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Exceptionality of Space: Sexual Violence in "The Camp. A Little Girl from Karabakh" by Gunel Movlud

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Abstract

In the autobiographical novel "The Camp. A Little Girl from Karabakh" the Azerbaijani author Gunel Movlud describes her experiences of living in a refugee camp in the Sabirabad region of Azerbaijan. Movlud was forced to flee her home town in the Nagorno-Karabakh region during the First Karabakh War (1988-1994). For five years, she lived in the tent camp. In the novel, Movlud describes the hardships of the life in the camp and different characters from her personal perspective. What is striking from her observations is the amount of sexual violence apparent in the camp and the seemingly tacit acceptance of the camp inhabitants. This paper seeks to find a theoretical explanation for the violence encountered in the camp. The analysis is based on the novel itself as well as an interview conducted with the author. It is found that Agamben's idea of the exceptionality of space and Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence can help explain the violence encountered in the camp. In the author's view it was women in the end who appeared stronger than men and who held the social fabric of the camp together.

Keywords: Azerbaijan, camp, exceptionality, refugee, sexual violence

Introduction

Gunel Movlud is a young contemporary Azerbaijani writer, poet, and journalist. She was born in 1981 in the Jabrayil region of Azerbaijan, which is one of the regions surrounding Karabakh. During the First Karabakh War, she was forced to flee her hometown in 1993 and became an internally displaced person (IDP). For five years, Movlud lived in a tent refugee camp in the Sabirabad region of Azerbaijan. In her book "The Camp. A Little Girl from Karabakh" Movlud describes her experiences living and growing up in the refugee camp (Movlud, 2022). This is one of the rare literary works on memories about refugee camp

life in Azerbaijan – if not the only one. Reading Movlud’s book, I was struck by the amount of sexual and gender-based violence described in the book which seemed to be part of the everyday life in the camp. Sexual violence, rape, and prostitution is not unusual during war and situations of forced displacement. Sexual violence seemed to be connected to the internal functioning of the camp. In the refugee camp that Movlud describes the moral structures seem to be out of joint, a different social world co-existed with the life around it. Considering the facts stating that the camp was demolished 14 years later and its experience has been shaped through these years, I reach a consensus with Agamben (1998, p. 166) stating the camp not only represents an exceptional space, but also has become the “nomos of the modern”.

The question posed here seeks the reason of that much sexual violence and the way to explain its seemingly tacit acceptance by the camp inhabitants. I would suggestthat this has to do with the exceptionality of the camp itself. In this article I seek to carve out the theoretical explanations which can account for the increased sexual and gender-based violence apparent in the camp as described in the novel. These theoretical insights will be connected to text passages from the book based on a content analysis. Furthermore, to find out more about the background of the book and the author’s personal explanations for the high degree of sexual violence in the camp, an interview with the author Gunel Movlud was conducted via the online platform Zoom. To firstly set the article into context, a brief overview of the First-Karabakh War, the refugees’ situation in Azerbaijan and the book are provided. The analysis is then conducted with references to theoretical works of mainly, Giorgio Agamben’s (1998) *Homo Sacer* cycle and Pierre Bourdieu’s (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) concept of symbolic violence.

According to Agamben (1998), the state of exception is the process by which the sovereign suspends the law, creating a group of individuals and space exempted from the reach of the state. Agamben’s work is recognized in diverse disciplines, including literary studies. Davies (2016), for example, applies Agamben’s concept of exception to contemporary fiction, analyzing sex, time, and space. Agamben’s concept of bare life has been used to analyze Southern African narratives of post-colonial conditions (Mavengano & Nkamta, 2022), the Australian novel “Dog Boy” (Neave, 2019), or literary works written in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina (Brown, 2017). According to Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), means of symbolic dominance rather than physical force are used to create and perpetuate social hierarchies and inequalities and their inherent misery. The concept of symbolic violence has been applied to analyze George Orwell’s Animal Farm (Amir, Rahman & Anriadi, 2022), violence against women in Indonesian short stories (Arianto, 2018), or contemporary

Japanese children's literature (Morellato, 2016).

