thread within anthropological dialogue on hospitality. It has been suggested (Da Col 2019, Agier and Morrison 2020) that the central purpose of hospitality is to move the stranger in from the outer horizon, along paths of ontological transformation. On these paths, hospitality achieves success as hospitable persons negotiate with one another towards familiarity and association, such that strangers become friends, and outsiders take on new status as insiders. Similarly, ontological motion towards alienation is the result of failed negotiation or inhospitable dispositions of the persons involved (Shryock 2012).

In the university discussion group, students’ experiences of becoming were significantly connected to experiences of gender and age. Several of the young, single women in the group clearly described their experience of ‘tethered-ness’ to expectations of them from older women, and women of power, in their lives. They were open, however, about the mobility of their personal journeys of becoming. Though tethered to multiple

expectations from others, they were clearly on journeys outward, towards ‘stranger’ horizons.

There is a growing body of anthropological writing on gender in Azerbaijani ways of life (Najafizadeh and Mennerick 2003, K. Zuercher 2009, Heyat 2014, Mahmudova 2017). These writings provide helpful descriptions of the forces which have been influencing the ontological journeys of Azerbaijani women in recent years. Faridah Heyat (2014), for example, describes the interplay between the current 'constellation' of gender-related practices in Azerbaijani ways of life on the one hand and the presence of “modernisation and industrialisation” (Heyat 2014:166) on the other. Heyat’s work is particularly important for its contribution to such a difficult sphere of study as gender and gender roles in Azerbaijani ways of life, as these are still controversial topics in public discussion.

“Hospitality is what lies between us and strangers.” I shared this remark with the discussion group. One of the young women responded with a smile. “And we will see what happens next” [D17-22]! There were laughs around the room. I did not immediately catch the humour. I paused, not knowing how to respond. One of the young men took it upon himself to explain. “Don’t worry,” he assured me. “It’s a large space. We know it well.” Some ribbing ensued, as students took playful jabs at one another. “Keep working on your *dolma*[5], Arzu.” “Get the office, then you can pour the tea, Shovket.” “Who knows, Ahmad, maybe you will get used to eating restaurant food.”

“And we will see what happens next!” “Trust the process. We all want the same things.” The large space of Azerbaijani interpersonal proximity, between “us” and the

[5] Grape leaves stuffed with meat, rice and spices, then boiled.

stranger, is a field of negotiation. In this field, Sevda expressed her experience of freedom and expression of self, as well as anxiety and questions of uncertainty. In this same field, young Azerbaijani men and women extend their tethers, trusting one another, and the processes within their shared lives that they have embraced together. Trust in others sustains continuity of hospitable presence across domains of life. Fulfilment of this trust requires commitment to sustaining continuity of self across hospitable moments. It is difficult to find adequate foundation for either of these continuities within a functional description of Azerbaijani ways of hospitality. A steadier foundation can be found for Azerbaijani moments and practices of hospitality when they are understood to occur within a state of being, the conditions of which are the focus of Azerbaijani ways of life.

Conditions of Awareness and Availability

"Describe what Sevda was experiencing." This was a request I presented to several discussion groups during a period of my research when I was processing a collection of hospitality narratives that I had categorized as laments. In these discussions, topics of conversation ranged from commentaries on aspects of the relationships in the narrative - *gəlin*[6]/mother-in-law, husband/wife, business guest/hostess, friends – to clarification questions, often centred on getting a better understanding of Sevda's resources and social networks. As sessions progressed, I began to notice a particular kind of reflection that opened for me an important perspective on the character of Azerbaijani ways of hospitality. Once I noticed these reflections, I began to see how they connected to numerous other commentaries and reflections that I have collected over the years, related to what Azerbaijanis consider to be the goal of hospitable ways of life.

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[6] The wife of a member of one's family.

Ilhama remarked, “The most difficult strangers are not the ones who are near.” We had been discussing Sevda’s description of her feeling of becoming the ‘stranger’. “We can connect with the close ones.” [D16-90]

“Finding guests is not the challenge,” commented one of the members of a suburban discussion group. “Taking care to host is what can be hard.” [D17-29]

“As long as hospitality is happening, we can manage the limitations.” [D16-79]

“Becoming a stranger is not the same as ceasing to be a host.” [D16-90]

These, and other comments were accompanied by additional stories, including laments, as well as celebrations and reflections. At the heart of Sevda’s challenge, as interpreted by my research partners, I was finding a growing illumination of the Azerbaijani interpersonal space which ‘lies between “us” and the stranger’. At stake, within this space, is hospitality’s availability, the accessibility of hospitality roles. In *Extending Hospitality: Giving Space, Taking Time*, Mustafa Dikeç, Nigel Clark and Clive Barnett describe the nature of hospitable care as a paying of attention to the “proximities that prompt acts of hospitality” (2009: 1). This language of ‘proximities’ was resonant in these discussion group conversations.

“We want to know that we can host, that we can be guests, that this is possible and that it is something which is welcomed.” [D16-52] Murad’s words brought me back to the lament of my close friend, referenced in the opening chapter of this study.

> My life has been robbed of purpose, not violently, but quietly. Life in the modern city has distanced us from one another, though we cling to what remains of our pride and reputation, struggling to earn a living, support our families and get ahead in life, we cannot offer our guests what we would like. This is shameful and makes all other things in life unenjoyable [V08-37].

Azerbaijani hospitality is experienced by Azerbaijanis as conditions, shared by those who are proximal to one another, conducive to the assumption of hospitality roles. When

these conditions are challenged, there is an experience of loss. Challenges to these conditions can come from challenges to proximity, hindrances to individuals having access to one another. These conditions may also be challenged by loss or restriction of resources, which reduce the capacity of hospitable persons to engage as hosts or guests. Challenges to hospitable practices are not lamentable in and of themselves, as long as they can be negotiated. In fact, negotiation is expected. "As long as hospitality is happening, we can manage the limitations."

The goal of Azerbaijani hospitable ways of life is sustaining and promoting conditions within interpersonal spaces that are conducive to hosting and guesting, responding to invitations, and having access to opportunities to invite. This is the "thing we all want" in the Azerbaijani pursuit of hospitality. Hospitable conditions require hospitable people to sustain them. Inhospitality arises when insufficient care for conditions occurs. The "negotiated acts" (Sheringham and Daruwalla 2007:33) which hospitality makes possible are predicated on negotiated conditions.

Spaces of Grace

"Language is dangerous," said Samir [V00-38]. "It lets you say things that you don't mean." We were sitting in his kitchen, at a little wooden table, tucked into the corner in front of the gas stove, balancing on several wooden stools. The tiny, shared "informational world" (Brooks and Chernyavskiy 2007) of the *krushchevka*[7] kitchen was a space in which lively conversation was welcomed, often so energetically that all in the

[7] Five-story buildings made of prefabricated concrete panels, colloquially named after Nikita Khrushchev under whose leadership (1953-1964) they were built. In any of the fifteen former Soviet republics one will find large numbers of these to this day.

immediate vicinity felt invited, even compelled to be drawn in. Though a few were present, all were most certainly welcome.

We had been discussing the linguistic world in which our relationship existed as we moved back and forth between Azerbaijani, English and Russian. This is a world in which many Azerbaijanis are comfortable. The rapidly changing socio-political and linguistic context (Zuercher 2009) creates an environment in which words, phrases, even mannerisms and gestures, can naturally flow between multiple languages. My experience of life with Azerbaijanis has been significantly shaped by our co-experience of language. In Gadamerian terms, language was not just the vehicle for my research, it was the "medium in which understanding occurr[ed]" (Gadamer 2004:390).

Research journeys around hospitality often find fruitful discussions in language, particularly in etymology (Heal 1984, Derrida 2000, Touval 2017). Some of the historical journey which Azerbaijanis and their language have taken is evident in the etymological components of *qonaqpərvərlik*. The Turkic root *qonaq* finds its origins in the Proto-Turkic *kon*, with various historical uses from "friend" to "neighbour" and "guest" (Johanson & Csato 2022). It is difficult to separate the historically close connection between the Proto-Turkic relational concept of *kon* and influence from the Persian spatial concept of *hane*, "room" or "house" (Doerfer 1988, Perry 2001). The manner in which this blending of concepts has occurred in other Turkic languages can be seen, for example, in Tatar, where the spatial conception has subsumed the term *qonaq*, to describe "a room for meeting", and in Chuvash, where the relational conception of *xăna* is used for "guest" (Rona-Tas 1982).

A blended relational-spatial conception, embracing the guest and guesting spaces, can be seen in the term *konak* in various non-Turkic languages of the Balkans. These can

be traced to the period when these languages came into close contact with the Turkish language during the era of the Ottoman Empire (Schmitt 2016). In Macedonian, *konak* is used for "hostel" or even "hospice" (Brankov 2018). In Serbo-Croatian (Benson 2008) and Bosnian (Mulasmajic 2011), *konak* can be used for "inn" or "guest-house".

In Azerbaijani, *qonaq*, on its own, carries the meaning of visitor or guest and even participant. It is used broadly for a variety of relational roles that assume reception, but not necessarily invitation. One is a *qonaq* by virtue of appearing in a space of reception. Events will create a *qonaq* role. Depending on the character of the event, the intimacy or level of personal connection will be determined.

Qonaq is used metaphorically, to indicate the character of an interpersonal exchange of something material. It is common, when purchasing something from a shopkeeper whom one knows well, for the phrase, *qonaq olun* to be expressed. This is closely equivalent to the English, "be my guest" or "help yourself", with the specific intention of offering the material object at no cost. Most often this is a polite offer, to strengthen a relationship. The purchaser will usually pay, despite the offer. This reveals a relational character to *qonaq*. In its broadest sense it denotes one who is received or one who receives within a receptive event. There cannot be a *qonaq* without someone to whom they relate in a receptive context.

The term *qonaqlıq* refers either to the state of being a guest or to an event of reception. A common usage of the first conception is seen in the phrase *qonaq getmek*, to go as a guest or to go in order to be a guest. In the second usage, it is used to refer to events ranging from weddings and banquets to small personal affairs. Once again, in both instances, the concept of *qonaq* denotes a role within a receptive relationship.

The second root of *qonaqpərvərlik* is Persian in origin. *Pərvər* encompasses the concept of care or concern. It occurs in various compounds such as *vətən pərvər*, patriot, *xəyəlpərvər*, dreamer, and *qonaqpərvərlik*. There is a transformative character to the care of *pərvər*. *Pərvəriş* is a posture, an attitude. There is, in the conceptual constellation of *pərvər*, a sense of intentional, above the norm, but appropriate and virtuous posture towards a subject that affects its status in the relationship and context. This posture is not tied to formality as much as to the relationship itself.

Etymology can provide useful insights into the meaning of a concept. I have come to understand, however, that for a concept like *qonaqpərvərlik*, etymology has the potential to "let me say what I don't mean". Particularly, to not say enough. It is in its collocation that I have come to understand *qonaqpərvərlik* in Azerbaijani ways of life in the richest way. With an understanding of Azerbaijani hospitality as an ontological space in which hospitable persons negotiate a set of conditions to make and keep hospitality roles available, two concepts have helped me articulate the character of *qonaqpərvərlik.* These are 'grace' and 'trusteeship'.

Conditions of Grace

It is characteristic of anthropology as a discipline to dance with the terms that populate an environment, "building infrastructure" for disciplinary explorations (Da Col and Shryock 2017: xv). This is often a dance between emic and etic articulations. Hospitality has been recognized as an etic conception that has lent itself well to articulating shared characteristics of circumstances and actors in diverse contexts (Lashley, Lynch and Morrison 2007: 6-8). Concepts such as the gift (Mauss 1925), and liminality (Van Gennep 1960, Turner 1969) are other examples of terms and concepts which anthropology has employed, providing an etic infrastructure to disciplinary conversations.

In my dance with Azerbaijani depictions of *qonaqpərvərlik,* a rich emic constellation of language has unfolded – Azerbaijani words and phrases, images and metaphors, relating to readiness, preparation, probing, searching, quick response, and experiences of response. Various aspects of this rich constellation will be described in the following chapters, as the practices and practicalities of the care which *qonaqpərvərlik* encompasses are engaged. Several etic terms, however, from the broader world of anthropology, have been important for understanding the conditions which Azerbaijanis pursue through ways of hospitality. One of these terms is 'grace'.

The most commonly identified Azerbaijani translation of "grace" is *lütf* (Mamedov 1995, Isaxanli 2004). As a colloquial term, *lütf* did not occur very often in my research conversations. Like other disciplinary staples within the anthropology of hospitality, such as the sacredness (*müqqəddəslik*) of the guest, which will be discussed in following chapters, *lütf* carries religious overtones. It appeared almost exclusively within narratives that occurred in religious environments. Similar overtones can be recognized in the English term as well (Deane-Drummond and Fuentes 2020). But it is not colloquial conceptions of grace which I have come to associate with Azerbaijani ways of hospitality. It is grace as it has come to be understood within the discipline of anthropology that has provided the particularly appropriate conception which encapsulates *qonaqpərvərlik*. I have embraced this 'anthropological grace' because of the manner in which it "englobes" (Da Col 2019) the emic constellation that my conversations on Azerbaijani ways of hospitality have revealed. As Jefer, in one of the suburban discussion groups put it, "As we dance with it, it fits" [D17-3].

In his seminal work on the anthropology of grace Julian Pitt-Rivers describes grace as that which "belongs on the register of the extraordinary…always something extra, over

and above ‘what counts’, what is obligatory or predictable” (2011: 425). Within anthropology, grace has provided a complement to conceptions of interpersonal encounters as defined by principles of simple reciprocity and exchange of interests. “Gratuity is the core of the notion, that which is undertaken not in order to obtain a return but to give pleasure” (Pitt-Rivers 2011: 429). Anthropological grace is characterized by “generous impulse, good will, gratuity, which demands only a reciprocity of sentiment” (Pitt-Rivers 2011: 430). This conception of grace has given a ‘third space’ to anthropological dichotomies. It provides a ‘way out’ of anthropological conundrums that quickly arise when dualistic conceptions of being are applied as a grid for understanding the manner in which members of a group expect to share life together.

Andre Gingrich’s (1997) expansion of the honour-shame duality to a ‘triangular’ conception is an example of what grace has to offer anthropological paradigms. Gingrich reflects on the “exhaustion” experienced by a community when there is no “access” to alternatives in the face of moral dilemmas. The particular dilemma with which Gingrich engages is that of the inescapable well of dishonour, within certain contexts of *haram*, down which individuals, often along with others who are associated with them, fall when interpersonal expectations for ‘honourable ways of being’ are not met. Gingrich describes the absence of moral, judicial or social recourse within these contexts to reverse descent into dishonour and the all too frequent violence which is eventually directed at dishonoured persons. Recourse is only to be found in a ‘third space’ where honour is placed “under the higher value of grace. Grace is the overall value that ultimately intervenes to halt, at least temporarily, an escalation of violence” (Gingrich 1997: 156-157).

Anthropological conceptions of grace offer a 'third space' to the conundrums of hospitality, as well. Jacques Derrida's (2000) philosophical challenge to the very notion that human beings can be gracious in hospitality, able to engage with one another "not in order to obtain a return but to give pleasure" (Pitt-Rivers 2011: 429), gives recognition, at least, to an imagined way of hospitable being which embraces "something extra, over and above" (Pitt-Rivers 2011: 425). As Derrida and others (Pitt-Rivers 1977, Benhabib 2006, Wrobleski 2012) have noted, hospitality is an ideal, "inaccessible to transformation" (Derrida 2000: 85), unconditional in its requirements. This ideal is fully gratuitous, violated in fact, by any imposition of perceived personal gain. The ideal host is one who receives without expectation of reciprocity. The ideal guest is the one who accepts provision without any weight of responsibility or obligation to, at some later point in time, become host, in kind. This 'hospitality as gratuity' differs from all forms of human hospitality in practice (Derrida 2000). Yet, the ideal remains, a virtuous conception of hospitality which stands as a foil to the conditional arrangements which hosts and guests actually negotiate. This pits the lived "way things are" against the "right, 'way things should be'" (Humphrey 2005: 32).

Anthropological grace offers a third space which affirms the virtuous ideal of unconditional hospitality alongside a generous acceptance of conditions as they are. It is this bringing together of affirmation and acceptance that provides a 'way out'. Derrida did not employ the concept of grace to name this imagined 'third space'. He did, however, describe the dichotomy within which an inescapable well is created in the absence of such a space. A well down which all who strive for hospitable engagement descend. This inevitable descent is not a product of moral deficiency but of anthropological limitation (Wrobleski 2012). Grace is the "intervention" (Gingrich 1997: 157) to this descent. It is

a disposition of gratuity paired with goodwill that characterizes the third space of hospitable grace. Spaces of *qonaqpərvərlik* offer insight into the character of this grace.

“That is what takes us down the corridor” [D15-80]. I had just shared a short vignette on the interactions of a group of colleagues which took place in the corridor of an office [E15-27]. It was a brief encounter in which hospitable negotiation had occurred. The colleagues in the vignette had exchanged offers to share a cup of tea, but then, both moved along the corridor to their respective offices. I had asked my conversation partners to describe the hospitality which was exhibited in the corridor. Clear indications were given that *qonaqpərvərlik* was indeed present in this vignette, though neither hosting nor guesting had occurred. Jefer was connecting to our conversation just moments before on the concept of grace. “We don’t know what will happen in these corridors. But we know what could happen. That is what takes us down the corridor.”

“But sometimes these corridors disappoint” [D15-80]. Vusal had spoken up. He had been relatively silent up until now. Vusal had recently returned from a season of work in Russia. Our conversations in the discussion group, in recent months, had been greatly enriched by his accounts of living as ‘the stranger’. I have gained valuable insights, in my research, from the experiences of Azerbaijanis who have lived among those whose ways of being are different from their own. Their experience is one of distinct displacement.

Azerbaijani narratives of hospitality reveal a collage of expectations with which physical spaces, corridors, rooms, streets and homes are entered. Every physical space into which Azerbaijanis enter is one of interpersonal possibility. Azerbaijanis expect to meet others in these spaces. These others may fit the category of “us”, they may be a stranger, or they may fall somewhere in between – “close strangers”. In these spaces,

Azerbaijanis also expect *qonaqpərvərlik* to be present. This is more than an expectation of meeting persons, more than an expectation that hospitality events may occur or even that they will occur. This is an expectation of conditions. “That is what takes us down the corridor.”

But there are spaces in which *qonaqpərvərlik* is not present. “Sometimes these corridors disappoint.” Spaces where *qonaqpərvərlik* is not found fill Azerbaijani narratives of ‘being the stranger’ in distant lands. Such spaces also frequent interpersonal laments of inhospitality, hospitality unfulfilled, and experiences of challenged capacities close to home. Even though persons may abound, *qonaqpərvərlik* may not. In such spaces, Azerbaijan hospitality itself becomes the stranger.

Vusal shared a story with us of an experience at the Kazanskaya train station in Moscow [N15-9]. Having bought a ticket he had made his way to the platforms. He found the one from which his train was scheduled to depart. There was a train there, but since it was quite early, he was not sure if it was his. He stood for a while, wondering if someone would notice his need for help. The space was full of people, coming and going, waiting, alone, in groups. After a few minutes he realized he was going to have to ask someone for some help. Vusal shared with us that he noticed a young man standing a short distance away and approached him. Vusal described the encounter as “difficult to begin”. He had greeted the young man, to open their interaction. Vusal laughingly described the young man’s face upon being greeted. It was a mixture of “ready to be assaulted and wondering whether he knew this person”. Sensing, nonetheless, a willingness to continue, Vusal asked if the train in front of them was the one on his ticket. He showed the young man the ticket. The young man indicated that it was not the train on the ticket and the conversation clearly ended at that point.

Vusal shared with us that he had felt no animosity at any point in the encounter. Bewilderment and even some anxiety were assumed in the young man's responses. As part of the complexity of the engagement, Vusal was also aware that he was visibly different from most of the others around him, and that multiple assumptions were likely being made about him by those around him, including the man he had approached. But Vusal had not received the impression that he had offended the young man or even done something rude or socially unacceptable.

Vusal's experience, however, was described to us as a lament of disappointing encounter. In the group we explored what might have been the source of this experience of disappointment. Vusal's own assessment and the broader commentary of the group were quite similar to numerous discussions I have had with Azerbaijanis around lamentable moments of hospitality.

The language of *mühit*, environment, has been prevalent in these kinds of discussions. In addition to the expected awkwardness and anxiety that is experienced when someone is navigating an unfamiliar context, Azerbaijanis experience the lack of specific interpersonal conditions when they are in interpersonal spaces with those who do not share Azerbaijani ways of life. These absent conditions can be interpreted as inhospitality. Vusal's experience at the train station, for example, prompted comments from the discussion group on 'no one noticing that Vusal needed help', 'the young man not returning Vusal's greeting', 'the young man not taking any action to help', 'the young man not continuing the interaction beyond the immediate moment of question and answer'. Vusal's experience of his engagement with the young man as "difficult to begin" was also one of 'difficulty in prolonging'. Further, Vusal's disappointment in this experience was centred on more than the particular moment of his engagement with the

young man. Vusal was disappointed at how the entire episode played out. *Qonaqpərvərlik yox idi.* "There was no *qonaqpərvərlik*".

Having lived in Russia for significant periods of time, I have had the chance to engage with Russians around similar experiences. To place experiences like Vusal's into context, it is important to be aware that most Russians would categorize Vusal's experience as having little to do with 'hospitality' (Smith and Puczko 2014, Dhiman 2016). This was an encounter of 'helping' or 'getting directions'. No one made any offers to be a host or requests to be a guest. There was not much space within this kind of interaction for such offers or requests to even be made. No hospitality event unfolded or had much opportunity to unfold. Hospitality was neither expected, nor was its absence lamentable.

This is quite similar to the socio-cultural context in which I, myself, grew up. In such contexts and in contexts like the one Vusal experienced, hospitality is not absent from the practices and norms of individuals and groups. There is a difference, however, in expectations for when and how hospitality is expressed. I have received wonderful hospitality from Russians in numerous places. Vusal shared with us that he, too, had experienced hospitality in his experiences with Russians. It was this particular kind of experience, on the train platform, as one in need of help, however, which revealed particular expectations which Azerbaijanis carry with them regarding the places and manner in which hospitality is expressed. These particular expectations are not always held in the same way by others.

When Azerbaijanis have engaged with what Vusal was experiencing, the language of hospitality has frequently been employed. In such discussions, the etic concept of 'hospitality' struggles to encompass Azerbaijani *qonaqpərvərlik* alongside ways of

hospitality that are decidedly particular and event-oriented. At the heart of Azerbaijanis' experience of environments in which *qonaqpərvərlik* is not present, there is a lament of 'missing possibility'. "We don't know what will happen…but we know what could happen." This is *qonaqpərvərlik.* Azerbaijanis enter into interpersonal contexts with the expectation that hospitality is always possible and that persons will engage with one another so as to give this possibility the best odds of materializing into hosting and guesting of one form or another. This is what Azerbaijanis take with them down corridors, into rooms and homes, across borders, and onto trains.

Azerbaijanis experience disappointment and displacement when interpersonal conditions exhibit neither potential for nor interest in hospitality. They find themselves moving through interpersonal spaces without recourse or invitation to carry out that for which they are hoping. They find themselves alone in their imaginations. An older woman in one of our suburban discussion groups shared her experience of displacement at a political function in her municipality, where for various reasons, she arrived unnoticed and was present for a significant period of time before conditions of *qonaqpərvərlik* eventually emerged [N16-4]. *Hara gəlmişəm?* "Where have I come to?" This was how she described her first experience of the moment. Her physical experience of the space was wrapped up in her displaced relational experience, in the unique manner encompassed by *qonaqpərvərlik.*

This reflective excursion into the conditions of *qonaqpərvərlik* provides a background to the manner in which anthropological grace infuses these conditions. Azerbaijani hospitality is made possible by the hopeful expectations of hospitable Azerbaijani persons. These are hopeful expectations of self as well as others. These expectations are described by Azerbaijanis in the language of gratuity and goodwill.

Grace drives the motion of hospitable Azerbaijani persons into and through interpersonal spaces. *Qonaqpərvərlik* is well characterized as a set of "*intentions* summoned by grace" (Da Col and Shryock 2017: xxvii).

The grace of *qonaqpərvərlik* is, first, a characteristic of a personal space. It is part of the imagination of Azerbaijani individuals, in relation to the interpersonal world beyond them. Intentions for *qonaqpərvərlik* are taken into the space "between us and the stranger". When they are not taken in, an interpersonal space will not have the conditions for *qonaqpərvərlik*. Julian Pitt-Rivers wrote of the manner in which hospitality operates as a "vehicle of grace" (1992: 279). In this conception, grace is possible when spaces of hospitality are available. Gratuitous hosting can occur where spaces for hosting exist. Goodwill can be extended where the conditions for reception are present. Spaces of Azerbaijani hospitality, however, give foundation to a conception of 'grace as a vehicle for hospitality'. As expressed by Gunel, earlier in this chapter, "Hospitality goes with us."

Gracious intention is the essential pre-condition which provides for the conditions that are recognized as *qonaqpərvərlik*. This pre-condition of grace finds it expression when persons obtain the possibility of enacting its intentions. The gratuity and goodwill of *qonaqpərvərlik* are generative, pulling out the potentialities of environments for the exercise of the Azerbaijani "moral imagination" (Johnson 1993).

Trusteeships of Grace

On my journey of coming into Azerbaijani ways of life I have moved in and out of interpersonal spaces shaped by *qonaqpərvərlik*. I have lived, for a number of years, a multi-modal existence. In my home, for example, our ways of being have not been fully shaped by the conditional intentions of *qonaqpərvərlik*, though significant influence can be recognized. When Azerbaijanis have crossed our threshold, they have brought

qonaqpərvərlik with them, and we have engaged in a manner appropriate to the expectations of *qonaqpərvərlik*. But when they leave, they take *qonaqpərvərlik* with them. We are left with our own collection of conditionals and particulars that we have constructed over the years.

Likewise, in various places where I have worked in Azerbaijan, it has been common for me to move, throughout a given day, in and out of spaces defined by *qonaqpərvərlik*. I have received Azerbaijani guests in my office, followed immediately by a visitor from places such as Nigeria or Ecuador. I have shifted from a project meeting with European donors to a local café down the street where *qonaqpərvərlik* fills the room. Azerbaijani descriptions of my frontier-crossing experiences have been enlightening.

"You are here, but you don't know how to 'be' here" [D16-41].

"It's not that you aren't here with us. It is that you aren't here 'like us' [D16-85]". (*Bizim kimi*, "as we are", "in the same manner as us".)

"You are here, but you are also still there" [D16-46].

And when I have achieved *bizim kimi,* the 'being as Azerbaijanis are', there is the tell-tale sigh of contentment from those around me, nods of approval, an enjoyment of the harmony which has been achieved with a space and its persons. Azerbaijanis have a particular manner of being in interpersonal spaces. Coming into an understanding of *qonaqpərvərlik*, which pervades Azerbaijani interpersonality, has required a commitment to Gadamerian belonging, learning to be 'of' these shared spaces. To appropriately engage with the content of these spaces, the positioning and motion of persons and objects, I have needed to reorient myself to the intent of these spaces. The central component in this reorientation of self has been a re-conception of the possibilities created

by Azerbaijani interpersonal spaces, possibilities of intention, of what 'could be' in these spaces.

Anthropological discourse has paid significant attention to the moral and ethical dynamics of intent within spaces of hospitality. Various laments within the discipline have been noted at earlier points in this research account - Camus' (1957) social commentary through existential fiction on the challenges presented by dynamics of power and history to the ideals of hospitality; Pitt-Rivers' (1968) description of the 'less than altruistic' manner in which hospitality's particulars are enacted in real human events; Molz and Gibson's (2007) analysis of the disconnect between the virtues of hospitality and the interactions of states and migrants. In these laments, the content of hospitable enactments reveals intents which are assessed as 'problematic'. This has been, in fact, a central aspect of the problematization of hospitality as an anthropological and philosophical subject. Philosophical ideals have been established for what hospitality should look like in practice. These ideals become a benchmark for evaluating the success of hospitable events, and the ethical or moral quality of participants' behaviours. This kind of evaluation 'looks back' at pre-defined ideals.

This 'looking back' positions evaluation differently than the "And we will see what happens next!" which *qonaqpərvərlik* entails. There is a generativity to *qonaqpərvərlik* that 'looks forward' to a set of ideals, pursuing them, engaging the contents of interpersonal spaces in order to make the odds of achieving ideals most possible. *Qonaqpərvərlik* is aspirational. This generative, aspirational quality of *qonaqpərvərlik* reflects a particular kind of Azerbaijani interpersonality.

There is a shared attentiveness which Azerbaijanis seek in interpersonal spaces. Simple examples of this expectation for shared attentiveness can be seen in the manner

in which Azerbaijanis enter into spaces of co-presence. When a newcomer enters into a space in which others are already present, it is common for the event or proceedings which were occurring at the time of entrance to be paused, while the newcomer greets each individual. This greeting is often done with a handshake or even an embrace, from each individual. Proceedings can continue once again, after recognition has been given to each present individual, in turn.

When events are sufficiently large, this pause for mutual recognition can be contained to a small group within the broader context, but occur, nonetheless. I have observed from the front of a room, as I have been presenting a paper at a conference or giving a speech at a gathering, someone enter while the presentation is commencing. The individual finds a space in the room where others whom they know are already present. As they make their way into proximity with this smaller group, practices of shared attentiveness begin. If relationships warrant, a seat may be given up, or relative positions of honour may be shuffled around, to accommodate the newcomer. Hands will be shaken, if not with all, certainly with most. Audible greetings may even be exchanged. These micro-events are expected and are not generally perceived as disruptions to the wider proceedings.

Azerbaijani narrative descriptions of attentive co-presence frequently include the concept of "trust" – *etibar, inam.* Individuals who enter into and perform well within interpersonal spaces are often described as *etibarli* or *inamlı,* dependable, trustworthy. There is a mutuality in this trust, not a dependence on, but a shared dependence with, one another. To articulate the character of this trust, I have looked to another etic concept from the discipline of anthropology - 'trusteeship'.

Anthropological study of interpersonal responsibilities has engaged significantly around various personal enactments - care (Biehl and Petryna 2013), justice (Werbner

and Werbner 2022), compassion (Fassin 2005), empathy (Maibom 2020). Engagement around these enactments has been shaped by the question of "What are the responsibilities an individual has towards others?" This question, however, is only sufficient for reflecting on one end of the Azerbaijani tether of ontological mobility.

As noted in Sevda's account earlier in this chapter, there are a range of *qaydalar*, rules, to which Azerbaijanis are attentive when interacting with others. As one enters into an interpersonal space, it is important to be aware of the expectations of others for how they wish to be treated. But these shared beginnings are less determinative of the outcome of interpersonal interactions than the aspirational, generative negotiation which occurs as persons engage with one another.

Within the extant literature on 'moralities of interpersonal responsibility' (Keller, Edelstein, Krettenauer, Fu-xi, Ge 2005) I have found a resonance between Azerbaijani interpersonal dynamics and interactive conceptualizations which give recognition to *mutuality* and *engagement.* In Azerbaijani interpersonal spaces, interpersonal responsibilities are shaped by the question, "What are the responsibilities *given* to the parties of a relationship by nature of the character of their relationship?" This is the critical question in the Azerbaijani context, in which interpersonal responsibility is understood as 'granted', 'provided by', 'created in and for' the specific relationships of life. Trust reframes the character of interpersonal responsibility.

In the work of Ruth Benedict (1946) I have found a particularly helpful set of language to describe trust-based interpersonal dynamics. Best known for her description of hierarchy and honour in Japan, analyses which are not without their critique (Creighton 1990; Wong and Tsai 2007), there is nestled in Benedict's work the concept of "trusteeship" (Benedict 1946: 255). Trusteeship places emphasis on the cooperative

character of interpersonal relationships. In a framework of trusteeship, interpersonal roles are 'entrusted' to individuals as honoured 'privileges'. “[T]hose who exercise these privileges act as trustees” (Benedict 1946:54). Each individual is a “trustee of a material and spiritual estate” (Benedict 1946: 56) which is collectively valued and pursued through the faithfulness of each member within each relationship.

There is a mutuality of responsibility in the conceptualization of interpersonal relationships as trusteeships. Diverse roles are experienced as opportunities to fulfill uniquely defined purposes that have been given as respected rights and privileges. This mutuality of responsibility is a shared understanding that each individual will fulfill their role to the best of their capacity. It is this character of intepersonality which is present in conditions of *qonaqpərvərlik.* Even the simplest of Azerbaijani hospitable engagements requires the initiation of a trusteeship, moving beyond reciprocity to mutual negotiation, based on evolving information, on a commitment to ‘make it work’. This is what stretches the spaces of hospitality all the way out to the stranger.

Azerbaijani hospitality operates as a trusteeship of grace. There is minimal predefinition of who can enter into encounters. Spaces of *qonaqpərvərlik* embrace what Webb Keane refers to as “ethical affordances” (Keane 2016), “potentialities, based upon various subjective capacities and objective properties, that arise in relation to particular activities, practical projects, and engagements” (Throop 2016: 472). This negotiation is attentive, but also imaginative, facilitative, and generative. It entails more than a fulfilment of roles. It strengthens the possibilities for all parties to participate in successful ways – though these ways may need to be discovered ‘on the way’.

In trusteeships of grace, gratuity pre-empts goodwill, but also ‘covers’ for the failings of goodwill through the choice to continue in relational engagement. Gratuity is not

dependent on goodwill. Likewise, goodwill pre-empts gratuity, but also covers for the failings of gratuity through a choice to continue – to continue to believe in the best, to look for the best, to accept the other. Within an expectation of gracious trust, hospitality roles are always carried into Azerbaijani interpersonal spaces, even if they may not materialize or be embraced well by all. *Qonaqpərvərlik* is a set of conditions which fuel opportunity for hospitality roles to be given and to be received, creating spaces of "shared revelation" (João de Pina-Cabral 2011: 3), with "the promise of non-trivial understanding" (Fabian 1995: 47) when co-presence is achieved.

Chapter Five: Living Invitationally

"The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning."

- Michel Foucault[1]

In this chapter, I explore stories and experiences of Azerbaijani ways of hospitality which allow for critical reflection on the role of host, constructing a multi-dimensional ethnographic narrative that is part of the broader story of Azerbaijani ways of life. I identify defining characteristics which are necessary for establishing that an individual is playing the role of host – power of domain, capacity and mastery of spaces. I then highlight practices which are most often expected from a host – liveliness and abundance. As these prerequisites and practices are described I make the claim that hospitality roles, within Azerbaijani ways of being, are ontologically intense. They are held across broad life narratives, taken into and out of particular moments.

* * * * *

As Asker descends, on the screen, Sevinc sighs [V15-2]. "The Azerbaijani garden," she exclaims with longing. "And the table!" We are sitting in Azer and Sevinc's living room, watching Rza Takhmasib and Nikolai Leshchenko's cinematic rendition of Uzayir Hacibeyov's classic, *Arshin Mal Alan,* "The Cloth Peddler" (1945). In the film, from a shaded bench beneath a tree, Aunt Jahan converses with Asker, who has seated himself by a table on which fresh fruits have been laid. The fountain flows invitingly in the middle

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[1] From Rex Martin's 1982 interview with Foucault (in Martin et. al. 1988: 9)

of the private, enclosed space. In Sevinc's sigh we all recognize our own longings and memories. We have experienced this story numerous times - a humorous, satisfying narrative of love, of family, of community. It is a celebration of many aspects of Azerbaijani ways of life. It is also a satirical exploration of how these ways of life can be negotiated. From the opening scene, the power of the story to evoke simple images from Azerbaijani life is revealed - the quiet, walled garden; the abundance of local fruits on a beautifully laid table, the interpersonal encounters within this space of closeness and provision.

My first experience of *Arshin Mal Alan* was a live stage production in the Azerbaijan State Theatre of Opera and Ballet [E00-12]. The theatre itself, a beautiful, early-20th-century architectural monument, had made the occasion memorable. But what left the most lasting impression was the character of the audience, a highly diverse demographic cross-section of Azerbaijan. There were young children, even an infant in arms, and others of various ages. Men and women were there, in groups, as families, young couples, and what looked to be some groups of school-age students. Styles of dress varied widely. All were dressed neatly, some in t-shirts and jeans and others in full 3-piece suits. The production was clearly meant for all, irrespective of walk of life. Tickets had been priced accordingly – affordable for all. There we sat, together, in the richly gilded theatre, to enjoy a moment of dramatic encounter.

At last count, I have watched *Arshin Mal Alan* in various formats, on stage, on screen, at least fourteen times. I have noted that it is a rare person in Azerbaijan who has not experienced the story a number of times. *Arshin Mal Alan* is an important part of Azerbaijani ways of life, as they have been experienced by Azerbaijanis, together. It not only tells an Azerbaijani story in an Azerbaijani manner, but it has become a part of the

story that is ‘being Azerbaijani’. It is an image for me of the multi-dimensionality of Azerbaijani stories.

Stories are experienced in the moment, as they are lived. This immediate experience is unique, and yet, has not occurred in isolation. Stories occur within a broader history, both contributing to this history, and being shaped by it (Eriksen 2006, Gottschall 2012). As I watched “The Cloth Peddler” with Azer and Sevinc we were experiencing a story that was unique to that moment – an enjoyable evening of dinner, tea, sweets and good fellowship, which included watching the film. The film itself was a story which we were experiencing, incorporating it into our own stories. This enjoyable moment occurred as a part of our relationship, adding to what we shared, but also made possible by our history prior to this particular event. These were stories within stories, interconnected episodes within all of our life stories.

In this chapter, I explore stories and experiences of Azerbaijani ways of hospitality which allow for critical reflection on the role of host. I identify what I have labelled ‘prerequisites’, defining characteristics which are necessary for establishing that an individual is playing the role of host. I then highlight practices which are most often expected from a host.

This chapter, along with the two which follow, provide ethnographic reflection on hospitality roles in Azerbaijani ways of life. These ‘dramatic’ chapters took their most concrete shape in the first half of 2020. This was a time when I was absent from Azerbaijan, quarantined during the global saga of COVID-19, in the Balkans. My interaction with Azerbaijanis was from a distance, consisting mostly of work with discussion groups and one-on-one readings.

Invitation and Domain: The Making of a Host

It is said that winter comes to Baku when the wind blows, and summer when it stops. On this particular day in early March, winter's cold bite was in the air and the stiff gusts off the bay were whistling mercilessly through the busy urban streets and alleys. I ascended, with the crowd, from the 28 May subway station, into the centre of downtown Baku, quickly gathered my coat and scarf around me, and headed off across the square.

I stepped into the office supply shop, closing the door behind me, catching my breath [E16-10]. Amidst the familiar smells of paper and ink, I was immediately met with the welcoming aroma of tea. I couldn't see anyone at the front of the shop. I worked my way back. Laughter led me to the cashier's counter and to the group of women sitting on stools in the small space behind it. This was where I first met Shovket. In her shop, in the long line of office supply stores that runs parallel to Baku's central train station.

Shovket was clearly hosting. She had arranged a small corner of her shop to accommodate four other women around a small fold out table. She had ordered tea from the café next door, which served the shops in the area. Sweets were on hand. The domain was Shovket's. She had taken on herself to prepare a space and to provide for her guests. Over time I would come to learn that Shovket's shop was frequently a place where she and her friends had tea during the workday. Curious to know the reasons which might lie behind Shovket's frequent hosting, I asked around. Was it because she was a particularly good host? Did she provide some particularly good sweets?

As I inquired, I did find that Shovket was recognized to be a pleasant host. But the most important reason for frequent teatimes in her shop was the fact that she was the only woman, among her friends, with her own shop in the area. Shovket had power of domain, a position of "sovereignty" (Shryock 2012:25), control over the place from which

welcome could be offered (Battaglia 2012:78-79). In Azerbaijani ways of hospitality, power of domain is an important prerequisite for an individual playing the role of host. It is denoted in the Azerbaijani linguistic conception of host, *sahib*, often translated literally as master. The host is in command of the space in which hospitality events occur. In the home the host is the *ev sahibi*, master of the house. At a wedding the host is the *toy sahibi*, master of the wedding.

When it comes to stories of *sahib* experiences, I have noticed two reoccurring concepts in relation to power of domain, mastery of hospitality spaces. The first is the concept of *əl/əldə/əlində,* hand/at hand/in hand. The second is the concept of *süfrə*, table or table cloth. The concept of 'at-handness' or 'what is at hand' can be understood as a sense of capacity. The concept of 'table' is more complex but can helpfully be understood as the locus of performance (Dark and Gurney 2001, Candea 2012, Korom 2013, Touval 2017) within hospitality events.

Nermin told me a story of one of her most challenging hosting experiences [N17-5]. Her husband was returning from diplomatic travel and had called a few days before arrival. He let her know that his supervisor in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would be having dinner with them in the evening of the day that he returned. Most of Nermin's story focused on her experience preparing for this visit. The part of the event during which guests were present, which I did not hear much about until a later time, was secondary to the significance of the experience for Nermin. She described her first emotional response as she began to imagine the upcoming hospitality event with the words, "*Əlim çatmır!*" (literally, "My arms can't reach!") Her story was an experience of challenged capacity.

Nermin's husband had worked in an Azerbaijani embassy for the last four years. They had lived abroad, as a family, during these years. They had recently moved back to

Azerbaijan and were now living in Baku. Neither Nermin, nor her husband, were from Baku. Most of their extended families lived in other parts of Azerbaijan. Over the years that Nermin and her husband had lived outside of Azerbaijan many of their colleagues whom they knew in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Baku had moved on to diplomatic posts or other jobs. Nermin's husband continued to hold a position in the embassy of his previous post. It was intended to be a temporary position, but as long as he was still in this position he travelled often, and for several weeks at a time.

As Nermin described her challenge, the financial aspects of the upcoming event did not seem to be an issue. She described a sense of excitement about the various dishes she could imagine preparing and the manner in which the evening would play out. Her family had known her husband's supervisor for a number of years. He was the one who had secured the position in the foreign embassy. Nermin knew what their guest liked to eat and her mind was already planning for what she would provide. Nermin described her husband as a good host. She was not worried about the overall success of the event. As Nermin described the days over which she prepared for the event, what appeared in her story was her experience of disconnectedness.

Nermin was experiencing, albeit in a more significant way, the same kind of situation faced by Shovket, in her shop. When Shovket's guest came for tea, she pulled on her capacity to access the space and resources necessary to play the role of host. Shovket had brought sweets with her to work. She had the physical space, and she had the connections and knowledge needed to arrange for tea to be brought over from the café next door. She knew what was needed, where to find it, and how to arrange for it to be made available. Shovket's capacity to host was a combination of what she could directly provide because

she had it *əlində*, at hand, and what she had access to, the extent to which her 'arms could reach'.

As Nermin assessed her social networks, her connections, and her knowledge of what could be found, where, and how, she realized that the evening she was imagining would be hard to pull off. She needed help in preparing, cooking, serving – help which would normally be provided by a hosting community, multiple members of a host's household or extended family who would make themselves available for the event. She needed to find certain specialty items, particular items of food and drink. These would typically be obtained through relationships and connections. After a number of years outside Azerbaijan, with extended family not living in close proximity, and with professional colleagues having moved out of connection, Nermin was limited in her hosting capacity. A close Azerbaijani colleague of mine has often quipped, "It takes an army to host a general." A *sahib's* capacity to host, to master spaces of hospitality, is closely connected to social networks and the extent to which these can be brought to bear in order to compensate for what may be lacking in immediate capacity.