The Firstkarabakh War and the IDP Situation in Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan and Armenia share a long and complex history of ethnic conflict, escalating into the firstKarabakh War (1988-1994), which resulted in the forced displacement of an estimated one million Azeris. The majority had been living in Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding regions in Azerbaijan (Najafizadeh, 2015). In 2012, there were roughly 600,000 IDPs who had fled from Karabakh and the seven surrounding regions (Crisis Group, 2012). These refugees were placed in 20 tent camps in various regions of Azerbaijan. Other IDPs were accommodated in villages, in public buildings, schools, boarding houses, in houses of their relatives; and the remaining in farms, or defunct train wagons (Ismayilov & Ismayilov, 2002). There raised several problems in the camps for refugees in terms of food, medical care, and social security. Unemployment and education also constituted social problems. Gender-based violence cases were rarely reported or brought to justice in the IDP communities, which might have to do with cultural norms restricting talk about this subject. However, it is believed that domestic violence and gender-based violence occurred often within the family and IDP women were subject to sexual harassment and abuse (UNHCR, 2009). Zamanov (2020, p. 52) encountered in his research on gender in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict that participants of his study did not want to talk about sensitive issues, such as experiences of sexual violence and rape, because this topic is "likely to be traumatic and shameful". The reluctance to talk about sexual violence also seems to be connected with the importance of honor and notions of chastity and modesty. Women in Azerbaijan generally have the role of the protector and bearer of tradition – they are the "guardians of the nation" (Tohidi, 1999). Azeri IDP/refugee women were the most vulnerable of all Azeri women, considering crowded living conditions, giving birth to children in uncertain settings, issues of medical care and nutrition, and unemployment (Najafizadeh, 2013). While IDPs initially lived mainly in 12 IDP camps in the south of Azerbaijan, the Government started the construction of new settlements in different regions of the country in 2002, and demolished all tent camps at the end of 2007 (UNHCR, 2009).

Brief Information about the Novel

In her autobiographical novel "The Camp. A Little Girl from Karabakh" Gunel Movlud describes her life in a tent camp close to Sabirabad in Southern

Azerbaijan, bordering Iran. Movlud was born in 1981 in the village of Mehdili in Jabrayil region. When the first Karabakh war broke out, she was 11 years old. In the summer of 1993, she and her family had to flee from their homes. The family members did, however, not flee altogether, Gunel fled separately, her mother with her brothers and her father with his sisters. Her mother had to cross the river Araz into Iran and returned from there to Azerbaijan. Movlud explains that "during one night the river Araz became a symbol of salvation" (G. Movlud, personal communication, September 2022). The family members fled separately because in an Azerbaijani village people are not always at home altogether: "Someone is in the field, one in the garden – everyone is in different places" (G. Movlud, personal communication, September 2022). Movlud recounts that the tents were not built instantly but set up during one year. Initially the whole country and Baku "were turned into camps: there was not a single family in Azerbaijan which did not accommodate a refugee-relative at home" (G. Movlud, personal communication, September 2022). Movlud remembers that during their fight they first stayed for ten days at a relative's place in Baku, then with a relative in a different relative in a village. For a few months, they were accommodated at her father's colleague's place in Ismayilli in the North of Azerbaijan. According to Movlud, she and her family dwelled all over Azerbaijan for one year since they did not have a place to live: All the dormitories, schools, kindergartens, and other public buildings were already full of refugees. There simply was no place to live.

In her book, Movlud describes the life in the camp No. 1 in which she lived for five years. Others lived in the camp for 14 years. She explores the relationships between the people living there and focuses on different characters. Movlud describes camp life with honesty, touching upon topics that are a taboo in Azerbaijani society.

Gender-based violence (GBV) or sexual violence refers to "physical, sexual and psychological harm that reinforces female subordination and perpetuates male power and control" (UNHCR, 2003, p. 10). What theoretical explanations can account for the high amount of sexual violence described by Movlud in the tent camp; which was apparently not reported on officially as indicated in the report of the UNHCR (2009)? How does Movlud herself explain it?