Capacity is one prerequisite of a host's power of domain. The other prerequisite which I continued to encounter was related to mastery of the locus of performance within hospitality events. Within descriptions of hospitality events the concept of *süfrə* is a central to a host's power of domain. The *süfrə* is where hospitality events happen. It is the centre of the spaces in which hospitality events occur. These spaces can be as simple as a table in a café or office, or as elaborate as the rooms and vestibules decked out for a wedding. When Azerbaijani hospitality events are described, the *süfrə* is frequently described in particular detail. These often include descriptions of a *süfrə* (table or tablecloth) in traditional or elaborate contexts. Popular magazines, for example,

commonly publish guides to *süfrə açmaq,* laying out or opening a *süfrə,* for various occasions. Our family photo albums are full of snapshots of well laid out Azerbaijani *süfrələr.*

The Azerbaijani host choreographs the *süfrə* from start to finish. The act of *süfrə açmaq*, is a series of decisions which play out as the host directs. The host chooses the place where the *süfrə* will be opened, what will be placed onto the *süfrə*, and in which order. The more elaborate an event, such as a wedding, the greater the importance of how things come on and go off becomes. In a tea moment, items can be placed all together and then replenished. In a wedding, there is a definite progression of foods. When the number of participants in a hospitality event are numerous or the extent of what is provided is significant, a host will often involve others to manage the *süfrə*. In a domestic context, this will most often involve family members. At a large event, such as a wedding, it may involve the staff of a venue.

What is common to all *süfrə* is that once set up, they should have everything that is needed to begin the event. If this can be prepared ahead of time, that is preferred. Even if a *süfrə* is opened for an unexpected guest, the guest is ideally brought to the table only after it has been prepared. This can mean that an unexpected guest may wait for a while, if a meal is offered.

I was with a group in a village in north-western Azerbaijan, having arrived at 10:30 at night, where we were hosted at the mayor's home [E01-24]. We were seated in the courtyard where we drank several pots of tea and were entertained by the head of the home until well past midnight. During this time, the female members of the *ev,*

household[2], stoked the wood-fired *təndir*, clay oven, then killed, cleaned and prepared several chickens, baked fresh bread, and mixed numerous salads and vegetable dishes. The *süfrə* was laid out in the guest reception room to which we then moved to have the meal. While we ate, down-filled mattresses were lined up in an adjacent room and fitted with clean cotton linens, to which we retired, after another round of tea.

The significance of the *süfrə* for a host's power of domain is closely connected to the responsibility for laying it out and filling it. But it is also the host's responsibility to place participants in a hospitality event into appropriate positions around the *süfrə.* Guests of honour will sit at the end of the *süfrə* which is furthest from the entrance. Explanations abound on the reason for this position. Some of the more common stories point to the safety of this position in a room, where the entrance is visible and where unwelcome or uninvited incursions will be least likely to affect the guest. These stories are often told by men. Women have noted some of the more logistical benefits of this positioning. Guests are more removed from the movement and bustle which occurs at the entrance of a room and can engulf the closest end of the *süfrə*, along with those seated there. Among the Azerbaijani hospitality narratives shared with me, stories of spilled tea, unexpected entrance of domestic animals and even a lively tale of attempted kidnapping, give credence to reasons of safety as well as convenience.

The *süfrə* is the centre of the host's power of domain. But it only becomes the stage on which hosting is enacted once a more fundamental aspect of hosting is established. The role of host needs to be accepted. The act of acceptance has become for me, a picture of what hosting means in Azerbaijan. The logistics of hospitality events are

[2] "In Azerbaijan, the local term for 'house' (ev) as a built structure also describes social groups like family or household (see also Yalçın-Heckmann 2010: 77)" (Roth 2016: 1)

choreographed only once roles in an event have been established. Preparation of a hospitality space is facilitated by a host. For this facilitation to happen, the role of host needs to be taken on.

In addition to capacity and taking ownership of the *süfrə*, the Azerbaijani host has a particular way of moving into the role. The ideal of spontaneity is often played up, both in stories told by Azerbaijanis but also by others. This is rather a trope within hospitality studies as a whole – the ideal of hosting the unexpected stranger (Camus 1942, Derrida 2000, Kearney and Semonovich 2011). However, I have discovered that the journey into becoming an Azerbaijani host is most lauded, not for the ideal of spontaneity but for the ideal of 'thinking like a host at all times'. This requires preparedness - awareness of access, and maintenance of access. This is not a spontaneous existence, but rather one of living within conditions of capacity. On the surface this seems to fit the stereotype of spontaneity. However, it is predicated on something much more relational. I return to Shovket, to look at this in more detail.

For reasons of gender expectations, I only interacted with Shovket in her shop, and most often, with others around. She had caught my attention at first because hers was a less usual situation – she was a female shop owner. As I got to know Shovket I began to ask her to tell me some of her hospitality stories. On this particular day I had purchased several large whiteboards. Shovket happened to be the only one on the block selling boards of this size. I referred my friends to her shop because it was one of the only places to find them. I noticed that she tended to maintain a steady supply of items which were harder to find in the city. So, I asked her why this was. She told me how her husband had good connections at the wholesale bazaar outside the city. And she told me a hospitality story [N16-17].

Shovket's husband, Aslan, works at the extensive wholesale bazaar that is located outside Baku on the central highway which heads south along the Caspian shore. A significant percentage of goods which come into Baku are channelled through the sprawling complex of warehouses and shops within the Sadarak Bazaar. Aslan owns a small warehouse at Sadarak, from which he resources a network of office supply stores throughout the Absheron peninsula. "If you visit Aslan's warehouse," said Shovket, "you will always find guests."

Aslan's warehouse sounded a lot like the back of Shovket's shop. But his guests were of a different type. Aslan's warehouse was a place that traders liked to visit. Aslan's place was where you could expect to find good tea, good company, and, on most days, negotiate good business. "These whiteboards arrived here on a river of tea," laughed Shovket.

Hospitality events in Azerbaijan are part of wider narratives. Hospitality is practiced rhythmically, occurring at regular intervals. The ideal of the stranger, the unexpected guest, the singular moment of surprise and response, is not what comes out of the regular stories I have heard in Azerbaijan. It does come out when the ideals of Azerbaijani hospitality are specifically queried. But, in practice, what is most appreciated is regularity of hospitality, what one of my non-Azerbaijani friends has described as the "10,000 meaningful touches" that make up the Azerbaijani shared life [V12-46].

Hospitality in Azerbaijan is practiced within relational histories. A hospitable person is one who lives life in a certain way, not just opens their life at certain moments. I have come to understand this as one of the prerequisites for being a host – a sense of openness, which could be termed, 'living invitationally'.

There has been a definite narrative spiral to my understanding of living invitationally as a defining characteristic of a laudable Azerbaijani host. It has been a process of

discovering two particular images of the Azerbaijani host. Azer and Sevinc gave me the words to articulate the relationship between these two images of the *sahib*. "I have spent a great deal of my life observed," Azer said to me one day [V15-19]. "I know what we look like to others. We are Asker. We live in our balconied homes and lounge in our shaded gardens."

"Would you consider yourself to be a good Azerbaijani host?", I asked. Sevinc laughed, before Azer could reply to my question. "We like that story. We like that image. But we don't actually expect that from each other."

Here were two images of the Azerbaijani host. They are both well understood and fully experienced. They have different places, however, in Azerbaijani narratives. They are, in fact, characters in different kinds of narratives. For the first image, there is a kind of narrative that is inspired by the prompt, "What does a good Azerbaijani host look like?" This is a generally welcome question. Answers are usually readily available. The stories that are told are often inspiring. They describe significant aspects of Azerbaijani ways of life which I myself have observed and experienced. What is interesting about these stories is that they are overwhelmingly told about others – a friend, an uncle, someone in Western Azerbaijan, a soldier in the Karabakh. There is a perception of these enactments of 'proper hospitality' as residing in "distant realms" (Marsden 2012:121), beyond the immediate proximities of real life. I have frequently been told stories of an ideal host which come from literature and cinema. Stories of ideal hosts are common in nationalist narratives and discussions of ethnogenesis (Goluboff & Karaeva 2005).

But there are other stories, most often quite personal, which describe a host that is much more nuanced. This is the second image of a host, the negotiating host, the seeker of balance. This host is a regular part of personal narratives. Ismet recounted for me one

of his most enjoyable moments as a host [N17-2]. On a beautiful, late spring afternoon he had invited a group of friends and their families over for lunch. He had spent a good part of the day before preparing the kebab meat, mixing in the onions and fresh spices. Shalala, his wife, had enjoyed preparing some of her favourite salads, accompanied by their daughters, and her sister. Ismet had several bottles of *araq*, distilled spirits, that his brother had made from his personal vineyard. They were good, he knew. He was excited to share them.

Ismet had saved up a bit of money for the occasion and he was happy to have been able to spend it in this way. Just a few days before, a friend, who was usually out of town, had called to tell him that he was in Baku for a few days. Ismet had quickly invited him and his family to the party. He had had to buy a few more things to add to the *süfrə*. The occasion came and Ismet hosted his guests. He told me how the event was a memorable moment of laughing, good food and good conversation.

As I reflected with Ismet on what made this moment so ideal, in his memory, he shared with me a series of things which all fit clearly into the category of negotiating hosting. The money he had spent on the event was significant but had not put the 'collective economic interests' (Yalçin-Heckmann 2001: 9) of his family in jeopardy. Though his house was small, he managed to lay out the *süfrə* on a collection of tables in their living room and "everyone had a place and everyone ate well." He had been pleased and able to include additional guests in the event, even at short notice. The event itself was smoothly managed, a satisfying experience for his family and his guests.

This kind of story seems ordinary. Yet it is the kind of story most often recounted to me when I have asked for stories of good hosting. It is not the stories of grandeur that are most common. It is the stories in which host and guest have their needs met. In fact, the

ideal host who appears in broader narratives of ‘being Azerbaijani’ has frequently emerged, in personal stories, as less than ideal. Gudret shared his experience of attending an elaborate wedding feast at which the host did not collect money [N17-11]. It was meant to be a grand gesture of largess. “I couldn’t swallow my food,” said Gudret. He was uncomfortable to the point of losing his appetite. The host’s generosity was unbalanced. It went out of the bounds of Gudret’s expectations as a guest.

The negotiating host is lauded for a lifestyle of caring for family, fulfilling life obligations, being a hard worker, and, in the midst of this, having space for others. Azerbaijani stories of good hosts most often include a broader description of how hospitality practices fit in with other practices. The host’s life has room for hospitality but is not dictated by hospitality. On the other hand, their life is specifically shaped to be prepared for hospitality. A good host lives in a manner such that hospitality events can happen when and as needed.

These acts of negotiation require the laudable Azerbaijani host to navigate around temptations towards conspicuous consumption (Veblen 1899, Appadurai 1986). The Azerbaijani host lives in such a way that hospitality fits well into their lives. They have structured their resources, time and relationships such that there is always room for hospitality. They themselves fill this space with planned hospitality events. But they also are able to include non-planned events. Living invitationally is a mindset and a holistic set of practices. These practices are well designed to maintain consistency and balance in relational histories.

Liveliness and Abundance: Practices of Hosting

It was refreshing to see Davud in his element [N17-18]. He was at the height of his story, animated, gaze intense, leaning across the table, bringing us all into the moment. Davud

was a master storyteller and the *süfrə* was alive. Across the table, laden with salads, pickles, meats, sparkling glasses, and colourful plates, he had us holding our breaths, for the punchline. "And then he pressed the button!" There was a corporate gasp, laughter, various exclamations of wonder, in response.

Davud was a health and safety supervisor on a platform in the Gunashli oilfield. He had recently returned from one of his regular two-week shifts, 120 kilometres east of Baku in the Caspian Sea. As usual, he returned with good stories and we were eager to hear them. We were at Ferman's house, Davud's brother-in-law [E17-7]. We were a mixed community of guests - friends, family, work colleagues, and neighbours. Early in the evening, Davud's father-in-law had stood up and made Davud an invitation. *Götür, Davud*. "Take it away." It was an invitation for Davud to become the 'master of liveliness' on behalf of the community of hosts.

The invitation to Davud was not a surprise to any of us. Though he had come as a guest, the invitation for him to transform, taking on functions of a host, was natural. He enjoyed these functions. Those who know Davud recognize that, whether hosting or otherwise, he is an energetic individual, warm with people, a great conversationalist, and attentive to interpersonal dynamics. He is *canlı,* lively, spirited, energetic, and *açıq,* open. Davud's temporary transformation onto the stage of hosting performance was not difficult for him to make. He brought with him, into the hospitality event, a set of skills and interests that he carries into all spheres of his life.

The bouquet of practices which define the role of hosting in Azerbaijani ways of hospitality are well glossed by the concepts of liveliness and abundance. Both of these concepts are common in academic narratives on hospitality (Allerton 2012, Da Col 2019). In stories of good hosts and satisfying hosting experiences it is liveliness and abundance

which most significantly facilitate the situational and ontological transformations of persons that occur within Azerbaijani ways of hospitality.

Continuity of Experience

Immediate experiences of liveliness in Azerbaijani hospitality indicate an embrace of vivaciousness, energy, and "sensorial production" (Chau 2008). This can take the passive form of background music in a restaurant or the chatter of a TV in a home or office. When I have commented on the ubiquitous presence of this passive liveliness I have been told, "Yes, the *kamança*[3] starts first" [V16-56]. Like a good *mugham*[4], Azerbaijani moments of hosting are often accompanied by the underlying tones provided by 'instruments' of liveliness.

Canlılıq, liveliness, also takes more active forms in storytelling, humour, dancing and various practices related to preparation and orchestration of the *süfrə* and its delights. Management of *canlılıq* is an important hosting function. But it is not just about energy or action. The underlying purpose of liveliness is to facilitate continuity of pleasant relational experience. When stories are told of hospitality experiences, it is common for the concept of *darıxma* to be referenced. *Darıxdıq!* "We were bored!" *Heç vaxt darıxmazdıq*. "We were never bored."

The antagonist on the stage of Azerbaijani hospitality is *darıxma*. It is easy, when one first enters into Azerbaijani ways of life, to underappreciate the force of the concept of *darıxmaq* (in its various linguistic forms) on spheres of interpersonal interaction. *Darıxmaq* is an unpleasant experience of a lack of something. It is most often translated

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[3] A stringed instrument played with a bow; one of the traditional instruments in Azerbaijani music. It often opens a musical piece, to set the tone for a singer.

[4] A traditional balladic form of Azerbaijani music.

as 'being bored'. But this only scratches the surface of the concept. *Darıxmaq* is used within Azerbaijani discourse to describe a range of emotional experiences from longing for someone that one has not seen for a long time to frustration, bordering on anger. One can be told to *darıxma,* calm down, when one is losing one's cool. Simple experiences of tediousness can be described as *darıxma*, indicating, more than just a lack of interest, a sense that an activity has lost its purpose or aim. *Darıxma* is the experience of a break in the continuity of pleasantness. It carries strong relational connotations and features frequently in Azerbaijani stories of lament, within experiences of hospitality and broader ways of life. Liveliness is the absence of *darıxma*.

Liveliness is not entirely dependent on the host. Guests should also contribute. This is similar to Catherine Allerton's description of the shared responsibility of hosts and guest to create *ramé* in Manggarai hospitality (2012: 51-52). However, when liveliness is lost, in Azerbaijani hospitality, it is the host who is expected to take primary responsibility to restore it. Liveliness is about attentiveness and is most clearly celebrated when it is masterfully negotiated. Lively hosts offer, but they also respond. Discourses of provision within Azerbaijani hospitality are conversations, not soliloquys. Food, entertainment, dialogue, shelter, comfort, are each shepherded by hosts through multiple iterations of invitation, attentiveness, and response. Provision is offered, the experiences of guests are assessed, and alterations, accelerations, removals, repetitions, or substitutions are made.

Lively provision begins with an inviting sensorial atmosphere, and, when food is a part of a hospitality event, beginnings require a well laid table. It is exciting to arrive at a 'ready' *süfrə*. Though detailed descriptions of Azerbaijani *süfrə* have been strangely absent from scholarly works, enjoyable artistic experiences of traditional *süfrə* moments can be found in painting, literature, and cinema. Some of my favourite *süfrə* paintings are

the works of Azim Azimzade (1880-1943), famous for their social commentary and the manner in which they depict traditional elements of Azerbaijani ways of life while exploring the ironies which these ways are forced to negotiate. He produced a number of painted sets depicting Azerbaijani scenarios of economic disparity. His set of "Ramazan in the Home of the Rich" (1932) and "Ramazan in the Home of the Poor" (1938)[5] is moving, but also reveals a fascinating continuity. Even in the home of the poor, the *süfrə* has been laid with careful attention and carries the distinctive look of an Azerbaijani moment of shared provision.

Once begun, lively provision around the *süfrə* is maintained by a steady stream of activities, culinary offers, and rhetoric. Each act of maintenance is negotiated with guests. Proximity is an important aspect of this negotiation. Food, for example, is rarely offered directly to the guest. That which the hosts' 'arms have reached' is placed within 'arms reach' of guests. When new dishes are brought out to the guests, multiple plates of the same food are placed on the *süfrə* so that a bit of everything on offer is within reach of each person. Guests should never be required to ask for anything to be made available or even to be passed to them. Food is offered by making it accessible.

Negotiation of provisional proximity can be clearly played up, particularly by members of a hosting community who have prepared the dishes which are on offer. The surface of the Azerbaijani *süfrə* is a lively space of motion. This is carefully managed, and motion is encouraged when it lulls. From the moment participants in a hospitality

[5] Ramazan (Ramadan) is a muslim festival, celebrated around the world. Following the lunar calendar, it occurs in the ninth month of every year and is observed by fasting, prayer, contemplation and community gathering. Fasting occurs during daylight hours. During the night-time hours eating is allowed and it is common for significant hospitality events to be held. The final night of the month of Ramadan is particularly important for celebration, hospitality and shared provision.

event take their places around the *süfrə,* food begins to move from spaces of preparation, to spaces of presentation, into spaces of consumption. When the contents of a bowl or dish of food on offer ‘stops moving’, negotiation begins.

If it seems clear to the hosting community that the particular food item is being enjoyed, a fresh round of presentation will be made – the empty or close to empty serving dish is removed and a full dish with the same item replaces it. If those around the *süfrə* have simply slowed down in their consumption of a particular item, but a reasonable amount still remains on offer, the dish will be moved to a slightly less proximal location and ‘prime real estate’ positions will be filled with new dishes. What results is a lively commotion at regular intervals as serving dishes are taken away, replaced, and shifted around on the *süfrə*. At a large-scale hospitality event, such as a wedding, dishes can begin to occupy a vertical dimension. I have seen as many as *üç mərtəbə,* three stories, of dishes stacked onto a *süfrə* [E12-19].

It is clearly a source of great pleasure for those who bring out the food to manage the movement of the *süfrə.* This game of spatial management is part of the lively discourse of provision in Azerbaijani hospitality. ‘Making room for more’ is not restricted to spaces of presentation. It also extends to spaces of consumption. Plates from which one is eating will be whisked away and replaced with clean ones, often before the food on them is completely finished. Provision of a clean plate is an offer which spurs continuity of pleasant consumption. It is the responsibility of the one who has now received this offer to ‘make lively’ with their plate. At least something should be quickly placed upon it, lest the plain, empty space be a visual source of *darıxma*.

The ‘plate struggle’ has become a piece of lore within our research community [E00-21]. On a trip to the central regions of Azerbaijan, a colleague found herself with more

negotiating than she had bargained for around an Azerbaijani *süfrə*. We were at a restaurant in the hills, a beautiful location, after a long week of research, and we were relaxing, in no hurry to finish a sumptuous meal. She was enjoying a plate of salads, meat, and fresh bread. Her plate was no more than half empty. She had leaned back for a moment and a waiter soared in to remove her plate. As she saw what was happening, she panicked. As she was not finished with what was on her plate, she grabbed it with two hands, at the same moment as the waiter got his own grip. For an excruciating few seconds they were poised over the table, pulling at the plate between them. When the waiter realized what was going on, his eyes grew large, and he dashed away from the table. We did not see him for the rest of the evening. Needless to say, the practice of renewing a guest's plate is indelibly etched in our conceptions of Azerbaijani ways of hospitality.

Negotiations of Liveliness

On the Azerbaijani *süfrə,* beverages are negotiated in a different manner than food. Two interestingly different forms of negotiation can be seen in the role of alcohol and the role of tea within Azerbaijani hospitality moments. Both are used in highly managed processes to maintain continuity of hospitality experiences.

When alcohol is part of a hospitality event, bottles will be placed, unopened, in a prominent place on a newly opened *süfrə*. This is a sign of *hörmət*, respect, for the guest. Even if the alcohol is not consumed at an event, it is often presented, unopened, on the table. I have even been a guest at events where a bottle has been opened and placed on the table, though it was known that the guests had chosen not to drink. This opening is an interesting negotiation on the part of the host. Having offered, and following the guests' choice not to consume, the host took one more step towards making his provision as proximal, as available, as he could to his guests. Opening the bottle meant that the expense

of the provision had been made. The contents of the bottle were now not reusable. The guests could consider the provisions 'theirs', to do with as they wish – to consume or to leave untouched. Yet, their glasses had not been filled. This would have been an offer of a different kind.

Around the Azerbaijani *süfrə,* alcohol is typically consumed as a shared activity. The 'rule of proximity' is upheld, throughout an event by ensuring that everyone's alcohol glasses are always filled, and close at hand. But the contents of these glasses are usually consumed only during toasts. Toasts may be initiated by anyone around the *süfrə.* It is common, however, at a hospitality event, for the host to lead the toasting process or for a *tamada*, a toastmaster, to be designated.

Toasting is expected to facilitate consumption of alcohol, at regular intervals. Drinking is done only following a toast, and everyone drinks together, most preferably consuming all of the contents of their glass for each toast. An individual can choose whether they want to drink *axıra qədər,* to the bottom, but this choice carries rhetorical weight. Drinking to the bottom of one's glass is a sign of agreement with the sentiments of a toast and can be a commentary on one's sense of comradery with others around the *süfrə*.

When a toast has been made and someone would like to express strong agreement with what has been said, they can say, to all, "*axıra qədər"*, stating personal intentions to drink to the bottom but also seeking to inspire others to join the affirmation. Before drinking, it is also common for an individual to make eye contact with one or more of those around the *süfrə* and to then drink to the bottom of their glass. This serves as a statement, "I drink to you." These moments are particularly important for wider relational trajectories in which hospitality moments reside.

Toasting is one of the elements of hospitality events which most clearly connects the situational function of these events with broader interpersonal narratives. In subtle ways, other negotiations of provision, such as those around food or gifts, can be seen to rely on relational histories and to be directed at deepening relational trajectories. It is knowledge of a guest's culinary preferences, for example, which allows a hosting community to place what the guest enjoys in closest proximity to them, and likewise, to keep things which they may not like at a distance. Gifts allow for continuity of hospitality experiences beyond the temporal confines of specific events. These are important interpersonal recursions within Azerbaijani ways of life, sharpening personalized attentions and deepening relational commitments. But toasting allows for unique clarity and specificity in expressing these attentions and commitments.

In her short article, *The Toastmaster's Unwritten Rule Book* (1996), Jala Qaribova describes the function of toasts in Azerbaijan hospitality events to connect people and facilitate their pleasant experience. Among the important aspects of the toasting process, she lists humour, attention to the order in which individuals are toasted, personalization of each toast, and choice of timing. Toasts should happen at appropriate intervals. They are part of the management of continuity of experience.

Toasts are interesting moments of interruption. During a toast the motion of a *süfrə* pauses. These are moments of risk. Liveliness is distilled into the focused spotlight of a single activity. Guests stop eating and drinking, motion and commotion within the room ceases. Full attention is given to the *tamada*. Expectations of liveliness are placed entirely on the *tamada's* performance. Moments of toasting are moments when the interruption of self within hospitality is viscerally experienced. But this interruption is not a disruption.

Toasts are relational negotiations. A toast is a clear expression of self. The person and character of the *tamada* comes out in a toast, in humour, intellect, insight and attention to relationship. But a toast is always directed at others. The content of a toast is an appreciation of another individual, most often one who is sitting around the *süfrə*. Toasting provides continuity of pleasant experience within relational histories. It is a denial of self, in order to embrace *biz*, us. In this embrace it is an affirmation of self as an inseparable part of self-with-others.

Toasts are opportunities to communicate lively sentiment, through attentive praise - 'this is what you bring to relieve our *darixma*'. It is often a chance to say things which would be difficult to say elsewhere. Toasts look back, affirming and confirming relational commitments and appreciations. They also look forward, aspiring and inspiring. Good toasts are imaginative, describing preferred futures. "With a bit of ingenuity, even ordinary people can be verbally painted into portraits of heroes and heroines, princes and princesses, and even social redeemers of the world" (Garibova 1996: 70). Toasts walk a fine line between mere flattery, and posturing, just making oneself look good. Good toasts are genuine, expressing the genuineness of the toaster and the best that the one who is toasted can be. Toasting clearly accelerates relational trajectories, taking relationships deeper. Toasts can reimagine the past, transform the present, and make a contribution to a desired future. When done poorly, toasting is lamented because it fails to achieve its potential.

What is Tea?

Çai nədir, say nədir. "What is tea and who is counting?" Murad gestured for another pot of tea [V01-7]. We had enjoyed a rousing evening of *nərd*, backgammon, in our favourite teahouse just outside the old city. The heat of the day had been pushed back by the gentle

breeze coming up from the bay. The fountains had come on down the hill in the square. When Murad had peered into the pot and found it empty, he had cast me a glance. I shrugged. This was an easy negotiation. Besides, I needed to win back my pride. He had just won the last few games. We needed at least one more pot of tea!

Though hospitality events often include food, tea is arguably more defining of the heart of Azerbaijani hospitality. Tea can be all that is needed to transform a space into one of hospitality, in an office, in a field after a long day of harvesting, or in a home. One is rarely asked if they would like a glass of tea. "Let's drink tea" is a common invitation to enter into a space of hospitality. But, once interpersonal proximities have formed, tea is usually just provided. Tea, presence, and conversation are constantly in negotiation with one another in Azerbaijani ways of life. It is hard to extract these three basic components of Azerbaijani interpersonal spaces from one another.

The role of tea in signalling and facilitating the transformation of Azerbaijani spaces and persons is multi-faceted. Provision of tea is a clear step, taken by an individual to take on the particular role of host. Tea is also the means by which closure of a hospitality space is negotiated. Tea invites conversation to continue. Appreciation of a good conversation is indicated by consumption of more tea. Tea will be poured until indications are made that closure is desired. On the part of the guest, a hand over one's teacup, before tea is poured, indicates the desire to wrap up the moment. The host will often insist that closure be delayed. If the guest agrees, the hand can be removed, and another glass can be poured. The guest may also leave a greater portion of the tea in their glass undrunk. This is an indication that they are done.

The host may also negotiate closure of hospitality moments through tea. Rather than simply pouring more tea for a guest, the host can ask, "Would you like more tea?" This

is a subtle indication that the host is exploring the possibility of closure. If the guest genuinely desires to delay closure, they can accept the offer. The host's hint has been made. It is likely that the guest will then reciprocate by placing their hand over the glass on the next round of pouring, in response to this hint.

Within discourses of provision, tea provides a mechanism for discerning intent of proximity and engagement. The role of tea in negotiating interpersonal intent is most important in non-domestic spaces. When one enters a home, even for a simple purpose, tea is the minimum of what will automatically be provided. If one enters into a non-domestic space over which power of domain is held by another, however, tea is an important means for negotiating the extent to which interaction will progress.

Tea marks invitation to move from proximity into deeper inclusion. When individuals have engaged in conversation, the usual expectation is for a host-guest space to be opened. This is done, most simply, by provision of tea. The newcomer will not be asked if they would like tea. It will simply be provided. When one is actually asked, "Would you like some tea?" it is important to read the moment. This question is being asked because the potential *sahib* would prefer not to have more than a brief conversation, at that moment, or there is reason to believe that the potential guest may themselves prefer to keep things brief.

In comparison to alcoholic drinks, spaces of consumption for tea have less restriction and protocol. Guests can drink just a few sips or go through several glasses, at whatever speed is desired. There are, however, clear expectations for preparation and presentation of tea. Tea is a consistent provision and the preparation of tea follows a consistent process, ultimately providing a multi-sensorial experience, well conceptualized through the

Azerbaijani understanding of *ləzzət,* pleasure. Azerbaijani tea should be *ləzzətli* in taste, sight, smell, and touch. Some would claim tea epitomizes the *ləzzət* of life.

Ləzzətli tea must be served piping hot, though the guest can wait to drink it until the temperature reaches what they prefer. It is brewed in a teapot, usually of ceramic. Fresh tea leaves are placed into the teapot, boiling water is poured over the leaves and it is left to brew, ideally over low heat. It is traditional to make a brew quite strong. This is then poured into teacups and, if desired, hot water can be added to obtain the desired strength of flavour. Tea can be brought out to guests in glasses, having been prepared beforehand. It is, however, most common for the teapot to be placed on the *süfrə* and for tea glasses to be filled at the table. Pouring of tea is done by a member of the hosting community. Pouring tea into a person's glass can be a gesture of interpersonal closeness or respect.

The aroma of fresh tea will naturally fill a room. Brewers of tea can tell from the aroma how well a pot of tea has been prepared. Colour is also important. The bright red hue of a good tea is colloquially described as the colour of a rooster's tail, *xoruz quyruğu.* A well-coloured tea takes skill to achieve. The *ləzzət* of tea is best enjoyed when drunk from a clear glass, show-casing its colour. It is traditional for Azerbaijanis to drink tea from *armudi stakan*, pear glasses - crystal glasses which narrow in the middle, giving the impression of a pear shape. This shape cools the tea quickly and allows for a hot glass of tea to be held without scalding the fingers. Holding an *armudi stakan* of steaming, red tea is an experience of *ləzzət* in one's palm.

Tea marks the beginning of discourses of provision, and the end. At events with food, there is a time for tea, when the *süfrə* is finally cleared, and filled again, but not in the same way – less compacted and layered. The space is clearly different. Now the serving plates of sugar, sweets, lemon, jams, nuts or baked goods can be left, not frantically

managed. But cups and saucers are constantly filled. In fact, when the last fill comes that is the end. When the tea stops, the event stops. Focus of motion has moved from management of spaces of presentation towards management of spaces of consumption. If members of a hosting community who have prepared food make themselves present at the *süfrə*, this is often when they do so. The table is set, and it is assumed not much else will need to be brought in.

Tea is a fitting metaphor for the ontological rhythms of being Azerbaijani. It is what Azerbaijanis wake up to. It is the image of everyday normal life and yet, an image of all that is special and unique – invitation, closeness, celebration, lament. It is hard to imagine an interpersonal sphere of any kind within Azerbaijani ways of life where tea is not a part. Tea is an element of hospitable liveliness, but it is also part of a wider narrative. The role of the host in this wider narrative is well represented by the concept of abundance.

Within anthropology, abundance is often discussed within discourses of wealth (Rakopoulos and Rio 2019), conceptualized in terms of economics (Schmidt 2019). Within these economic conceptions, abundance is associated with accumulation and extent of possession or control, measured in 'amounts' and 'counts'. Azerbaijani hospitality narratives frequently reference experiences of *bolluq*, wealth, plenty. This provides an image of abundant hosting which is tied to lavishness and extensive offer. But *bolluq* does not fully cover what is lauded in abundant hosting. Full tables and 'layered' provision make for enjoyable narratives and pleasant memories. When describing events, extent of provision is frequently celebrated in Azerbaijani hospitality accounts. When accounts move beyond events, however, and touch on descriptions of hosts, abundance becomes less about extent of provision and more about extent of inclusion.

Azerbaijani practices of abundance are very much about negotiating a host's limitations. Abundance is not about creation of unlimited spaces of provision, but rather, facilitation of shared access to limited spaces. Azerbaijani practices of abundance maximize the extent to which a guest is included into interpersonal spaces through which access can be gained to what a host has 'at hand'.

My friends, Perviz and Fatima are recognized by their community as abundant hosts. When Perviz travels by bus to various regions of Azerbaijan, for business, Fatima always sends along a large satchel of fruit, nuts, raisins, and, occasionally, even baked goods. Along the way, Perviz likes to open up the satchel and share with others on the journey. Perviz and Fatima's home is a simple two-bedroom apartment which they share with their two children and Perviz' mother. When one visits their home, fresh tea is quickly provided, along with homemade jam and slices of lemon. Fatima's friends often joke that Fatima has a secret lemon tree on her balcony. No matter what time of year, she seems to always have a lemon in her kitchen. "And she always cuts us a fresh one!", exclaimed one of her friends [D17-50].

I have personally experienced inclusion into a number of special hospitality events at Fatima and Perviz' home. When Perviz and Fatima's eldest daughter turned eight, they held a party for their network of friends and colleagues [E17-3]. Fatima and Perviz' mother, along with a few aunts and cousins, put on a lovely afternoon and evening of hospitality for the event, with full tables and lively fun.

Fatima works at a government office. When teatime comes, it will often be Fatima who produces one of her mysterious lemons, from her bag. I have met Perviz on the street at various times. I have come to realize that he prepares for these 'chance' meetings. Perviz frequently has something with him that he shares with me when I meet him – grape

leaves from his *bağ evi*, country home, or a jar of jam that Fatima has sent along with him. When I meet Perviz, and he doesn't have something in his bag, he begs me to "come and drink some tea" with him.

Perviz and Fatima are described by Azerbaijanis as 'living invitationally'. They do not hold back in spaces of interpersonal proximity. Invitations to inclusion are made quickly. They facilitate these invitations through practices of abundance. Perviz and Fatima naturally "create guests" (Allerton 2012) from the abundance of their hospitable imagination. They carry a potential guest with them always. They seek out interpersonal proximity throughout their lives. They prepare for moments of interpersonal proximity and are quick to transform these moments, through practices of abundance, into something deeper. "It is not about what they have, it is about how we are included in their lives and what they have in this life", explained one of our friends, about Perviz and Fatima [D17-50].

As I have explored the character of abundance in Azerbaijani ways of life, it has not been surprising that tea features prominently in practical as well as figurative reflections on hospitable ways of being. The physical and interpersonal transformations within Azerbaijani ways of life which are facilitated by the imagination, preparation, presentation and consumption of tea are intricately connected to practices of abundance and, often, symbolize them.

As Azerbaijanis talk about their lives, tea enters in, sometimes as a passing note, sometimes as a reflective anchor. The commonality and regularity of tea make it an assumed component of interpersonal narratives. When one is told, for example, in the midst of an account of a business engagement, "we sat down to discuss the proposal", it is likely that the teller of the story will not mention that tea was present, or that special

sweets were provided. The provision and formal presentation of tea is a significant aspect of business hospitality. But it is expected and assumed, and thus can often be considered unimportant to note in recounting an experience. The same is the case in stories of small interpersonal encounters. When a story of interaction between friends is recounted, tea, though it was most certainly present at the event, may not be mentioned.

As a participant in one of the community discussion groups put it, “Tea is the tap of the heels and the swoop of the arms” [D16-49]. It is as regular and ubiquitous as the click of the feet while dancing, but also as visible and accentuated as the arc of a dancer’s body drifting back and forth across a room. So too, abundance is the rhythm and accentuation of living invitationally.

Abundance of Being

In Azerbaijani hospitality narratives, the manner in which abundance focuses on hosts as persons, looking beyond events towards agency within interpersonal spaces, has opened for me an important window on Azerbaijani ways of being.

Because of its deeply interpersonal character, hospitality frequently finds itself at the centre of the “moral universes” (Selwyn 2000: 19) within which its actors reside. Experiences of hospitality are inextricably connected to ethical expectations and moral frameworks. Many of the prominent voices who have shaped anthropological and philosophical perspectives on hospitality have found these to be paradoxical experiences (Levinas 1961, 1982; Derrida 1997, 2000, Da Col 2019). They have noted that hospitality can be experienced as invitation, welcome, virtue, transformation. But it can also be experienced, often simultaneously, as division, contradiction, manipulation and self-defeat. What has intrigued me, as I have entered into Azerbaijani ways of being, is the distinctly different character of Azerbaijani experiences of hospitality.

Anthropological discourse on paradoxical experiences of hospitality has developed, overwhelmingly, within moral universes in which individual freedom and personal rights and obligations are paramount (Kant 1795; Derrida 1999a; Lashley, Lynch & Morrison 2007). Within these moral universes, hospitality's spaces of welcome challenge moral and ethical aversions to curtailment or confinement of persons. In these contexts, the paradox introduced by spaces of hospitality is their limited, boundaried character (Wrobleski 2012). The concept that an interpersonal interaction might restrict one or another of its actors in some way is morally and ethically reprehensible to those for whom individual freedom is a foundational aspect of personhood. These experiences of paradox have found particularly stark language in academic discourse on hospitality. Hosts, and guest, have been referred to as "hostages" (Derrida 2000), and "captives" (Swancutt 2012). The language of "violence" (Derrida 2000, Dufourmantelle 2011) has been invoked.

Though not expressed through such specific terms, similar sentiment can be found in colloquial narratives, generated from within these moral universes where individual freedom and rights are foundations. These sentiments are prevalent in European and North American literature (Potter 2012), cinema (Boulé and Tidd 2012), and conversations of everyday life. In these colloquial expressions, hospitality is lamented for its 'burden', for the interruption and constraint that it introduces into broad life narratives. Ways of being that are predicated on the moral and ethical standard of uncurtailed, individual freedom experience hospitality as an ontological constraint.

My own habitation within such a moral universe was, for a long time, a considerable barrier to coming into an understanding of Azerbaijani ways of being. Observing how

Azerbaijanis experienced my personal conceptions of hospitality were among the many circumstances through which I began to understand the character of this barrier.

It is common, as the guest is pursued in Azerbaijani lifestyles of invitation, for particular hospitality moments to be imagined but not realized. Times and spaces can be arranged, even prepared, for particular hospitality to occur, but for one reason or another, a planned event will not materialize. My personal experience of such moments has often been mixed. It is common for me to lament the time or expense which has been put into preparing for a potential hospitality event, only to have the moment thwarted. For many years I operated with the assumption that Azerbaijanis were experiencing a similar lament. This assumption was revealed in my conversations following unmaterialized hospitality. When an expected guest did not appear for a particular hospitality moment, it was common for me to assume a feeling of guilt on their part and attempt to assuage it.

"It's ok, no problem."

"It all worked out - we were able to spend the time as a family, instead."

"Don't worry, we can easily try again on Tuesday."

"Oh, it was nothing. It isn't hard for me to whip up a lasagna."

The intent of these statements was to downplay the burden of hospitality, the manner in which preparation for a particular moment with particular individuals had constrained my broader life narrative, without delivering the expected reward. Most significantly, I was clearly seeking to relieve the moral and ethical shortcomings of the unmaterialized guest who had been the agent of this unrewarded constraint. I was constantly bewildered, however, at the responses which I received to these attempts. Azerbaijanis were, apparently, expecting a different kind of conversation.

I began to pay attention to how Azerbaijanis handled negotiations with unmaterialized guests. Conversations following such moments were shaped quite differently than my own.

"Oh, we cooked for 3 days. My mother and my sister helped. My father-in-law even sent a bottle of wine" [V01-6].

"We really missed you" [V13-16].

"We set up the table again yesterday for lunch, just in case you might have dropped by" [V01-31]

There was a clear desire to emphasize the effort, the time, the resources, which were put into preparation. The imagined moment of particular hospitality had been opened, like a bottle of fine alcohol, and placed before the guest. Though unconsumed, unconsummated, the moment had been given. A great deal of what was to be gained by the moment had been redeemed from immateriality. Though consumption had not occurred, the guest was fully welcomed to the moment, to its spaces, to its abundance.

"It is about joy" [D17-22]. I had returned, once again, to discussion on how Azerbaijanis experience the transformations of particular hospitality moments. The community discussion group was in the middle of lively reflection. "*Şadlıq*," Ahmed repeated. "It starts with joy. But, not just for the moment. We wait for these moments." He paused, searching for language. Fariz filled in the pause with a question. "What really changes in these moments?"

The room was silent for a few seconds, and I could sense a breakthrough. True to form, Fariz launched into a hospitality story [N17-29]. "Yesterday, Dr. Samedov dropped into my store. He popped in for just a moment. He wasn't planning to buy anything

actually. He was passing by and he came in to greet me. I was serving a customer. I saw him come in. And I remember my thoughts when I saw him. ‘Dr. Samedov! Great to see him.’ But what did I do? Did I stop serving my customer? Did I ‘put on another hat’?” The group liked that phrase. I had introduced it to them as a concept for illustrating the process of transformation from the roles of broad life narratives into roles within particular moments.

“No,” continued Fariz [D17-22]. “How does one really take that hat off?”

My personal experiences of Azerbaijani ways of life have challenged my conceptions of the place of hospitality within the broad narratives of individual lives. Within anthropology and philosophy, the place of hospitality within ways of life is often identified as particular moments shaping the depth or intimacy of ontological states. These moments are described as temporally and physically defined “acts” (Selwyn 2000:79) or “performances” (Goffman 1959:39; Darke & Gurney 2011:79), “temporary transformations” (Allerton 2012:55). The function of these acts or ‘particular hospitality’ is to “establish a new relationship or promote an existing relationship” (Selwyn 2000:79). This conception defines hospitality primarily in terms of particularity. In this conception, individuals become hosts and guests for a moment and then go back to whatever roles they have in broader narratives.

There is an ontological framework behind particularized conceptions of hospitality in which hospitality roles are seen as particularly intense but not ontologically intense. Other roles are considered to be more central to broad life narratives, to ways of being. Ontological intensity is most often attributed to interpersonal states of familiarity. Particular hospitality moments are portrayed, for example, as vehicles for transforming strangers into acquaintances or enemies into friends. Thus, an individual may enter into a

moment of hospitality as a stranger. As the hospitality event begins, the individual becomes a stranger-guest. Over the course of the event there is a transformation into acquaintance-guest. The individual then leaves the event as an acquaintance. Temporary assumption of hospitality roles has provided the possibility for the deeper, ontological roles of stranger and acquaintance to be traversed.

"How does one really take that hat off?" Hospitality roles within Azerbaijani ways of life indicate a strong ontological intensity, carried across life moments, not just assumed in particular moments. Azerbaijanis are continually carrying hospitality roles with them. The *papaq*, hat, of hospitality roles is never removed. This ontological intensity can be seen in the speed with which particular hospitality roles are taken up, the extent to which hospitality practices permeate a wide variety of life spheres, turning them into hospitality-shaped events, and the importance of pseudo-hospitality connections in daily life – frequent phone calls, meeting up on the street, dropping in – the '10,000 meaningful touches' of living invitationally.

For Azerbaijanis hospitality is an interruption of self, but not a disruption. The temporary shifts in personal spaces which are required by particular hospitality are not disruptions to broad ways of being. They are opportunities for expressing these ways of being. They are part of an ontological consistency and continuity. This ontological trajectory is facilitated by practices of abundance.

As practices of liveliness orchestrate motion through spaces of particular hospitality, practices of abundance facilitate motion across the string of particular moments which make up broad life narratives. Liveliness propels provision from imagination, through preparation and presentation, towards consumption. It moves outward, from the inmost places of self and possession to the selfless spaces of consumption where others have full

reign and benefit. Abundance moves inward. It seeks out the other who is not yet 'among'. It works to create proximity, and then labours to empower inclusion. This inward movement of abundance is expressed through the Azerbaijani concept of *bərəkət*.

Nazim described the difference between *bərəkət* and *bolluq* [D16-71]. "*Bolluq* is a truck full of grain, a bountiful harvest. *Bərəkətli* is how I describe the field which gave me the grain, the land which, year after year, feeds my family. *Bolluq* is a full table, a bountiful feast. *Bərəkətli* is how I describe my aunt's table, at which I have sat throughout my childhood, fed, and cared for."

Bərəkət is a common term used to describe abundance. It carries a richer ontological sense than *bolluq.* It is a more experiential and existential concept, used to describe material and relational richness that is beyond individual moments. It is often translated as "prosperity", connected to benefit, blessing, stability. *Bərəkət* speaks to the manner in which abundance transforms the quality of the spaces in which persons live. It provides differentiation, within discourses of abundance, between affluence (Suzman 2017) and access (Da Col 2019).

As I have explored narratives of hospitality in Azerbaijan, I have discovered that what is most lauded in a host, beyond the excitement of events, the enjoyment of entertainment, is the sense a guest gets that they are welcome, not just into a physical space, but an interpersonal one. It is this access to the person of the host which transforms simple spaces of layered liveliness into ontological spaces of life lived together.