Exceptionality of Space

Refugee camps are often located outside cities, in suburbs or rural areas, as a rule in demonstratively peripheral sites (Diken, 2005). The camp No. 1 where Movlud stayed had been set up in one of the hottest regions of Azerbaijan (Galagayin

village, Sabirabad), as far away as possible from where the local people lived: "It was a ghetto of sorts" (Movlud, 2022, p. 11). According to Movlud the camp was not set up to function as the camp in a region in the north of Azerbaijan like Gebele or Ismayilli because these are humid regions so that in the winter it would be very hard to endure and there would have been problems with heating. The Sabirabad region, in contrast, is located in the Savannah and there is an abundance of flat land to build a camp. This region is sizzling in summer; the climate is dry, so that the ground dries quickly after rain. In the winter, there were problems, too, but the situation was not as problematic as it would have been in Gebele or Ismayilli (G. Movlud, personal communication, September 20, 2022). The camp was geospatially separated by a canal from the public services in the nearby village and there was no doctor (Movlud, 2022, p. 43). The relation of the IDPs towards the outside can thus be described by moving "in a zone of in distinction between outside and inside" (Agamben, 1998, p. 170). Therefore, a refugee camp is considered as "non-place" due to a lack of characterization and non-integration of other places and traditions in the camp (Diken, 2005, p. 82).

The local people of Sabirabad looked down on the refugees "because of [their] miserable living conditions" (p. 69). Movlud remembers a local man who approached them when they were collecting bush wood; he approached them "Ey, you of different colors (*raznotsvetny*), move from here, don't touch this bush wood" (G. Movlud, personal communication, September 20, 2022). The man did not address them as people. People in the camp wore second-hand clothing, which had been given to them by humanitarian aid organizations. This meant that the IDPs stood out from the rest of the people in Azerbaijan where it was common to dress in dark colors (G. Movlud, personal communication, September 20, 2022). IDPs were sometimes considered as lower-status compared to other Azeris (Najafizadeh, 2013).

The most irritating thing for the local population was that the people in the camp did not follow religious rules. However, Movlud remarks that this was an unfounded fear since Karabakh always was "the most godless region in Azerbaijan" (G. Movlud, personal communication, September 2022). Officially, people from Karabakh were Muslims: "If you ask them 'Are you Muslim?', they will say yes. But that does not mean anything to them" (Movlud, personal communication, September 2022). For example, Movlud grew up in a very religious family, her grandfather was very religious, but her father smoked and drank. Her family, however, was maybe the only religious one in the region. Her mother and her grandmother did not wear the veil. Movlud explains that in order to be religious and to follow some religious traditions, people need to be settled, but in Karabakh the people were nomads; in winter they resided in the lowlands,

and in summer in the mountains - they were always on the move. Sabirabad, in contrast, was a very religious area. Movlud's maternal grandfather, who was "a very godless and funny guy" one day returned downcast from the local bazaar (G. Movlud, personal communication, September 20, 2022). He had bought *pirozhki*[31] from a boy and ate it right away. People from all sides approached him, and asked him whether he as an elder (*aghsakhal*) would not be embarrassed to eat during Ramadan, and inquired why he was not fasting. "He did not know at all what Ramadan was", comments Movlud. In camp No. 1, the people were "convinced that the extremely poor conditions and life of a refugee was temporary and would soon end" (Movlud, 2022, p. 34). However, after some time people started to turn their tent houses into houses made from mud bricks. Some people lived in the camp for 14 years. The camp can thus be characterized as the space "when the state of exception, which was essentially a temporary suspension of the rule of law . . . is now given a permanent spatial arrangement" (Agamben, 1998, p. 169).