Chapter Six: In the Shade of Hospitality

> I always have in my memory a scene from childhood when our old neighbour Aslan kishi was telling young people not to hurry when making decisions about their lives. Put your papaq[1] next to you and think carefully – he loved to say. That phrase has stayed in my mind since that time and, now grown up, I understand the wisdom of those words more and more deeply. The papaq is the embodiment of yourself. Don't be your own enemy; put the papaq next to you, look at yourself from the side and this will help you to make the right decision.
>
> - Jeyran Bayramova, The Mystery of the Traditional Papaq

In this chapter I look at the movement of the Azerbaijani guest from imagination of self in the presence of others, into the spaces and towards the objects that facilitate preparation, across thresholds between private and public worlds and into opportunities for presentation. I describe the manner in which the role of guest complements that of host within the Azerbaijani hospitable being. Ontological mobility is presented as a central characteristic of this hospitable being, as Azerbaijanis navigate moments of hospitality by shifting between various modes of hospitable presence. I explore a conception of the Azerbaijani guest as the one who creates the sacredness of Azerbaijani hospitality spaces, through their personal presence and what they carry into these spaces. I close the chapter with a reflection on how Azerbaijani ways of life are shaped by pursuit of shelter from the intensity of ontological hospitality's interpersonal expectations. The Azerbaijani hospitable being stands as an anchor for the creation of negotiated spaces of hospitable living.

[1] A traditional *papaq*, is a lambskin hat, though the term is used generically for a variety of hats.

* * * * *

"So, where is the guest?" I reached into the box of Belgian chocolates with which Sultan had transformed me into an exemplar of our subject [V17-30]. He placed his teacup down on the *süfrə* which had emerged among his books and papers. Gazing out the office window he gestured broadly with a sweep of both arms at the buildings, streets and parks which rolled down the hill. "Everywhere," he exclaimed. "We are everywhere."

We had been discussing my experience of coming to know the Azerbaijani guest. On the surface it seemed ironic to myself as well as others, with whom I was having hospitality conversations, that the Azerbaijani guest would present a particular enigma. My earliest experiences of Azerbaijani ways of life were as a guest of Azerbaijani hosts. I have often commented that my life among Azerbaijanis has been a sustained experience of being hosted. Within anthropological, philosophical, cinematic, and literary discourse, as well, the guest is hardly a neglected persona. There would seem to be more than passing personal and academic acquaintance available to me, to aid my understanding of the Azerbaijani guest.

My struggle, however, was summed up aptly by a colleague. "You know too many guests" [V17-9]. A plethora of acquaintances with the persona of the guest fills the stage upon which I have come to know the Azerbaijani guest. On one side of the stage, from Camus' prisoner (1957) to modern political conceptions of global relationships (Ahmed 2000, Abbinnet 2006, Molz & Gibson 2007), the guest has been exiled. This guest is the wanderer, the refugee, the placeless one, unknown, excluded, searching for that which has been lost and that which has not yet been found. The imagery is powerful - particularly descriptive, but, ontologically, incomplete.

On the other side of the stage, from Abrahamic images of angelic visitors (Selwyn 2000, Asad 2018) to twentieth century anthropological studies of Mediterranean societies (Abou-Zeid 1965, Pitt-Rivers 1968, Herzfeld 1987), the guest has been beatified. The guest is the bringer of divine blessing, the revered one, an image of that which is missing in sacred spaces of expectation. This image, too, is revealing of the social and moral importance of the guest, within human conceptions of relationship and engagement. But, like the exiled guest, it is incomplete, particularly within ontological conceptions of hospitality.

In the current chapter I describe the process by which I have come to know the Azerbaijani guest as a part of the Azerbaijani hospitable being. I explore the ‘moorings’ and ‘mobilizations’ (Molz & Gibson 2007) which define the being of the Azerbaijani guest. I explore various ways in which presence and mobility interact within the practices of the Azerbaijani guest. I look at the place of the Azerbaijani guest in relation to the Azerbaijani host, describing the manner in which these roles both shape Azerbaijani conceptions of being.

Finally, I engage with the real enigma faced by the Azerbaijani hospitable being. It is not one or another persona. Rather, it is the experience of life lived between the law and spirit of hospitality (Pitt-Rivers 1977, Derrida & Dufourmantelle 2000). Azerbaijani spaces of hospitality are pursued as places of refuge. The Azerbaijani hospitable being provides spaces of shelter from the intensity of ontological hospitality’s expectations. Azerbaijani ways of life are shaped by movement towards these spaces of protected interpersonal connection.

Presence and Presentation

“We are everywhere.” Sultan was still looking out the window [V17-30]. “We are all on the way to someone.” That made him smile. His chair provided its own symphony of liveliness as he swung around, returning to his tea. This was a space I knew, with the squeaking chair, the tables full of books, Fatima’s ‘office tea’, and Sultan – without whom, this would not be a space of reception. I had, indeed, come into this space having first, ventured out. I had left other spaces, other people, to be here with Sultan. I would leave here to make my way somewhere else, to other people in other spaces.

This conception of a persona, ever “on the way to someone”, has been a fruitful entry point for my explorations into the character of the Azerbaijani guest. It frames the role of the guest around purposeful, interpersonal motion. The physical dimension of this frame, in particular, is readily observable. Narratives of guesting are full of transitions and passages, actions of motion towards, through and out of physical places. Though this physical dimension is just a part of who the Azerbaijani guest is, it is a good starting point from which one may discover other depths.

The movement of the Azerbaijani guest begins in preparation. If guesting is planned, when one *qonaq gedir*, goes to visit, significant physical motion occurs in preparing one’s self to be a guest. As the Azerbaijani saying goes, *Gözəllik ondur, doqquzu dondur;* Beauty is ten, nine of which is dressing. The Azerbaijani guest’s imagination of self in the presence of others is a matter of great attention. Preparation is an important prerequisite to the procession and presentation which make up movement towards others. Among the spaces in which the Azerbaijani guest’s physical preparation occurs, the foyer or vestibule of the home is particularly important.

To a great extent, Azerbaijanis live between two distinct worlds, the private, domestic-familial world and the world beyond. Transition between these worlds is facilitated by the space inside the main door of the home. It is in this space that final preparations to leave the private world, to enter the public world, are made. Narratives of guesting provide a rich conception of presence (Fabian 1990, Nason 2018) in relation to this space.

I was getting ready to leave Qurban's house one afternoon [E15-20]. He walked me to the space inside the entrance to his apartment, and we proceeded to prepare ourselves to go out the door. He handed me the *buynuzcuq*, the shoehorn. It was an intentional yet almost subconscious move. He took my shoes off the shoe rack which ran along the wall, perpendicular to the door, and laid them on the floor next to me. As I slipped them on with the horn, he opened the small cupboard next to the shoe rack, removing a shoe brush and polishing sponge. I brushed and then polished my shoes on all sides. Qurban followed suit.

As we were ready to leave, Qurban stood up and looked at himself in the mirror which was hanging on the wall opposite the shoe rack. He ran his hands over his hair and then straightened his shirt and pants. He looked at me with a wink as he glanced at the shelf above the shoe rack on which his hats were arrayed. "No hat today," he said. On the shelf, I noted his light grey lambskin *papaq*, alongside several caps. As he was just walking me to the bus stop, he would forgo a hat on this journey.

There, in the vestibule of Qurban's home, I had experienced a ritual of hospitable significance. Qurban and I were negotiating my transition from being his guest to my journey into other interpersonal spaces in the world beyond. He would accompany me for a while, on this journey. We were both preparing to enter the public world, though with

different interpersonal intentions. He was completing his role as host. We had moved from the *süfrə,* from spaces of provisional motion, towards the *eşik,* the threshold, of Qurban's private space. Here he joined me in the preparation of self, to assist me, guide me and then move with me.

In Azerbaijani hospitality narratives the *eşik* encapsulates the complex character of the space through which a guest moves, out of a particular host's domain. This is the space from which the poet Mammad Araz's remembered love makes its journey, exiting the *ev-eşik,* "threshold of the home", to find itself in the wide world outside (*How Can I Forget You).* This is the space through which the story-teller Mirza Fatali Akhundov's fugitive slips from the hidden confines of the *ev,* home, into the dangerous world beyond (*The Botanist Monsieur Jordan and The Sorcerer-Dervish Mastali Shah).*

The *eşik* is designed to facilitate transition between the private and public worlds. In this space of transition, the presence of the Azerbaijani guest can be seen for its trajectory, for the purposefulness with which it is developed, carried, and presented. The objects within this space provide significant materialization to the Azerbaijani guest's trajectory of presence. As considerations of materiality are one of the particular strengths of Azerbaijani ethnography (Knight 2008, Goluboff & Karaeva 2005), it is helpful to look at hospitable presence through this lens.

Many of my most fruitful conversations about the Azerbaijani guest's role have centred around the objects which assist the creation and expression of this role. These have included reflections on the Azerbaijani *papaq*, lambskin hat, and *kelaghayi*, head scarf, which are particularly significant in the preparatory function they play as the guest enters public spaces; on perfumes and colognes, which extend the sensory presence of the Azerbaijani guest beyond the visual; and items which assist the function of primary

objects of preparation, secondary objects such as shoe-care equipment, headwear storage spaces, and mirrors.

Among the objects which lie in the space defined by the *eşik*, shoes provide an important materiality to the motion of the Azerbaijani guest across the public world, into and through interpersonal spaces. Like hats and scarves, shoes are an object of the public world. They are donned and removed as one moves out of and into a private space. Shoes are left by the *eşik* for the duration of an individual's time in a private space. In Azerbaijan, shoes are a marker of boundaries, they are a physical space of personal presentation, they facilitate and direct the motion of individuals towards one another, they shape the moral character of interpersonal interactions.

Looking back on the decades over which I have come to know Azerbaijani ways of life, I am grateful for the graciousness which has been shown to me as I have learned, so slowly, new ways of being. In my early years of research in Azerbaijan I remember moving in and out of various interpersonal spaces with very little attention to my shoes. One particular moment sticks out to me, as an illustration of the role of shoes in the function of the guest, though I was oblivious to this role at the time. We had come down from a long day of interviewing in several villages in the hill country of Xizi. We had made an appointment with the local governor's office, to gather some statistical documents [E01-18].

Climbing the stairway to the second floor of the town hall, we were met by the governor's assistant. I remember, distinctly, the flow of her reception. As we came to the top of the stairway she was there, with a smile. She welcomed us warmly and her eyes went quickly to our shoes. It was a brief glance. But she had clearly begun her appraisal of our presence from our shoes. As we moved into the governor's suite of offices this

pattern continued. We were seated by the receptionist, whose eyes drifted quickly, though briefly, to our shoes. As we entered the statistics office, we were met by the department director, whose eyes, ever so briefly, engaged with our presence, beginning with our shoes. At no point in any of these encounters was anything said about our shoes, nor were we at all given an impression of approval or disappointment. What was clear, however, was the attention that had been paid to our shoes.

I have had this same experience, walking down streets in Baku and into spaces, shared with others. As individuals see me coming into their proximity, their eyes quickly drift to my shoes. Shoes, in Azerbaijan, speak of presence. They communicate preparation for interpersonal interaction. Shoes indicate an individual's assessment of the character of the spaces through which and into which they move. Through shoes, a guest carries with them, *hörmət*, honour; *ismət*, purity, and *nüfüz*, reputation. Shoes contribute to what the guest alone can create, the sacredness of hospitality.

Anthropologies of the sacred embrace the figure of the guest with a particular reverence (Pitt-Rivers 1977; Selwyn 2000). It is common, within hospitality studies, for the person of the guest to be characterized as sacred, and to be depicted, from this presence, as providing a moral character to hospitality spaces (Peristiany 1965, Friese 2010). I have found a rich cornucopia of terminology, within dialogue on Azerbaijani hospitality, to express the sacredness of the guest. On a philosophical level, the concept of the Azerbaijani guest as *müqqəddəs*, holy or sacred, is readily upheld. The concept of *müqqəddəs*, however, does not fully express the sacred character of the Azerbaijani guest's presence and presentation.

Müqqəddəs is a concept heavily associated with religious experiences and traditions (Abdulhalimov & Qarayev 1994). This resonates with historical perspectives from

anthropology (Morinis 1992) as well as from Azerbaijani ways of life. In relation to the Azerbaijani guest, however, sacredness is more than a religious conception. Conversations with Azerbaijanis reveal a conception of sacredness, in relation to the Azerbaijani guest, which is wider than *müqqəddəs*, encompassing a range of moral conceptions, such as those listed above – honour, purity, and reputation. The concept of sacredness is closely tied to the character of grace which underpins the Azerbaijani notion of hospitality.

Azerbaijani hospitality narratives provide a clear picture of hospitality spaces as moral spaces, spaces with clear expectations for interpersonal postures and interactions. This use of 'moral' follows Edel & Edel's (2010) concept of "ethics narrow", summarized by Signe Howell as closely connected to "obligation or duty…those notions that *ought to be* or *ought to be realized*…" (Howell 1997: 4). The moral character of Azerbaijani hospitality spaces is dependent on participants, and particularly on their interactions with one another. Hikmat explained to me, in one of my sessions with an urban discussion group, "We make hospitality. It doesn't just happen. And when it happens, it reminds of us of who we want to be" [D17-26]. To this, Salman added, "We are who we are, because of others. Hospitality is who we are when we are with others." This is the sense of sacredness which characterizes Azerbaijani hospitality spaces. They are spaces of reverent dedication to the persons within them.

I have enjoyed the growing understanding I have gained around the importance of personal appearance in Azerbaijan. In Azerbaijan, one's appearance is not a simple matter of personal presentation. Personal appearance is a commitment to the moral character of interpersonal spaces.

In the Xizi governor's office I had proceeded through the building, from person to person, with little awareness of what I was communicating through my shoes. I was an unknown individual, with an, as of yet, unknown purpose for being present. Each of the potential hosts, with whom I had encounters, was left to their own devices to determine my intentions, and whatever they could about my person. I was not in a neutral role. I was a guest, the one who had entered. The progression of those who received me, some only to hospitably pass me on to the next host, each took in what they could about their guest. I had, through my shoes, communicated what I thought of the governor, of the spaces over which he was host, and the character of my relationship to him. As I was met, each individual was assessing how they should respond to me, in light of how I had chosen to position myself in relation to the governor.

Appearance is part of the mobile presence of the Azerbaijani guest. The motion of the Azerbaijani guest is first, motion around self. This motion begins in the inner, most private spaces of life, with cleanliness, achieved in spaces of bathing. It continues with attentive dressing, in spaces of dwelling, rarely accessed by anyone in the public world. It is completed with material expressions of interpersonal intention, such as headwear and shoes. The Azerbaijani guest prepares self for presentation by preparing physical appearance. This presence is prepared and then carried, with one's self, as one moves towards persons. It is a presence that is defined by interpersonal intention. As Salman described, "Hospitality is who we are when we are with others." The Azerbaijani guest is a person formed on the way to others.

Hospitable Being

With our shoes brushed and polished, we descended the stairs into the *həyət*, the courtyard in front of our apartment block [E11-11]. With gusto, my son began the ritual of

procession that defines the perimeters of the world of the guest. He nodded his head, reaching out his hand to Ibrahim *bey*, seated on the bench under the fir trees. "*Salam*,"[2] sang his little voice. Ibrahim gave him a big smile and shook both our hands.

We turned the corner and met Murad, cleaning the windshield of his car. "*Salam!"* As his hands were wet, Murad offered us his wrist. We touched briefly in recognition of one another's passing. As we reached the fresh produce market at the end of our *həyət*, Aslan looked up from stacking apples and nodded his head at us. *Sabahınız xeyir. "*Good morning." We waved to one another. Murad gestured to the fruits and vegetables on his stands. I placed my hand over my heart and thanked him with a bow of my head. We stepped onto the footpath that led out of our *həyət*, onward through the Azerbaijani world of invitation.

Movement beyond the *eşik* of Azerbaijani private worlds is a procession of recognition and attentiveness. The attention placed on preparation of personal presence, prior to entering the public world, reveals its depth of purpose as this presence is carried outward. Interpersonal intentionality is a fundamental characteristic of Azerbaijani public motion. One is never simply moving towards a particular place or task - going to the bazar, making one's way to an appointment, or paying an electric bill. These tasks and objectives represent the parameters of a trajectory. The tenor of this trajectory is attentiveness to the persons with whom one comes into proximity, throughout one's movement.

In the spring of 2016, I took an interpersonal inventory of a single morning of my life [E16-16]. I had left my home to pick up a new social security card at the local

[2] Literally, "peace", this is a standard greeting when one meets another.

government office. I had seventeen interpersonal encounters that morning, in the span of three hours. Five of these encounters occurred within our *həyət*. They were simple greetings, handshakes, two accompanied by brief conversations, culminating in offers to go have tea together. As I walked to the bus stop, I received a phone call from a colleague, providing another of our shared "10,000 meaningful touches". He asked where I was, probing whether we could meet up.

At the bus stop our landlord, Mushviq, was waiting with his grandson. I fished in my pockets for a small gift and found a Canadian flag pin, which I offered to the young boy. We chatted about our lives until the bus arrived. It was a short bus ride. My destination came before Mushviq's. As I got off the bus, I gestured to him that I was paying for him as well. This is common practice, a small means of hosting individuals whom one knows, if you happen to meet each other on public transport. The first to exit typically pays for the other.

Once I was off the bus, I checked my phone and saw two messages and a missed call. This was a routine count for a seven-minute ride. I replied to the messages and quickly returned the call. A friend was asking for some information. I didn't have it, but I knew who did. I passed a phone number on to my friend. It was likely that I would soon be asked to host both of these individuals to move my friend's interests along.

Along the road to the government office, I realized that I was passing by a cell-phone shop where one of my former students worked. I dropped in to greet him. He didn't happen to be in when I stopped by, but I had a chat with a co-worker and asked that my greetings be passed along. A few hours later, I received a phone call in response.

When I arrived at the government office I was surprised when the receptionist gave me a look of recognition and greeted me by name. It turns out, he was a cousin of a close

friend. He was quite pleased to have recognized me. He pulled up a picture, in which I was present, from social media that my friend had posted a few weekends earlier. As residents of the capital are fond of quipping, “Baku is a small village.” Deep interpersonal intentionality, practiced on a large scale, makes social connections a staple occurrence of daily life in the city.

While waiting to see a government official I sent off a few text messages and answered a few others. An acquaintance, who had learned where I was currently located, gave me a quick call to say that he would make his way over to where I was and would like to chat with me. Neither of us knew when I might finish at the government office, but we put one another on our mental checklist. With hospitable hope, he set out on his own journey towards me. I eventually squeezed my way into the cubicle at the end of the long hall, to pick up my card. The interpersonal trajectory of my morning had been richly played out.

I have been asked by numerous non-Azerbaijani readers of my work whether the highly participative character of this experience truly reflects the broad Azerbaijani experience. It is notable that this question has not been asked by Azerbaijanis. While some Azerbaijanis are recognized as more outgoing, more motivated to interpersonally engage than others, there is a rhythm of life that is recognized and practiced by all, in some manner. Through planning, constant adjustment, responsiveness and continual observation, Azerbaijanis live their lives “on the way to someone”, shaping this way in relation to those along it. In these trajectories of Azerbaijani public motion, hospitality is an important hermeneutic. In a world of invitational living, motion across interpersonal encounters is experienced and negotiated by Azerbaijanis as one, also, of continual offering. To enter into the public world is to offer one’s self to others. In pursuit of others,

Azerbaijanis live with multiple ontological potentialities always at hand. Alongside the ontologically intense role of host, is the equally intense role of guest.

In Ahmed's office, we had been discussing the negotiations which occur as Azerbaijanis come into proximity with one another [V17-39]. I had proposed that Azerbaijanis lived continually as hosts, searching for guests. Though the proposition readily received assent, the conversation which ensued revealed that this was a simplistic description. "One cannot always be a host," said Shalala. To which Ahmed replied, "One is first, a guest." From there we got to the heart of the matter. If one is to walk through the world, ready to host, one must first, take the posture of one who is not yet a host. The Azerbaijani world of invitation is empty without reception. In this juxtaposition is found the synthesis of what Azerbaijanis refer to as *qonaqperver insan*, the hospitable being.

What drives the physical motion of Azerbaijanis, across interpersonal trajectories, is an ontological mobility. Each hospitality role is a part of the ontological integrity of Azerbaijani ways of life. The integrity of the *qonaqperver insan* is sustained by a willingness and proficiency to negotiate particular moments, taking on various hospitality roles, as interpersonal considerations may require. One picture of this ontological mobility can be seen in the practice of 'shadow hosting'.

Farid finished a humorous toast [E15-8]. As our chuckles subsided, we resumed our consumption. Across the table I watched Elman engage with Sultan. Elman picked up a plate of meat, forked a large piece and placed it on Sultan's plate. During the meal, Elman had paid close attention to Sultan's needs. He would gesture to members of the hosting community whenever Sultan's glasses were empty. When conversation lulled, he would ask Sultan *müəllim* a question. Though not a member of the hosting community, Elman was ensuring that Sultan's needs as a guest were met. Throughout the event, he

participated as a guest. At moments, however, he shifted to a shadow host role, in relation to Sultan.

I have experienced, in Sultan's office, instances where he himself, at a moment's notice, shifted from primary to shadow host. He was hosting me, and two other colleagues, when Aslan, the head of the department came into the room with a guest of his own [E17-2]. We immediately shifted from our places around Sultan's desk, to the conference table. Aslan was seated at the head of the table, furthest from the door. Sultan sat at the other end of the table, closest to the door.

Positioning at the table clearly indicated the place of honoured guest which had been given to Aslan. Aslan immediately led the conversation after introducing his guest to us. When tea came, Aslan was served first, as an honoured guest would be. But it was Aslan who continued to offer us all chocolates as we conversed, from the box that Sultan had moved from the desk to the conference table. There was a moment when Aslan made a humorous reference to something he and his guest had previously experienced. They had a brief exchange, between the two of them around this reference. During this time, Sultan leaned over and quietly asked me a question, alleviating the temporary lull in continuity of experience at our end of the table.

In moments of particular Azerbaijani hospitality, movement can be seen between the roles of guest and host, from guest to shadow host, from host-on-call to guest. Within the ontological mobility of Azerbaijani ways of life, host and guest are modes of presence. These modes are readily available to Azerbaijani hospitable beings, taken on, when needed, with an intensity appropriate to a moment. Conception of these roles as ontological modes hit home for me in a conversation I had with Fatima [V17-43]. I had

been sharing some of my experiences of being a guest. Placing a new pot of tea on the table, she asked, “Where is *your* guest?”

My mind skipped to the world outside, to my home, to my office, to the various teahouses I enjoyed frequenting. Was someone waiting for me? Had I forgotten an appointment? “*Your* guest,” she repeated, pointing to the centre of my chest. It was then that I realized, she was searching for something beyond particular persons. She was pursuing the mode, within me, that was expressed when I functioned as a guest. She was searching for my own unity of being that she understood as the character of the *qonaqperver insan*. This unity of being is significantly more intense within Azerbaijani ways of life than my own.

There are echoes of Luce Irigaray’s (2013) “mutual hospitality” in the Azerbaijani hospitable being. It is not experienced as demeaning or violent (Derrida & Dufurmantelle 2000) to play a particular hospitality role at a particular time. Particular roles do not demand destruction of ontological roles. Within the Azerbaijani hospitable being, roles are ontologically “reciprocal and not reduced to a bipolar relationship between dominant-dominated, acting- acted, superior- inferior” (Irigaray 2013: 50).

Within Azerbaijani ways of life, particular roles of host and guest are temporary. Though momentary interruption of a part of the Azerbaijani self occurs in these temporary moments, the “volume of being” (Piette 2017:3-4) of the *qonaqperver insan* is not disrupted by ontological mobility. It is, on the contrary, validated and strengthened by this motion. The *papaq* of a particular mode may be placed aside but, it is never far, always available to be put on once again. “It is good, in fact,” Fatima told me, “to let a hat sit at one’s side, long enough to get a good look at it” [V17-43].

Sacred Journeys

As the sun drops behind the high-rises, bridges and walls of Baku, courtyards and boulevards begin to fill. Individuals and families, groups of friends, lovers, move out into the now shaded spaces. Fountains come to life. Women and young girls take their place in front of buildings and homes, watering recently sun-baked driveways and cobblestoned squares. School children awake from their naps, to chase one another beneath the trees or to skip along sidewalks. The *kölgə,* the shade, has come.

Life, in Azerbaijan, is lived in the *kölgə*. It is here that the rhythms of interpersonal movement take place. As *kölgə* expands, so too, does motion towards others. These rhythms are natural to Azerbaijani ways of life which have been temporally and spatially shaped by intense light and heat. Visiting is planned for these times. Shared spaces are populated in these moments. These spaces, where shared presence occurs, have themselves been arranged to embrace shelter. Pleasant congregation is facilitated by the positioning of grape arbors, stands of trees, walls and collections of buildings between intense light and heat, and the participants of hospitable connection.

I have discovered a veritable anthropology of shade and shadow in my explorations of Azerbaijani ways of life. Figurative journeys through hospitality narratives have revealed these "dark siblings" (Reinhardt 2018) to be significantly defining of the character and role of the Azerbaijani hospitable being. Though there is no immediate linguistic differentiation between shadow and shade in the Azerbaijani term *kölgə*, a distinction emerges in collocation. Shadow is deferent to light, following it, defined by its effects. Close connections are described as *kölgə kimi izləmək*, following like a shadow. Shadows are cast, *kölgə salmaq*, depicted as constructs of an object or being's relational position vis-à-vis a source of light.

I have found the concept of shade, however, to encapsulate another depiction of *kölgə*. There was an elderly woman in our *həyət* who would greet us as we returned from our daily endeavours with the words, *kölgəyə gir*, “come into the shade”. When walking with someone, it is common for one to comment, *gəlin kölgə axtaraq*, “let’s seek shade”. There is a conception of *kölgə* as a space of respite, to be sought out and inhabited. It is a space of purpose, intentionally searched for, to be embraced for what it provides. Though dependent on that which provides it, the shade of *kölgə* is more than a deferent, secondary effect. It is, itself, a provider.

In conversations around hospitality, provision of shade, *kölgə vermek*, finds particular meaning. Beyond discussions of how the roles of guest and host ‘shadow’ one another, or the manner in which lamentable hospitality encounters reveal overshadowing, *kölgələmək,* of individuals or roles, *kölgə* as shade emerges when the ontological character of hospitality within Azerbaijani ways of life is discussed.

In the community hall of one of the suburban apartment complexes of Baku’s Neftciler district, we had been discussing the effects of urbanization on Azerbaijani ways of life [D16-34]. Stories of vibrant social networks and intense invitational living had filled the room. Our conversation had moved in and out of celebration and lament. Following a particularly moving story of loss and disconnection, there was a pause. The weight of disruption from migration, employment challenges and shifting social constructions was visible on many faces. Stories of urban life had revealed paradoxes and conundrums to which practices of hospitality were struggling to respond. Breaking a moment of silence, Ruhana spoke up. “Hospitality is what protects us”.

Bizi qoruyur. “It protects us”. As we continued to tell our stories, there emerged an image of hospitality as something standing before all of us, something we gazed upon, in

the presence of which we were sheltered. The language of shade unfolded. As I have explored the ontological intensity of Azerbaijani hospitality roles, I have come to observe the complexities faced by Azerbaijanis, living continually within this intensity. There is a clear seeking of shade from the "law of hospitality" (Pitt-Rivers 1977, Derrida & Dufourmantelle 2000) which ontological hospitality entails. It is the shade of negotiation, of balance and presence, care and control, provision and consumption, which provides the *kölgə* of Azerbaijani hospitable being. The *qonaqperver insan* is more than an image of Azerbaijani being, it is a conception of refuge which provides shelter for this being to be pursued.

In the fall of 2020, as I was completing this current chapter, the conflict within and around the region of Nagorno-Karabakh, reached new heights. There are few disruptions to ways of life as intense as war. The conflict, though brought to a low simmer by the 1994 cease-fire, has always been a part of life as I have experienced it with Azerbaijanis. I have worked hard to avoid political discussions around this tragic situation. I have been a keen observer, however, of the anthropological experience of Azerbaijanis. Of all the challenges to hospitable being, adversarial relationships are a particularly harsh paradox (Kant 1795, Derrida & Dufourmantelle 2000, Fausto 2012). Azerbaijani experiences of this challenge are one of the starkest revelations of how the intensity of ontological hospitality can be experienced, and how it can be managed.

My earliest recognition of these most challenging of negotiations toward ontological shade was precipitated by isolated experiences, come upon unexpectedly. Occasionally, during research projects in the early 2000's I would find myself in a home where, as I interviewed the residents, I would discover the wife was ethnically Armenian. This was not information shared quickly. It was shared in hushed tones. The family was not hiding

this information. They were, in most cases, healthy members of their communities. But the complexity of the regional history in which these women lived demanded care. In several of the cases I was privileged to be able to learn more about their history, and how they have experienced their situation.

Most often, I was told stories. The storytelling itself was not surprising. In discussions of life and practice, particularly if topics are sensitive or significant, Azerbaijanis frequently employ stories to communicate propositions or principles. What struck me, however, was the character of the stories. Mariam told me how she had grown up in the regional centre of Shekhi [N00-6]. Her family lived side-by-side with Azerbaijani families. Children in the neighbourhood played together, went to school together. Her story was nostalgic, descriptive of a time when 'all was as it should be'.

Anya recounted her university days when she was studying to be a teacher [N15-8]. She remembered the rich relationships she had in those days. That was where she had met her husband. She shared, with particular fondness, about the times she would spend with friends, who, she was careful to make sure I understood, were Azerbaijanis. She spoke of tea and cooking, walks on the promenade and attendance at weddings.

I have, since, noticed similar appeals to the past within presentations of personal life stories, at various times and in various places. At a dinner table, when mention is made of the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict, the host may say, "We used to live together, you know." Or a story will be told by someone about an Armenian they knew in younger days. These comments and stories are shared carefully. But the fact that they are shared at all reveals a significant desire to reply to an intense ontological challenge. The Azerbaijani hospitable being has experienced the violence of animosity.

Nostalgia is not the only Azerbaijani response to the current ontological rift. Even in more vehement responses, there is a clear experience of disruption of self which demands a response. The language of hospitality is important in these responses. Ontological shade can be found at the *süfrə*, and within the spaces of the *eşik*. There is a claim of violation of the sacred interpersonal spaces of hospitality. Those who once 'broke bread' together, who shared interpersonal spaces, stand now as those who have broken the reverence of these moments and spaces. In nostalgic stories as well as angry ones, there is a similar principle to which appeal is made. Deeper than any violence which has occurred to physical persons, a deeper transgression runs through the prevailing narrative – invitation once accepted, has been experienced as denied and offer, once given, has been experienced as refused.

The Azerbaijani hospitable being provides an anchor to ways of life from which shade can emanate. The Azerbaijani hospitable being, a concept of self, a standard for ways of life, stands as a bulwark between hospitable beings and the intensity of ontological hospitality. While war is an extreme case, this can be seen in life as a whole. Shade is not always possible to find. In a desperate moment of frustration, during the national lockdown in response to the rapid spread of COVID-19, in the spring of 2020, a close friend lamented, over the phone [V20-7], "Who am I when I can't be with others?" His lament revealed a deep experience of ontological intensity when shade could not be found.

Modern Azerbaijani life presents numerous challenges to the pursuit of ontological shade. Urbanization, migration, economic hardship, all pull on practical capacities for hospitable ways of life. As the needs of negotiation shift, Azerbaijanis today are moving to stay in the shade. The interpersonal landscape has shifted. But it has shifted for many

Azerbaijanis. And so, these shifts are being experienced as something shared. *Biz biryoldayıq*. “We are on the same path”. This is the Azerbaijani experience today. Challenges are being met by a recommitment to the sacred journey.

Chapter Seven: A Life Observed

"It honours our past to dream about our future."

- Vignette excerpt (2015)

> The train picked up speed, across the valley, with the border behind us. One of my cabin mates broke the ice. We were the only two in the cabin who had not left to find a place to smoke. He had pulled a bunch of grapes and some goat cheese from his bag and placed them on the short table which stretched out below the window. He asked me to tell him about Baku. This was his first time, as a young Azerbaijani man who had grown up in Georgia, to visit the big city. It was a bit ironic that I, myself a foreigner, would be the one to describe the capital for him. As I shared about some of my favourite places, others were pulled into the conversation. A cabin mate from an upper bunk had returned from the corridor and was leaning in the doorway. I had been sharing some of my experiences of the park around the Genjlik subway station where we had lived for a number of years. "They have cleared all the houses," he said slipping into the cabin and sitting next to me on the lower bunk. I remember the houses that had been constructed along the edge of the park. Temporary homes for some of the thousands who had been internally displaced by the war. There was no trace of the houses now. Their architectural testimony was now under the trees and the large lake which cover the site. Late into the night as the tracks straightened out across the central plains, we put out the lights. In a few hours we would all see the city for ourselves.
>
> - Personal Journal (September 2016)

In this chapter I examine the character of the witness in Azerbaijani ways of hospitality. I describe the manner in which observant witness, alongside memorial witness, provides cohesion and coherence to these ways. I present the witness's role as that of 'looking outwards', bridging moments and spaces by testifying on behalf of hospitality and its participants. This testimony strengthens shared narratives of hospitable ways of being, celebrating them and creating spaces for them. In the face of significant ontological challenges, caused by change and disruption, it is the faithfulness of the witness, to be present, to bear, and to represent, which makes the conditions and practices of *qonaqpərvərlik* possible and fruitful.

* * * * *

Among my experiences of Azerbaijani ways of being few are as nostalgically charged as those of train travel. There is an "ontologically capacious" (Fisch 2018: xi) character to the cabins and corridors of regional train travel in Azerbaijan. In these temporally muted, unhurried spaces, where strangers and acquaintances alike share momentary residence, physical proximity prompts interpersonal approach. Conversations find depth at surprising speed. Material hospitality follows suit.

The small tables which extend below cabin windows become spaces of shared provision as bread, fruit, drink and sweets, from individual stores, are placed onto the table for mutual consumption. Echoes arise from ethnographic descriptions of North American first nations' potlatch ceremonies (Boas 1888, Jonaitis 1991, Harkin 2001, Thornton 2003), and American mid-western 'hot-dish' community meals (Sack 1997, Sutton & Wogan 2010). Hospitality narratives from railway spaces abound in my personal journals and in the archives of my anthropological research among Azerbaijanis. From within this genre, a particular category of narrative has illuminated the shape of the current chapter – experiences beyond the confines of the trains, experiences of the landscapes which train travel engages.

"When do you begin to look outwards?" We had been exchanging narratives of train travel experiences [V17-64]. My daughter's birthday party was beginning to wind down. The children were descending from their sugar highs and the women were clearing up the tables. The men had exited for quieter spaces, to the balcony off of the living room. Ilkin's question shifted our conversation. It was a temporal shift. Narratives of camaraderie and interpersonal engagement most often centre around the first part of train trips, when

acquaintances and invitations are made. Thoughts and expectations usually shift outwards as destinations are approached.

The question was directed at me, initially. Since the majority of my travel by train was in and out of Baku, I was drawn to my experiences of coming into the city by rail. There is a distinct absence of divide or crossing over in these experiences. Though an administrative point is marked to indicate the official beginning of the city, a traveller's experience of entering in is more subtle. The city begins with glimpses, physical witnesses to its imagination. Before the rise of steel and glass, there is a gradual emergence of smaller, singular signs. What one sees is only recognizable as signs of the city's presence if one knows what one is looking for, what constitutes 'the city'. Agreement is strongest at the core where witnesses abound.

Witnesses to the presence of the city are varied. Architectural witnesses reveal the city as their intensity and concentration increase. Spaces between buildings shift from natural expanses of grass and dirt to pavement and asphalt. Buildings take on significant height. Witnesses of adornment become visible as the attire of agricultural occupations is replaced with those of office workers and shopkeepers, as functional appearance gives way to the expectations of sustained public presence. Movement accelerates. Though distances between locations are shrinking, the intent of the denizens of the city is clearly to cover these distances with as little delay as possible. It is these signs of approach which pull my attention outward.

Narrative shifts towards 'looking outwards' are common in Azerbaijani hospitality accounts which involve transport. A moment of conversation with a fellow passenger, a brief episode of sharing a candy with a child who has come near, lovingly pulled from a purse having been placed there in the hopes of such an opportunity. These interpersonal

engagements, unfolding organically within the mobile "social containers" (Da Col and Shryock 2019: 3) of urban life are frequently interrupted as participants' attention is drawn towards occurrences on a different scale. Immediate proximities take on different significance as considerations of broader goals and objectives demand attention. Signs of approaching arrival at an individual's destination - the slowing down of a subway train, a sharp turn in the direction of a bus, or a recognizable shift in conditions outside - a change in lighting as new spaces are entered, visible motion observed through a window. These witnesses to progression along the arc of a journey spur acts of 'looking outwards'.

That evening, on the balcony, Ilkin provided us all with an important narrative perspective. Following his question there was a marked change in the contexts and scale of the stories which began to emerge. Negotiation of attention became a tangible aspect of the experiences we now shared. Simple experiences of being drawn to noises outside of a train were enough to prompt feelings of disconnection and disruption from what was going on inside. Javid shared a humorous story of a domino game which he lost quite badly because he was nervous about missing his rail stop. He was not going all the way to the end of the line and he was planning to disembark at a station with which he was unfamiliar. Every jolt of the train made him look outward. His cabin mates took full advantage of the situation by strategically taking furtive glances out the window to make him nervous at opportune moments. In this milieu of multi-scalar attentiveness Javid's broader life interests significantly challenged his capacity to negotiate localized interactions.

"Well, the best journeys continue in the stories they have created." Fuad took a bite of watermelon to punctuate his commentary. Following his narrative lead, we began to share stories of missed bus stops, trains going to the wrong destination, and strange things

seen out of transport windows. Many of these stories occurred alongside memorable relational events – lifelong friendships forged; business deals initiated. There, on the balcony, as witness was borne, hospitality became the vehicle for something profound. The fundamental role of attentiveness and observance in making Azerbaijani hospitable being possible, across and in-between the 'layered' realities of life, was revealed.

This chapter is about the role of witness in Azerbaijani ways of hospitality. It is about the manner in which Azerbaijani hospitable witness is created and plays its role. Witness is defined as the function of bridging moments in space and time by representing aspects of one moment while present at another. In the first section of this chapter, I provide a brief overview of the "emergence of the witness" in anthropology (Fassin 2006), identifying the significant themes of presence and representation which define disciplinary expectations in relation to witness. I then look at various types of witness within Azerbaijani ways of hospitality.

In the latter sections of this chapter, I explore the role played by witnesses in Azerbaijani ways of hospitality to facilitate negotiation of the demands of multi-scalar attentiveness. Hospitable witness is shown to provide cohesion and coherence to Azerbaijani ways of life in the midst of urbanization, social change, and the macro-dynamics of global relationships. The role of witness is described as a significant aspect of how Azerbaijanis "look outward", evaluating the conditions of life they are experiencing and shaping what they seek in their ways of life together and with others.

Defining Witness

Bəli, şahidi çağırdın! "Yes indeed, you have summoned the witness!" We had called Shalala to join us on the veranda [V16-53]. I was looking for stories. "She can tell you some of the good ones." "That's the way it should be – she knows." The group had me

primed. As Shalala made her way out, I began to prepare some narrative cues. Would I start with her favourite dishes? Perhaps, reflections on some of her most challenging moments in hosting. There were numerous aspects of Azerbaijani ways of hospitality which I had become used to discussing and to which I could ask Shalala to add her perspectives. But this could also be an opportunity to look for something new. What treasures lay within the library of Shalala's personal history of hospitable experience?

I chose to begin with some of Shalala's best memories of hosting. As she shared her stories, the conversation found its way to the role of the table and food. I asked her about the process by which she chose what to serve to guests. She replied with a question. "Did you like my *paxlava*?" I assured her I most certainly did. She had been generous with the almonds and cardamom, which she knew I enjoyed. "This is the process," she said. "Before we are guests and hosts, we are observers."

Azerbaijani hospitality narratives are full of the language of 'observance'. Expressions of receptive observance, of seeing - *görmək,* looking at - *baxmaq,* watching – *tamaşa etmək*, blend with those of invitational observance in seeking and searching – *axtarmaq*. My personal enamorment with certain Azerbaijani phrases, which are common in highly active narratives, has often been a source of shared humour within my research networks. One of these phrases is *görən kimi*, translated literally, "as it was seen," or "as soon as it became visible." Semantically this phrase is an expression of immediacy – right away, at that moment. Noting the frequency with which this phrase is employed in hospitality narratives, I have often asked questions about it. It has caught my attention because it is used in situations where, clearly, more than simple progression of events is evident. There is frequently a deeper narrative function at play when this phrase is employed.

Humour has arisen because of my regular querying of this phrase. When someone uses it, another individual in the group will wink in my direction and shrug. “Oh look! What a coincidence!” *Görən kimi!* “It just so happened!” Rustam told us a story about the day his boss almost fired him, but he salvaged the moment with a well-timed pot of tea and a gift [D15-32]. In his story, *görən kimi*, he saw the gift, a newly published first edition of a book, sitting on his table and was able to seize the moment. As we asked him more questions about the event, we quickly elucidated that the book was not just randomly out in the open, nor did the pot of tea simply appear, fortuitously. Though he had not specifically planned the event, Rustam knew the potential value of the book and had it readily accessible for the right moment. The tea, in good Azerbaijani form, was available because one never knows who might drop by. *Görən kimi* was an expression of noticing, observance of the moment when hospitality could be employed. This moment could be seized because signs of its potential could be recognized. Conditions of observance had generated an ‘immediacy’ which allowed for particular expression of Azerbaijani hospitality.

These conditions of observance are a significant foundation for Azerbaijani ways of hospitality. They reveal a character of witness which complements the function of ‘memorial witness’, testifying about the past for the purposes of the present. The concept of witness is frequently defined by its role of ‘conveyance’ forward (Stephen 2017: 86). The “rubric of testimony studies” (Krämer and Weigel 2017: ix) has come to envelope a range of perspectives on this function of bridging past and present. The role of witness in Azerbaijani hospitality, however, calls upon a conception of witness that embraces observant witness, as well as memorial witness. Observant witness is attentiveness to what is occurring in the present, in order to shape conditions to make a desired future more likely.

Observant witness is at the heart of the interpersonal attentiveness which *qonaqpərvərlik* embraces. Along with memorial witness, observant witness provides cohesion and coherence to the broad narrative arc of *qonaqpərvərlik* in Azerbaijani ways of life. Within ways of life in which hospitality is “always possible” and to be hospitable is to enable possibility, hospitality becomes something understood well before it fully materializes. It is recognized in a multiplicity of witnesses and is experienced as it grows and is managed. It is something to be constructed, something that emerges.

Conditions of Witness

The discipline of anthropology has a rich heritage of presence across scenes of witness. This heritage has given rise to a variety of invitations. Anthropologists are increasingly invited to bear expert witness in legal proceedings, for political asylum cases (Good 2007, McGranahan 2020), for questions of land and rights (Talebi 2019). Invitations to forensic witness (Lindsay, Ross, Read & Toglia 2007) have also spurred involvement beyond judicial venues towards disciplinary reflection on the experiences of persons and communities in the processes of remembrance and testimony (Marcus 2005, Wieviorka 2006). Anthropologists have been clearly willing to step into invitations from a world of need, to contribute practically and philosophically, by bearing witness.

There is a testimony, in this willingness, to the illeity (Levinas 1974) experienced by the discipline of anthropology in the face of ‘the witness’. An identity of witness (Behar 1996, Reed-Danahay 1997, Fassin 2011) has come to shape anthropological self-understanding as well as practice. It is not surprising, therefore, that in the anatomy of the witness lines are blurred between ethnography and life (Mclean and Leibing 2007), between observation and critique (Guilhot 2012), between the worlds in which the anthropologist moves, across space and time (Bacchidu 2004).

Two components of anthropological witness have gained recognition, in various capacities, across functional as well as contextual spheres. These components are commonly identified in analyses of anthropology as witness. They are also prominent in anthropological studies of witness. I have found these same components to be helpful as a framework for understanding the role of the witness in Azerbaijani ways of hospitality. They are presence and representation.