Between Legal and Illegal

The camp is a space in which the distinction between legality and illegality is rendered unclear: "The camp is a hybrid of law" (Agamben, 1998, p. 170). There is no official or state surveillance of the camp. In camp No. 1, there is only one policeman called Mashadi, who resolves cases receiving bribes from the offended as well as the victims (Movlud, 2022, p. 75). Mashadi "acted like a big fish in a small pond" he ruled with his own laws in line with sharia law. Sometimes, he raided people's tents looking for alcohol, especially during the month of Muharram (p.96). Furthermore, the refugee becomes dependent on institutions and people in powerful positions. People who are mandated with supporting refugees sometimes misuse their power position to exploit them sexually (Ferris, 2007). In camp No. 1, a certain social hierarchy developed: "individuals and families were subjected to . . . social hierarchies, and the rules of the privileged" (Movlud, 2022, p. 36). The relief organizations selected representatives from every 30-40 refugees who could inform them of their group's needs and problems and accepted and distributed humanitarian aid (p. 36). Those representatives were more powerful and had more social capital, that is "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 248). The camp

[31] Russian and Ukrainian baked or fried yeast-leavened boat-shaped bun

representatives could be bribed: Camp representatives skimmed part of food aid allocated to families, and took food shares as commission. Humanitarian aid organizations did not know that this was happening. Therefore, the representatives and their families had a much better life, "showing off their gold" (Movlud, 2022, p. 74). These representatives also had their own goon squads: "The reps offered low-quality vodka, cheese and bread…further corrupted (young boys) with second-hand clothes" and in return "the young boys tried not to disappoint them", they "insulted or beat the dissenters" (p.75). Some representatives also raped women or induced them to have sex with them: „Sometimes married women also 'hosted' strangers a night. By spending a few hours with a man, she could obtain several kilos of rice, bottles of oil, or clothes from the aid packages" (p. 75). On a different page, Movlud describes that a schoolboy raped his classmate, but this was silenced by the camp inhabitants since the perpetrator's father was a representative. The rape of the boy was solved and settled between the families since there was no police station near to call.

GBV emerges due to the particular conditions of the camp. The particularity stems from the fact that the individuals and communities are removed from their normal, everyday context, which followed certain norms and rules (Buckely-Zistel & Krause, 2017). Tskhvariashvili (2018) describes that In such a militarized environment, witnessing violent behavior through daily life does not look strange anymore. Strong vertical power structures are reproduced on a smaller scale. Tskhvariashvili (2018) explains that a "man who feels defeated, humiliated and controlled on public outer-space, brings the same frame of hierarchy at home – in inner-space, and plays the role of controller" (p. 44). This could mean that in the absence of state surveillance, men reproduce violence in the intimate sphere to assert masculinity. In the camp situation the same rules and norms of previous life do not hold anymore; they are "challenged and put into doubt by new demands and limitations" in a world which is "externally formed and restrictively imposed" (Buckely-Zistel & Krause, 2017, p. 1). For instance, traditional Azerbaijani cultural norms, such as chastity before marriage, were disregarded in the camp: "Young couples who met at nights were targets of rumors . . . but no one intervened aggressively. Residents believed that if they love each other, it will most likely end in marriage" (Movlud, 2022, p. 62). This, thus, indicates that the cultural norms were relaxed in the altered circumstances. In a situation of fight during which previous social norms are suspended, there is an increased risk of domestic and community violence (Ferris, 2007). In refugee camps, gender roles often change, so that fathers, for instance, cannot protect their daughters who entered into exploitative