It is not difficult to find 'presence' in anthropological discourse. "Being there" is a popular description employed by anthropologists to describe everything from the character of anthropological research (Geertz 1988, Watson 1999, Borneman 2009), to postures within anthropological relationships (Coleman and Collins 2006; Heffernan, Murphy and Skinner 2020). Presence has come to be understood as more than just physical co-location. Anthropological presence has become defined by various intentional modes of attentive being – participatory observation (Spradley 1980, DeWalt and DeWalt 2011), ethnographic immersion, collaborative engagement (Simonelli 2011, Sillitoe 2015).

At the heart of these intentional ways of being is an understanding that presence is something achieved, by a process of entering in. The anthropologist, the researcher, comes into a scene of presence from other places and times. This connection between 'coming from' and 'entering in' is defining of the character of presence. Presence is vicarious. One who has entered in can never fully separate themselves from the moments and spaces which they occupied prior to the given moment (Gadamer 2004). Nor can they separate themselves from the moments and spaces which they imagine will follow (Descola 2014). Both history and aspiration are represented in every moment of presence. The one who is present is someone formed by the past, with intentions for the future.

I first encountered this vicarious character of presence in the frequent appearance of individuals from other times and places in conversations about Azerbaijani hospitality. As I engaged with groups and individuals over extended periods of time, my history and my aspirations became increasingly known to those with whom I was conducting research. The influences that had shaped me, the perspectives which were clearly dear to me, the persons who had played important roles in my life, and the experiences which made up the beaded string of my life story; The hopes that I had as I explored the depths of Azerbaijani ways of life, the intentions I had for representing what I was learning, and the theories I was seeing unfold in my mind. All these were present with me, in my speech, in my actions, in the manner in which I was with and among my research partners. As they came to know this ecology of presence that was unique to me, they began to call upon the vicarious presence of others who were also present among us by virtue of their connection to me.

In a moment of musing on explanations or interpretations someone would ask, "What would your professor say?" Or, "Do you hear this in other places?" There was an awareness that what we were discussing had the potential to be enriched by invocation of these vicarious authorities. Equally, queries on the future called upon interactions with expected interlocutors. "How are you planning to explain this to your conference attendees next week?" "Do you think this will work well in your chapter on the guest?" We were never alone. Significant others were always available to us through the vicariosity of presence.

My research partners would also bring their own significant others into our shared presence. It was common to hear, "My grandfather used to say…" or "I hope my mother doesn't hear that story!" It was here that the figure of the witness arose as an important

element in my experience of research, but also as a significant element of what I was coming to understand about the conditions which make up *qonaqpərvərlik.* The foundation of hospitable trust which undergirds Azerbaijani expectations for interpersonal encounters relies on the role of witness, to carefully steward hospitable presence across temporal and spatial horizons.

"This is what we bear" [V12-22]. Zaur turned the photograph so we could see it. "That, my friends, is my mother's *şəkərbura*[1]." I had enjoyed his mother's baked delights on numerous occasions. Gazing at the picture, I was connected for a moment to the group of men in fatigues, sharing a few bites of home outside their tent. Witness filled the room. Zaur's past joined our present as tastes and sights mingled and began to inspire. For the next several hours we lapsed into stories of army service, of home-cooked meals, of friendship and moments of hospitality. Other pictures came out, in albums and on phones. Plans and invitations were made, as memories prompted desires to gather again, with one another, but also with others who had drifted in and out of our conversations and accountings. Late into the evening, after pouring another glass of tea, Zaur put the pot down and placed his hand on my shoulder. "And now it is yours to bear."

In moments of memorial encounter it is difficult to cleanly separate times and spaces from the echoes and percussions they exchange with one another. Within anthropology the language of representation is frequently invoked to describe the character of these exchanges (Clifford and Marcus 2010, Vargas-Cetina 2013). Representation is commonly defined by the concept of reproduction (Fabian 1990),

[1] A half-moon shaped sweetbread filled with sugar and ground nuts.

conveying or portraying, in a particular moment, aspects of something that is not itself present (Zeitlyn 2014). The ethical and epistemological challenges of representation as an act of reproduction have been robustly discussed within anthropology (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, Asad 1994, Blakey 2010). Representation makes ethical claims (Grotti and Brightman 2021) regarding the suitability and authority of the one who represents another. Representation also makes epistemological claims (Toren and Pina-Cabral 2011) regarding the "accuracy" of what is conveyed, the "fit between reality and its reproduction" (Fabian 1990: 754).

"This is what we bear." Understanding Azerbaijani conceptions of the role of witness within hospitable ways of being has required engagement with etic articulations of 'bearing'. The stewardship of hospitable presence which *qonaqpərvərlik* entails is sustained by a conception of representation that is broader than the function of reproduction. It is a stewardship of remediation. There is an expectation of hospitable persons within Azerbaijani ways of life to 'take hospitality with them'; to *aparmaq,* convey, relay, to *daşımaq*, carry, bear, to *gətirmək*, bring, to *addatmaq*, transfer, direct, to *gəzdirmək*, draw out, bring forth, by various, intentional means of attentive, observational, memorial and testimonial witness. And in this bearing, to strengthen the ties between times and spaces within which objects and persons have invested in conditions of hospitable being. This strengthening of ties across temporal and spatial divides is the function of Azerbaijani hospitable witness.

It is the role of witness that prompts representations of particular hospitality in toasts and anecdotes, in accounts of laudable hosting and memorable guests. There is a breadth of Azerbaijani hospitality which can be experienced in moments but goes well beyond the confines of singular times and spaces. Built into the fabric of

Azerbaijani hospitable practices is the telling of stories and display of objects or pictures which give immediate presence to past moments of hospitality. The remediatory function of these stories, objects and pictures can be seen in significant depth, as it is common for them be shared, as they themselves have been received. Tableware, cloths, objects displayed on mantlepieces and brought down in the midst of conversations, culinary offerings which prompt the sharing of generational recipes, humorous accounts of fantastical occurrences of abundance and the inevitable videos and pictures which are brought out for guests to enjoy – of weddings, parties, and festive picnics, these are staples of moments in the cohesive stream that is *qonaqpərvərlik*, the flow of memorialized practices which are remembered even as they are repeated, created even as they are represented.

"We bear witness to that which we recognize (*tanımaq*)." We were seated in the courtyard of the community hall, beneath the mulberry trees [V13-19]. The 40-day memorial of Hajar's father's passing was coming to a close. The family had worked hard over these weeks of mourning and transition. This was the closest I had been to someone going through such a season. I had been given the gift of participation, invited to join those who walked in community with Hajar and her family through this time. Along the way, I had been given the additional gift of conversations about what I was observing.

We had been discussing the manner in which younger Azerbaijanis continue to engage, even in urban settings, in memorial practices that are rooted in ways of life that are more suited to rural contexts. Hajar had been sharing about her childhood, of her own experiences of the memorial process, a number of which had occurred in this very *həyət*, courtyard, where she had grown up. Though most of her relatives and

family friends had moved away from the suburban block in which she and her mother still lived, it was in times like these that relational bonds were renewed. Even individuals and families who had moved to places beyond the borders of Azerbaijan would come to take part in these memorial events.

And around the *süfrə*, as the traditional memorial practices were enacted, other times and places were evoked. Stories of other funerals and wakes, of special moments from the life of Hajar's father and extended family, pictures of other gatherings, and gifts to mark the moments of gathering. "We bear witness to that which we recognize."

"And we give it recognition." Another of the teachers from our cohort spoke up, in response to Hajar's words. "This is how we honour (*şərəfləndirmək*) that which we recognize."

Rooted in acts of noticing, of attentive observation, Azerbaijani ways of hospitality rely on the role of witness to provide a rhythmic continuity of recognizable examples and reminders of what *qonaqpərvərlik* looks like. This continuous stream of recognition goes beyond making note and requires more than repetition or mimicry. There is an obligation carried by being present in a given moment, to represent other people and other places, so as to bring deeper meaning, to what is occurring as well as to these past times and spaces.

Annette Wieviorka refers to this kind of discursive provision of meaning as a modality of orientation, providing participants in particular moments a necessary "framework for memory and memorialization" (2006: 25), according to which they can define their place, among others, in the world. The language of modality, of witness as a way of knowing, providing an epistemological bridge between moments

of presence, describes well the conditions of Azerbaijani hospitable witness. In addition to cohesion, the role of witness brings coherence to the stream of honoured moments which make up *qonaqpərvərlik*.

A Gathered Presence

"There is no hospitality without walnuts" [V16-59] Amidst the laughter, Rafik let his comment linger. He had opened up the generative space. Stories followed. Just down the hill from where we sat, stretched the stalls and booths of the Nəsimi bazar, laden with the building blocks of Azerbaijani cuisine – spices, dried fruits and nuts, fresh produce from every corner of the country. We had started our work early that morning. Most of the group had come in from outside Baku. We had each been working on our own research and we were now spending a few days together, sharing what we had learned, preparing for a joint publication. As we broke for tea, the late morning sun was highlighting the array of colours on display in the bazar below.

The laughter among us, as we settled into Rafik's narrative cue, was one of affirmation and recognition. Much of Rafik's livelihood depends on walnuts. We had come to learn that interactions with Rafik invited connections to the calendric rhythms of the nut groves of north-western Azerbaijan, the ebbs and flows of life which revolve around the trees and their harvest. We met with Rafik when the trees allowed. And when we met, walnuts were always present. He didn't leave his trees behind. They came with him, to the table in various forms, and through his stories and perspectives on life.

Though I had first come to know Rafik in down-season moments, the weave of our shared life together soon pulled me in, beneath the walnut trees. From late September to early November the primary place I could connect with Rafik and his extended family would be there. This was a labour intensive, time-sensitive season, the season of the

harvest. It was a milieu that resonated with me from my early years as a young man in the farming communities of south-eastern Manitoba, Canada. In the bustle of the harvest season there is an interpersonal synergy which arises as work and socialization are blended within moments of interpersonal engagement. With Rafik, long days of nut collection eased their way into late evening meals around the long wooden tables at the edge of the grove, in the clearing where his grandfather had built their home. And under the sunlight speckled canopy, conversations found a depth that is difficult to achieve outside of the spaces created by shared labour.

"There is no hospitality without walnuts." It would, indeed, be difficult to detach the walnut from the intricacies of Azerbaijani ways of hospitality. Most Azerbaijanis know the walnut as it is encountered at the later stages of its journey, on display for purchase or at the *süfrə*. Walnuts make their way into a steady staple of jams and baked goods, are stuffed into roasted meats, placed into sauces with pomegranates or plums, and served whole alongside cheeses, dried fruits and other nuts. I have even enjoyed various walnut wines as an accompaniment to the sweet end of an Azerbaijani meal.

Walnuts stand as a witness within the narrative arc that is *qonaqpərvərlik*. They are among the multiple expressions of what I have come to refer to as 'inanimate witnesses' – non-personal elements of hospitality that play a specific role in recognizing, remembering, celebrating and creating expectations within the experience of being that Azerbaijanis call *qonaqpərvərlik*. Inanimate witnesses bear testimony in their particular presence. When walnuts, for example, appear within an occasion of Azerbaijani hospitality, they take specific forms. These forms are particular to the manner in which Azerbaijanis practice hospitality. The presence of

walnuts, in these forms, communicates to Azerbaijanis who observe them that conditions of hospitality are available.

When walnuts are purchased, as dishes are prepared with them, as they are displayed, and as they are consumed, witness to *qonaqpərvərlik* is borne. Azerbaijanis who observe walnuts being purchased will immediately associate the purchase with a future hospitality event. When an Azerbaijani observes a tray of walnuts, almonds and raisins set on a table, numerous memories of hospitality experiences come to mind. Around a *süfrə,* as a moment for sharing tea approaches, Azerbaijanis begin to imagine what will be laid alongside, and as *paxlava* or *şəkərbura* are eaten, they recognize when the flavours and presentations match their expectations.

Inanimate witnesses communicate that hospitality is occurring. They bear testimony to practices of hospitality as they have come to be learned, across the history that Azerbaijanis share. And they signal the shaping of Azerbaijani hospitable imagination and preparation. They remind and proclaim, 'this is what hospitality looks like, it is present here and now, as it has been, and as we expect it will continue to be'.

When Azerbaijanis share their experiences of hospitality, inanimate witnesses fill the narrative spaces. Great attention is given to their aesthetic description. The beauty and flow of Azerbaijani hospitality is created by the gathering of inanimate witnesses. Careful choreography of gifts, foods, utensils, decorations, memorabilia, and furniture transforms spaces of potential hospitality, and the persons within them, into expressions of *qonaqpərvərlik.*

Mahira was describing a dinner event that she and her sisters had arranged for their extended family [V12-49]. At various points in her description there were expressions of recognition and affirmation from within the group. "That must have

been fantastic!" "Good choice!" "Oh, the crystal set with the small diamonds? Yes! We have had that same set in our family since Grandma moved in." "Beet salad? With the walnuts? Oh, I can just taste it!"

As she described the manner in which the event unfolded, we engaged in our minds with the inanimate witnesses that she had gathered. And, as the narrative came to a close, Gunel spoke up. "Now that is hospitality." It was a pronouncement of recognition, of what had been accomplished. A pronouncement that gathering had achieved consummation.

Negotiating Witness

From within the sequence of gathered spaces, across which I have moved on my journey through Azerbaijani ways of life, my gaze continues to be drawn outwards by the pull of witness. There is a shared echo of this attentive arrest in the broader anthropological experience. Didier Fassin (2011) has employed the language of "humanitarian reason" to describe the manner in which anthropologists are beckoned to 'look outwards' by the plight of the world which they observe. A particularly powerful anchor for witness has been found in worlds of trauma and tragedy. Standing in observation of such worlds, anthropologists have often been pulled by a desire to provide voice and recognition to those who have experienced violence and destruction. It can be difficult, from within this space anchored by pain and despair, to stretch the "affective economy" (Ahmed 2004) of witness. This is, however, what has occurred within me, as I have experienced Azerbaijani ways of hospitality. Coming to understand the role of the witness in these ways has been a discovery of more varied anchors, encapsulating arcs of lament but also joy.

The role of Azerbaijani hospitable witness is not constrained by inanimate expression. Witness is also a personal, positioned endeavour. It is from particular places and times

that witness is borne, and it is in particular places and times that representation is made. This particularity is embodied by persons. Like the host and the guest, the witness is a personal role, taking on and shaped by its enactment. Azerbaijani hospitality is filled with the bearing of personal, positional witness. And it is in appreciation and identification with the positional witness that I have found my own self and voice. Witness has provided an ontological architecture to my journey with Azerbaijanis, and has revealed, for me, significant aspects of the structures of being which guide and shape hospitable Azerbaijani persons.

Positional witness functions within the sphere of hospitable participation. As Jamal expressed it, "witness to hospitality is best borne by one who is standing in the midst of it (*içərisindən)*" [V16-59]. We were deep in our discussion in the living room of his apartment overlooking the Nəsimi bazar. Reflecting on our various research projects, we had moved into a discussion regarding the elements of a context which can provide legitimacy to the stories and experiences which we are given by others. I had, by that time, collected hundreds of stories and personal experiences. I was looking for some perspectives to anchor the role of witness in Azerbaijan ways of hospitality.

Jamal's 'positioned' conception of hospitable witness prompted stories from around the room of the manner in which witness is borne by individuals who are present when hospitality occurs. Sariyya spoke of the *əhval-ruhiyyə*, the mood and spirit, of hospitable desire, the sense which arises within a space that those who are present would welcome the unfolding of particular hospitality. "A little *sövq* (prompting, nudge) never hurts." She shared some of her personal methods of testing the waters when potential hospitality was being explored. "That's why I like my crystal teaware." We enjoyed a good laugh as she told us about her family practice of 'rattling the *nəlbəkilər* (saucers)'. When people would

drop by their house, she or one of her daughters would surreptitiously move some teaware around in the background and watch to see how the potential guests responded. If they settled back in their chairs, it was a green light for action. This would also give an opportunity, however, for indications to be made of wanting to move on. Tea would still be served, but Sariyya and her family would now know to keep watching, to continue to gauge the *əhval-ruhiyyə*, to prepare for a good closing, or to keep 'prompting'.

Bearing witness to hospitable desire is only possible when one has come to recognize it. The body posture and verbal signals of one who desires to be a guest must be learned. Likewise, the signs that an individual desires to become a host. Azerbaijanis learn to recognize these signs by virtue of extended participation in a stream of moments, across times and spaces, in which guesting, and hosting have emerged. These moments include experiences that are described as positive, but also those which are lamented.

I remember a particular moment when the role of this kind of testimonial lament began to sink in for me. I was walking with a colleague from our office to the Department of Immigration to pick up a document [E09-16]. We had an appointment, which I was anxious to keep. Along the way we met our lawyer, an individual who was older than both of us, and who had been very influential in recent weeks, helping us with a particularly difficult issue. We greeted one another, exchanged good wishes and moved on in our different directions. And as we moved away, Rovshan, my colleague, told me a story [N09-4].

When Rovshan was in the army he remembered the steep learning curve he had encountered in restructuring his personal habits to meet new disciplinary requirements. He told me how challenging it was to be pushing hard from morning to night, training, following orders, keeping to a strict routine. He described a

particular day when he received a package from his mother filled with homemade baked goods. He had a brief moment in his barracks when he opened the package and looked up to see his bunk mates looking at him. In just a few seconds they knew they all needed to be outside for muster. Rovshan described for me how he opened the package, laid it on his bed and gestured quietly to the group to dig in. They all knew what would happen next. But they enjoyed the moment. When their superior officer entered in to see them eating, he was furious. They were all punished.

I expected Rovshan to continue his story with some kind of evaluative conclusion. But he didn't. The conundrum of the moment was the moral of the story. The story allowed for us to reflect on our moment on the street with the lawyer. Should we have invited him for tea? He himself had offered to take us out for lunch. We had quickly turned down his offer. Now, as we walked away, Rovshan was reliving moments of hospitable negotiation under pressure.

Whether expressed verbally, through testimony, or choregraphed and read by means of signs and signals, positional witness is at the heart of the negotiation which Azerbaijani ways of hospitality require. Positional witness arises out of the "historically effected consciousness" (Gadamer 2004: 341) of those who have been guests and hosts. To speak of hospitality, in appreciation or out of desperation, one must have first lived an experience. To recognize a moment of potential guesting or hosting, one must have come into an understanding of what such moments look like, how the persons within them move and respond to one another, inviting or shifting away. And within particular hospitality events, through testimony and signals, observation and response, the uniqueness of an event unfolds as the persons within it create something new together. It is as a present host or guest that one bears witness to the enactments of self and others in past moments

of hospitality. It is out of one's experience as a past guest or host that one imagines and seeks to create the hosts or guests one hopes will emerge.

The positional witness bears testimony from within the sphere of existence that is *qonaqpərvərlik*: "Look at it from here." When a story is told, when a picture is shown, when the desire for a cup of tea is noticed, when the opportunity is taken to save one's job with the offer of a gift, these are acts of stewardship, providing cohesion to Azerbaijani ways of life. These acts call upon attentive, historically conscious presence, to gaze outwards, towards the wider narrative of hospitable being, and to call others to do the same. It is a call to 'see this guest', 'encourage this host', 'celebrate the mood and spirit of hospitality which we are experiencing', 'live up to the beauty of hospitable practice which we have learned to appreciate', 'imagine together moments of hospitality which will fulfil our shared desires'. But this seeing, encouraging, celebrating, living up to and imagining is anchored in what has been seen, encouragement that has been received, beauty which has been experienced, desires which are recognized for their consistency with those of others, in other places and other times.

"Look at it from here" [V13-23]. It was a heartfelt plea. We were planning a conference event which would take place in just a few weeks. Ahmad was clinging tightly, with obvious frustration, to the list of attendees. His other hand was tapping his chest as he looked at me across the table. "From here." He continued to tap his chest.

My attention was arrested, pulled from the details of seating and sequencing towards Ahmad's personal concerns. And then further outward still, towards a greater understanding of the broader story in which we were both involved, a story within which

Ahmad's own place was significantly different than my own. And yet, a story within which our places were also beginning to converge.

As various aspects of the event came up for discussion, Ahmad was frequently surprised by my suggestions. When one or another individual should speak, the order of topics, the layout of spaces, and the kinds of decisions we were planning to make on our own as opposed to involving one or another of the upcoming participants in deliberations - my proposals on each of these particularities were met with significant pauses and silence. Ahmad would sit back and look at me inquisitively or furrow his brow. Sometimes I 'got it right', but not often enough. When I asked for an explanation for his concern, he frequently laboured to articulate what he was experiencing. His most successful replies were scenic. He would recount past experiences of similar decisions or ask me to imagine with him how a particular decision would be likely to play out. Finally, as Ahmad made his call of witness, it opened a window for us both on the character of our experience of shared imagination.

I recalled Fatima's query as she probed my internal conceptions of hospitable practice. "Where is your guest?" As Ahmad and I engaged one another around the construction of this upcoming event, we were bumping up against differences in our internal conceptions, those aspects of gathering others about which we had a plethora of juxtaposed assumptions and expectations. Until cohesion could be established between these internal conceptions and the particularities of the conference event, we were at odds. And Ahmad named the centrifugal centre of this search for cohesion – establishment of a place from which we looked outward. Negotiation of hospitable engagement required locating this place, from which the narrative arc of *qonaqpərvərlik* could be seen and recognized,

could be described, could be affirmed. Negotiation relied upon positional witness, to guide the adoption or correction of hospitable practices.

A Place Among Us

Memory stretches across the ridge. Beneath the pines of Baku's Highland Park, a complexity of narratives is gathered and shaped. In the café and walkways of the lower end, one can catch some of the best views of the city and the sea beyond., and as one moves up along the paths, a pluricentricity of observance emerges. At the entrance to the park is the Turkish Mosque, standing in curious juxtaposition to the British Military Memorial, an expression of particular posthumous hospitality, in memory of the commonwealth soldiers who gave their lives defending Baku against Turkish forces in World War I. Along the upper reaches, the granite reminders of the *şəhidlər*, martyrs, make their procession towards the Eternal Flame. School children often come here, on days of memorial, to be told the stories. Here, too, presidents and dignitaries frequently pay their respects.

The Alley of Martyrs, which fills the majority of the park's space, has borne a great weight of shifting commemorative allegiances. It was originally consecrated in 1918 as a Muslim cemetery during the final throes of the Russian Civil War. Following its unceremonial destruction by the Bolsheviks the area was turned into an amusement park, in the midst of which a grand statue of Sergei Kirov was placed. The park was to be known by this name, Kirov Park, until the early 1990s, when it regained its memorial status, venerating those who died in the uprising which led to Azerbaijan's independence from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. On the same site, national heroes who have died in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict have now also been interred.

Highland Park has been one of my favourite places to sit and reflect on my experiences of life. It is a quiet place, up above the bustle of the city, and on most days, offers inspiring views of the Absheron coast. It has also been a place where I have frequently brought foreign guests, to enrich their own journeys of coming into Azerbaijani ways of life. There is a broad, multiscalar hospitality in these spaces. Individual, local, national and international narratives mingle here. Those who make their way to and through the site come with a variety of personal and associative motivations – religious, patriotic, academic - seeking penance or solace, seeking better understanding or to pay homage through the gift of presence.

It has been interesting to observe the varied manner in which the gathered witnesses of Highland Park are experienced by others. One or another element within the space may resonate strongly with a person, while they may pass others by without much thought. Motivations for entering the park often dictate what is experienced. Those who have come with an express interest in visiting the Alley of Martyrs may move quickly past the smaller memorials nearby. If views and a quiet pot of tea with friends is one's goal, minimal attention may be given to the park's array of architectural witnesses. But it is also the case that, personal purposes aside, the witnesses themselves can draw a person in. And as they do so, they may arrest original purposes and dispositions.

During a period of time when parts of Highland Park were being developed in the mid-2000s I remember a conversation with an Azerbaijani colleague regarding the park's seemingly contradictory juxtapositions - the sombre marble passages rising above the jovial clusters of café tables, quiet benches under the canopies of pine overlooking towers of glass and steel, webs of asphalt and pavement in the distance [V08-19]. We were discussing, in particular, the location of the British Memorial in close proximity to the

Turkish Mosque. I was curious about his opinion on the witness which was borne by these disparate monuments, and their co-presence in this particular space. To what were we being called to 'look outward'?

"We want you to remember," said Ralf, "There is a continued space for you among us."

I have reflected often on Ralf's words, as I have visited Highland Park, on my own and with others. He had, in a succinct manner, positioned the witness within Azerbaijani ways of being. I was drawn back to my encounters with Telman, in southern Ukraine, to my first experiences of 'invitation which lies open long before it finds expression'. And, to my growing understanding of the anchors which keep Azerbaijani hosts and guests tethered. It is witness that provides coherence to Azerbaijani ways of hospitality, facilitating the call to invitation and participation which defines *qonaqpərvərlik*, the sustained reminder that "there is a place for you among us", that this place has continuity and endurance, and that "we want you to remember" the availability of this place.

Chapter Eight: Conclusions

"To be Azerbaijani is to weep and sing though few understand"

- Vignette excerpt (2017)

"I will always recognize this one." Huseyn lifted the *saz*[1], cradling its dark mulberry bowl in his palms."I watched this tree grow. They are all different, you know." I walked with him as he carried the intimately crafted instrument from his studio, down the corridor, and into the small gallery. It had been a privilege, over the course of nearly a year, to watch one of Azerbaijan's most sought-after luthiers bring life to this masterpiece. "Would you like to hear it played?", asked Huseyn. How could I refuse?

- Personal Journal (2015)

"And now it is yours to bear."

Zaur's words have lingered with me as I have written this final chapter of my work. There is a particular "propriety" (Sherry 1983) with which I have come to bear the gift of witness. Coming to the end of this research project has spurred reflection on the manner in which writing broadens the ecology within which witness is exchanged. Bearing witness has moved beyond train platforms and toasts at tables. I have gained new appreciations for the dynamics of researched spaces, for the arc of experience which stretches from first moments of recognition, across shared engagements, towards conclusions, memories, recollection and ultimately, to evaluation and articulation. Now, in this act of articulation, the arc has been extended even further. Spaces of farewell and closure have become spaces of offer, of potential, of welcome.

[1] A plucked stringed instrument, similar to a lute, central to bardic music in the Republic of Azerbaijan.

This is my testimony. I have been in corridors and offices, homes and cafes, in parks and on mountain paths, where Azerbaijani ways of hospitality, *qonaqpervərlik*, were being formed. When my journey through these spaces began, I didn't have the words to name them for what they were. But that is no longer the case. *Qonaqpervərlik* now describes something of which I have been a part, something about which I have had deep discussion with others who have lived and been formed within these spaces. What I have written in this work is a selected articulation of how I have come to bear witness to Azerbaijani ways of hospitality.

Rooms of Light

The rays of the late morning sun framed the row of chairs adjacent to where we were seated [V10-10].

"Come into the light."

At Perviz's invitation we shifted our places around the table. From our newly illuminated position we were better able to engage with the collection of photographs, empowered to see them differently and appreciate them more fully. Before moving we had held the pictures, entirely within our grasp, but were restricted in the manner with which we could experience them. As we moved, we gave up our aesthetic engagement all together, focusing our attention on repositioning. Once seated in the sunlit frame, we were finally able to look once again at the same photographs, this time experienced in a new way.

I have come to the close of this multi-year journey of 'coming into the light'. I have described, in these pages, the manner in which this journey unfolded, the discoveries and transformations which I experienced along the way. It began as an experience of difference, a dawning recognition of the importance that hospitality holds in Azerbaijani

ways of life. Setting out to understand the force which hospitality clearly bears on these ways, I moved towards Azerbaijanis, towards the spaces in which Azerbaijani ways of life shine most brightly. This required a re-imagining, a re-posturing of myself and my perspectives.

In recognition of the existential nature of this journey across a frontier of difference I embraced existential perspectives, guided by personal as well as contextually illuminated methodologies and methods. From within the disciplinary niche of existential anthropology I engaged with the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, establishing a set of postures which shaped my choice of research tools and approaches as I sought to address some of anthropology's epistemological concerns. In this written account of my research journey, I have given significant space to description of these postures. They were philosophically and methodologically foundational to my work, and to my growth as one who has come to know the concerns which Azerbaijanis carry in the space between their hopes and desires and the reality they are experiencing with others.

As I made myself proximal to these spaces of concern, I embraced Gadamer's call to respond to personal and anthropological finitude of being with a determination to seek others. I entered into the frontier between self and other, the frontier in which anthropological research resides. It has been a journey of rising up to listen (Gros 2014: 23, Nietzsche 1968), of movement inspired by the hope of illumination. On this journey I have discovered personal limitations and longings, and my concerns have found a new focus and direction. I have seen and have been seen. The experience has been transformational.

I have been challenged in my capacity for epistemological humility. I have discovered the rich empowerment to be found in a posture of confidence and acceptance

of the person I have become through what I have experienced, though this person is finite and constrained in numerous ways. Likewise, I have grown in my capacity for appreciation of others. This has been fostered through a posture of affirmation, recognizing the existential value of Azerbaijani ways of life and has broadened my attraction to the potential which they hold for enriching my own being.

I have come into a deepening posture of openness, embracing epistemic faith, with the realization that Azerbaijani ways of life cannot be adequately understood solely within the frames of understanding which I have brought with me. I have been led into an understanding of the logic within which Azerbaijani ways of life reside, the manner in which Azerbaijani ways of life are founded on a commitment to conditions of hospitable being.

My research data consisted of personal narratives of hospitality experiences, my own and those of others. More than one hundred of these narratives have been anthologically arranged as steppingstones across the breadth of my writing. These narratives have provided language and illustrations for me to construct an ethnographic description of the central ways in which hospitality shapes Azerbaijani ways of life. My methodology and methods have aligned themselves with the perspectives and practices of existential phenomenology.

I wove my narrated ethnography around the hospitable figures of host, guest, and witness. As I have engaged within this framework, I have experienced a growing appreciation for my own journey into the role of witness. It has been a journey from being a witness *of* Azerbaijani ways of hospitality towards becoming one who could bear witness *to* these ways. And as my research came to its full conclusion, a recognizable

transformation had occurred within me as I had become one *by whom* witness could be borne.

The narrative which has unfolded across my journey of research has been an ontological one. I have come to understand the Azerbaijani conception of *qonaqpervərlik* as a lived commitment to conditions which are to be sustained, a shared way of life founded on gracious trust in one another to sustain these conditions. I have experienced the manner in which Azerbaijani ways of hospitality function as a field of participation within which life is lived, a space between participants within which there is a continuity of hospitable presence as persons move in and out of various domains. *Qonaqpervərlik* has been described to me as something carried by individuals as they move through contiguous interpersonal spaces. It is facilitated by a continuity of personal experience across moments of hospitality. This coherent, mobile self is tethered at one end to past experiences and expectations, but is ever adapting and negotiating in present moments, to foster current conditions of hospitality. I discovered, in Azerbaijani ways of hospitality, an ontological anchor, a conception of what is desirable, a guide to being, as Azerbaijanis live out their existential continuity.

Through exploration around the figures of host, guest and witness, I have come to understand, in more depth, the character of these conditions of hospitable being. The practices and considerations of the Azerbaijani host have revealed a conception of 'living invitationally', a readiness at all times to become a host, to open spaces of hospitality and to fill them with provision. The Azerbaijani host has been described to me as a purveyor of abundance, beyond the simple distribution of goods, a person who makes themself abundantly available to others in an abundance of being. The Azerbaijani host is the *sahib*, holding power of domain, control of hospitality spaces.

The host contributes to hospitality conditions by maintaining potential for hosting, the capacity to open a *süfrə*, a locus around which hospitality can arise. This capacity is managed through constant awareness of possible hospitality moments, and through the maintenance of social networks and management of personal means.

In harmony with the host, I have come to know the Azerbaijani guest as 'a person formed on the way to others', a physically and ontologically mobile role. The physical mobility of the guest has been described to me as a process of preparing one's self to be in the presence of others, followed by intentional motion towards others, culminating in acts of entering receptively into shared spaces.

The mobile figure of the guest, expressed through sustained practices of planning, adjustment, responsiveness and observation, has provided an important hermeneutic for my understanding of the Azerbaijani world of invitational living. In this world, motion across interpersonal encounters is experienced and negotiated as one of continual reception as well. I have seen the manner in which this ontologically intense space of invitation and reception is embodied by the Azerbaijani hospitable being, the *qonaqperver insan*, one who is available to become a particular host or a particular guest at any moment.

As stories of hospitality have been shared with me, I have gained insights into the role which hospitality plays, to brighten life, and to provide a refuge for life's challenges, the conundrums and interpersonal demands which have the potential to emotionally and spiritually overwhelm. I have seen the manner in which Azerbaijani ways of hospitality provide 'shade', *kölgə,* to hospitable beings, through the creation of spaces for negotiation of balance and presence, care and control, provision and consumption. Azerbaijanis have described the ways in which such spaces of shade are

sought and lived into, in the face of war, enmity, and strife, when hospitable expectations are most challenged.

Across the spaces and moments of shared invitation and reception which define *qonaqpervərlik,* a synthesizing function was revealed in the role of witness. The witness bridges moments in space and time by representing aspects of one moment while present at another. The Azerbaijani hospitable being is expected to 'take hospitality with them', by various, intentional means of attentive, observational, memorial and testimonial witness. This bearing strengthens the ties between times and spaces within which objects and persons have invested in conditions of hospitable being.

In my personal experiences and in the narratives which were shared with me, I came to see the attentive observance which is required of the Azerbaijani hospitable witness, to carefully steward hospitable presence across temporal and spatial horizons, and to call others to do the same. In this function of stewardship, the Azerbaijani hospitable witness was described to me as a provider of coherence to ways of hospitality. The witness facilitates the call to invitation and participation which defines *qonaqpərvərlik.* I observed the manner in which Azerbaijani hospitable witness, borne by inanimate objects as well persons in hospitable roles, can achieve a gathered presence, created by the compilation of persons and objects in spaces of hospitable practice.

It has taken a number of years to move across this room, to seek the light, to gain deeper appreciations and perspectives on Azerbaijani ways of hospitality. Now that I have crossed the room, I see the room itself in a different light - in its own light. In this written work I have taken an important step, to exit the room, and from a distance, share

what I have experienced with others. It is my hope that Azerbaijani ways of hospitality will be seen for the brightly lit spaces they create - like an Azerbaijani celebration hall with its shifting and blending of illumination and witness, of welcome and engagement, of external and internal light.

In one of my early journal entries of life in Azerbaijan I recorded a description of the dynamics of light which I observed as I entered and then eventually left a wedding palace in Baku. We had walked to the event, coming upon the hall from the street, in the late afternoon. The sun was still bright, reflecting off the windows on our approach. As we entered the hall the light followed us, now shining in through the windows to illuminate the internal spaces. It sparkled off the glasses and silverware. It was brighter in the places directly beneath the windows, creating a checkerboard of shadow and light across the room.

As the evening progressed, the sun set, leaving the hundreds of lights within the room as the only source of illumination. We could not see outside the windows anymore as the lights inside created a myriad of sparkling reflections off the glass. Later, as we left the hall, we looked back. The windows were shining radiantly. The hall was now illuminating the space around it, presenting itself to the world beyond.

There is a resonance, in this picture, with the manner in which I have experienced this research. I came to know Azerbaijani ways of hospitality first, as they were illuminated by light from other places – from the etic worlds of anthropology, philosophy, hospitality studies, and politics. I came to know them, then, as something into which I was personally invited – through participation and through the sharing of the experiences of others, in story. Now, as I offer up this written work, it is my hope that Azerbaijani ways of hospitality, as I have come to know them, may shine for a wider world.

Stretching the Horizon

As these moments of research drift, temporally, behind me, I find myself frequently engaging with others around these experiences which I have been given. Some of these engagements have continued around the smaller, intimate table of dialogue, with Azerbaijanis. Others have pulled me outwards to the longer table of broader anthropological discussion. To honour the participants around both of these tables, I wish to close this written work with a few reflections.

First, I believe an invitation has been offered to the discipline of anthropology, in the particular conceptions of interpersonality which are encompassed by Azerbaijani ways of hospitality. It is an invitation to consider broader ecologies within which persons and their worlds engage. Alongside conceptions of exchange, reciprocity, and obligation, which factor heavily in anthropological discussions of human reception and offer, *qonaqpərvərlik* provides other considerations, of trust, and grace. There is significant potential for these considerations to enrich both understanding and practice.

From the perspective of understanding, *qonaqpərvərlik* warrants further study. As I have shared my research experiences, I have discovered that the ontological intensity of Azerbaijani hospitality resonates strongly within the lifeworlds of others. Further understanding of these resonances would be valuable. Comparative works would deepen what can be understood about *qonaqpərvərlik* and other ways of hospitality. The language of conditions and postures may be appropriate and useful for understanding the character of ways of hospitality in other places.

In terms of practice, Azerbaijani ways of hospitality have enriched the manner in which I live my life with others, in profound ways. It is possible that others will find these same opportunities for enrichment. I have experienced distinct transformations

in my relationships, across the breadth of my life domains, as I have engaged with practices of living invitationally. I have intentionally allowed myself to be formed as I move towards others and have willingly borne witness to the laments and the celebrations I have met within this engagement. I have experienced what life is like when I pursue others, particularly those whose ways of life are different than my own. *Qonaqpərvərlik* has inspired me to stretch the horizon between myself and the stranger.

Second, having conducted my research within the disciplinary space of existential anthropology there are some contributions that I see can be offered to this space. This has been an extended study, providing one model for how existential principles can be followed in a research context. The concept of postures guiding research, alongside methods, is one I propose could be more deeply explored, within existentially-oriented studies.

The concept of ontological intensity, I propose, is also important within an existential understanding of lifeworlds as complex yet holistic. Existential perspectives often shy away from unifying principles or frameworks, out of a desire to preference the individuality of personhood and the uniqueness of particular lives. The language of intensity provides a means to describe the cumulative effect of interpersonal engagements over space and time, highlighting the evolving character of overlapping existences. As levels of excitement or emotion may rise or fall within a space that is filled with numerous individuals, ontological intensity can describe the ebb and flow of certain ways of being as multiple individuals pursue their individual and collective ‘quests’ towards ‘existential viability’ (M. Jackson 2015).

There are several contributions to existential anthropology that I hope will continue, building on what I have only just started to explore. I would like to see Gadamer more frequently referenced within existential anthropology. My own study has created one space for Gadamer and existential anthropology to engage with one another. I would like to see others carry this further. Likewise, I would like to see further engagement with hospitality within the discipline, not only as a subject of study but as a framework for understanding research itself. I have come to a deep appreciation for what hospitality has to offer existential research perspectives and practices.

To those who have sat with me around the table of Azerbaijani ways of hospitality I would like to leave you with a particular blessing, a closing 'toast'. Live into the best of the ways of life that you have learned. Though conditions of hospitable being may seem hard to achieve, and sometimes even absent, in the places and moments that you face in the world today, they are worth fighting for, defending, maintaining. Though these ways are often misunderstood by others, your practice of them stands as a light. Continue to live invitationally, with a faithful intensity. Continue to embrace growth and change as you move generously and graciously towards others. And let your stories strengthen and inspire each other. Remind one another of the beautiful gift of *qonaqpərvərlik* which you bear.

Appendix: Ethnographic Data References

Format

Elements of Reference	Type of data	Year recorded	- Chronological place in series from that year
Example	V	1992	- 6
	V92-6		

Series were labelled by chronological occurrence. Within particular discussions, where multiple topics were discussed, separate numbers were given to moments of conversation, based on the specific topic they were focused around.

Coding for Types of Data

V Vignette

N Narrative

D Discussion Group

E Ethnographic occurrence

Reference	**Description**
V92-6	Telman's welcome – Ukraine
V99-23	Welcome on the subway platform
V99-8	Conference – Concerns
V00-18	Being invited to be *tamada*, as a guest
V00-20	Layered logic – host on call
V00-24	Research – angst – threads of a carpet
V00-38	"Language is dangerous."

V01-31	"We set up the table again yesterday." – hospitality extended
V01-6	"We cooked for 3 days." – hospitality effort
V01-7	"What is tea and who is counting?"
V06-10	"Hospitality begins with hospitable persons."
V08-19	Multiple narratives in Highland Park
V08-37	A friend's lament on loss of capacity to host due to urbanization
V09-32	Border crossing – Georgia/Azerbaijan
V10-10	"Come into the light."
V10-43	Rufat – mangal – "good Azerbaijani"
V12-15	Shekhi stained glass
V12-22	"This is what we bear."
V12-29	Taxi driver's comment on Eurovision construction – preparing the guest room
V12-30	"Your own guest list"
V12-46	10,000 meaningful touches
V12-49	Mahira's excellent dinner
V12-9	Fruitseller's experience of Eurovision – international relations
V13-11	Paxlava – a well prepared welcome
V13-14	Trust the process – driving
V13-16	"We really missed you." – interpersonal longing in hospitality
V13-19	"We bear witness to that which we recognize."
V13-23	"Look at it from here." – planning a conference
V14-69	"Come and see" – carpet dye, where it comes from
V15-19	"I have spent a great deal of my life observed."
V15-2	Watching Arshin Mal Alan

V16-53	“Yes indeed, you have summoned the witness!”
V16-56	“The *kamança* starts first.”
V16-59	“There is no hospitality without walnuts.”
V17-30	“Where is the guest?” – “Everywhere.”
V17-39	“One cannot always be a host.”
V17-43	“Where is your guest?”
V17-64	“When do you begin to look outward?”
V17-78	Archivist – “Do you like us?”
V17-9	“You know too many guests.”
V20-7	“Who am I when I can’t be with others?”
N00-6	Mariam growing up in Shekhi – experience of different others
N15-8	Anya – university days – experience of relationship with different others
N15-9	Vusal in Moscow
N16-17	“These whiteboards arrived here on a river of tea.”
N16-4	“Where have I come?” – displacement when hospitable conditions are absent
N16-8	Sevda’s account
N17-11	Wedding – no monetary gifts collected
N17-18	“And then he pressed the button!”
N17-2	Ismet – simple hosting
N17-29	Dr. Samedov – no hats can be removed – hospitality roles always available
N17-5	Nermin – “My arms can’t reach.”
D14-5	Catching versus throwing oneself in
D15-3	“This is Azerbaijan.”
D15-32	Tea and a gift save the day

D15-80	"That is what takes us down the corridor."
D15-80	"But sometimes these corridors disappoint."
D16-34	"Hospitality is what protects us."
D16-41	"You are here, but you don't know how to 'be' here."
D16-46	"You are here, but you are also still there."
D16-49	Tea is the tap of the heels and the swoop of the arms."
D16-52	That it is possible to welcome – to become hosts or guests
D16-6	"Tell me a story."
D16-71	*bərəkət* and *bolluq*
D16-79	Managing limitations
D16-85	"It's not that you aren't here with us. It is that you aren't here 'like us'."
D16-90	Difficult strangers – those who are near
D16-90	"Becoming a stranger is not the same as ceasing to be a host."
D17-19	"Hospitality is what lies between us and strangers."
D17-19	"Hospitality goes with us."
D17-22	"And we will see what happens next"
D17-22	"It's about joy."
D17-26	"We make hospitality."
D17-29	Taking care to host
D17-3	"As we dance with it, it fits." – research concepts and metaphors
D17-50	Discussion about Fatima and Perviz – abundance of self
E99-6	First experience of Azerbaijani wedding dance
E00-12	Arshin Mal Alan – first experience – Opera Theatre
E00-21	The plate struggle
E01-11	Paragliding – postures

E01-18	Xizi mayor's office – shoes
E01-24	Late arrival in village – preparing the table before we are brought in
E09-16	Going to get a document – not stopping to have tea
E09-4	Rovshan – baked goods in the army
E11-11	Leaving the courtyard with my son
E12-19	Three layers of plates on a wedding table
E15-20	Leaving Qurban's house – shoes
E15-27	Office interactions in a corridor – potential for hospitality roles
E15-8	Shadow hosting
E16-10	Shovket's office supply shop – first meeting
E16-16	Interpersonal inventory of a morning
E17-2	Shadow hosting in Sultan's office
E17-3	Perviz and Fatima birthday party
E17-7	Davud being asked to be *tamata*

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