relationships because their role as the male breadwinner in the family was not possible (Ferris, 2007). Furthermore, since the previous social mechanisms are suspended, men "may be more apt to assert their power as men . . . and push women and children aside in order to get food". Life in the camp could be challenging for a young single woman without a male guardian: "Someone could enter the tent and rape her at night" (Movlud, 2022, p. 55).
In our conversation, Movlud explains that during Soviet times, there was a special relation to women, "not because they adored women or praised women, but because they needed women to be part of the workforce. In order for them to be able to participate in work life, they had to be able to go to work. In countries like Azerbaijan or Uzbekistan - in our region - usually men want their women to sit at home and care for the children, whereas men earn money and secure the family financially" (G. Movlud, personal communication, September 20, 2022). This, Movlud comments, was, however, not profitable for the Soviet powers. Therefore, they needed to empower women as individuals, so that they could exploit the opportunity of going to school, entering higher education levels and seize job opportunities in future. Movlud underlines: "And who could tell a manager (provost) of the *kolkhoz*, or the leader of the militia, that 'I will not send my daughter to school'. This would have been against the Soviet powers. And they could simply arrest you for that". Therefore, men's carefulness towards women was only "at gunpoint", out of fear created in the Soviet Union (G. Movlud, personal communication, September 20, 2022). Following the Soviet Union collapse , and there was left no special surveillance over life, nothing in particular, neither the family, nor their home, and there was no work and something to do, "men should somehow adorn their free time, and how could they create that in a different way. If there was a woman and no man around her, a helpless woman - to rape her, when possible, why not", explains Movlud. Thus, also in Movlud's account the camp is a place where there is no surveillance a place in which legal and illegal cannot be easily discriminated and men commit any forms of crimes with n o fear in their face.

New Normality

In camp No. 1, it seems that some new normality was set in at some points, which, however, reminds of a group of zombies following the same routine: *"At six pm . . .the faucets started running . . . everyone collected water . . . dined on tapis in front of their tent . . . women and young girls cleaned up and men gathered to play games like dominoes or cards"* (Movlud, 2022, p. 44). Movlud describes the camp as an "anthill'": In the summer when it was too hot, she and her

brother preferred to sleep not in the tent but outside on a pile of mud bricks next to her grandmother's tent: "At night, there were snakes and the croaking of frogs could be heard. When I woke up the next morning, leaving my room, from the height I could see hundreds of people around: There were neighbors, someone was collecting water, someone prepared breakfast, someone was helping his child... there were people everywhere, it was a polyphony of sounds, screams, sounds" (G. Movlud, personal communication, September 20, 2022).
In the camp there was also a library run by two sisters, and a mosque established by the Iranian aid organization. The people also watched Indian moviestogether with their neighbors, and then everything around them stood still. Moreover, the disastrous situation was not lamented about, but somewhat accepted: "Refugees attributed illness and death to war and refugee life – not the officials' disregard and disrespect" (Movlud, 2022, p. 43). Also, intimate relations were adapted to the new situation, much to the suffering of children: "To be alone and have sex…their parents found various excuses to send their children away … some children would refuse to leave, but then they were beaten by their parents. Some had sex at night whether their children were asleep or no. The next morning the older children were sullenly and timidly moping around the house. The tents in the camp stood so close to each other that there was no space for secret and intimate affairs (p. 62).

Homo Sacer

In this non-place of the camp, the refugee, is "'relieved of his usual determinants'" (Diken, 2004, p. 103). Removed from former life and identity, the refugee becomes a "zombie" in which "his symbolic capital does not count" and he is characterized by a "social nakedness" (Diken, 2004, p. 103). Bourdieu defines symbolic capital as "the form that the various species of capital assume when they are perceived and recognized as legitimate" (Southerton, 2011). Agamben (1998) characterizes the refugee as neither a beast nor man, an outlaw that can be exposed to violence without facing legal sanctions. The camp's inhabitants are "stripped of every political status and wholly reduced to bare life" (Agamben, 1998, p. 171). The individuals become "homo sacer", referring to the notion of sacred person who cannot be killed and yet not sacrificed (Agamben, 1998, p. 171).
Conflict and fightaffect individuals' mental health; and can lead to an increase of violence towards women (Ismayilov & Ismayilov, 2002). The refugee has to cope with traumatic experiences and of striving to create a new life under difficult physical, economic, social, and psychological circumstances

(Najafizadeh, 2013). Among the mental disorders are long-term depressive, anxiety and stress-related psychosomatic disorders. The loss of relatives, the stress caused by staying in the war zone or the uncertain social situation as well as the strained relations with local population and the nostalgia for abandoned lands leave impacts on a refugee’s mental condition (Ismayilov & Ismayilov, 2002). Movlud writes about the men in the camp’s mental condition: They were “pathologically nervous and alcoholics after losing all they had possessed”, they “did not have any plan or hope for the future” and faced

> *“the sarcasm of sayings of the locals, who cried ‘you left your lands for the enemy and came here’... Men who were ashamed. Men who were not even allowed to cry…Men …who legitimised their own laziness and greed, who spent money that their children and wives had struggled to earn on prostitutes and alcohol. Those who raped single women in ‘man less’ tents and houses” (p. 6).*

Movlud raises the question what the hunger, misery and life in the tents mean in the first place. In her view, it is the loss of contempt toward oneself, the contempt towards human life, she commented that, “you realize that your life, your body, your being is not respected. In these conditions, people lost the respect for their own body and other bodies. It was a moral degradation. Inescapable moral degradation” (G. Movlud, personal communication, September 20, 2022). The refugee is thus *homo sace*r in a system that exerts control over bare life (Agamben, 1998).

Loss of Symbolic and Social Capital

The lack of employment opportunities affects gender relations since men cannot perform their gender roles as breadwinner of the family (Buckely-Zistel & Krause, 2017). In the post-war situation in Azerbaijan, unemployment among men was high since there were no work places, which could be acceptable and appropriate for them (Najafizadeh, 2013). Men lose in social and symbolic capital in the refugee situation; as expressed in status, power and influence. Now all are the same status-wise, even those who were wealthy before. However, IDP women, likewise, have to cope with reduction in social and occupational status (Najafizadeh, 2013). The perceived loss of status and the related social degradation of men in camps is referred to as emasculation (Buckely-Zistel & Krause, 2017). Instead of men, women often have to take on additional responsibilities in such a situation (Buckely-Zistel & Krause, 2017). The women

living in camp No. 1 went to collect cotton on the fields in the summer. When the women returned from cotton collecting in the evenings “desperately tired” their men were waiting for them: “Inhaling cigarette smoke they asked: ‘How many today?’” (Movlud, 2022, p. 47). Men noted down the kilos of cotton their women had collected to predict how much they would receive at the end of the month; some of them went shopping “a little” with that money and “wasted the rest on what the men called ‘Nigar’s video house’” – which was developed into the camp’s brothel (p. 60).

This loss of social capital and status was omnipresent: For instance, some men got employed to soak the waste from the camp toilets, which paid comparatively well but was looked down on. A teacher in the camp’s school asked his pupils about their parents’ occupation. One boy, whose father was working as a waste soaker, tried to hide this fact. However, the other children knew and started laughing, including the teacher. The boy went back to his tent home and “dropped off his school bag, and then, without informing anyone, went and jumped in the nearby canal, drowning there” (p.32).

Symbolic Violence

Frustration might also lead to abuse in a more symbolic sense. According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) symbolic violence is “the violence exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2002, p. 167). For instance, the camp toilets were constructed along the main road in front of the tents. They were holes in the middle of a wooden board that lay over deep wells (Movlud, 2022). “Since Eastern and Islamic mentality disapproves of women going to the toilet when men are around, women had to wait for hours at times” to use the toilet and to wait for men to be busy with other tasks (p. 29-30). Men knew of this difficulty and on purpose sat in groups next to the toilets playing cards or dominoes for hours (p. 30). Through such intentionally mocking behavior they embarrassed the women and prevented them from using the toilets.

Another place where symbolic power becomes apparent is in the camp’s showers: “Due to the lack of separate shower stalls in the bathhouse, people stared at one another, and, at times, this led to body-shaming” (p. 35). Young adult women avoided the public bath because if “some injury caused a young girl tobruise, women stared at her suspiciously, interrogated her, and pressed her to ‘admit’ that it was not an injury, but a “different thing” (p. 35). Girls who had a spot of birthmark on their intimate areas did not go to public baths at all. If she had, one of the women could have told her male family members who in turn

“could have flung dirt at them or dishonor them by saying ‘I’ve seen that girl's body, she has a spot in her certain place’” (p. 36). In avoiding the showers women complied with symbolic violence exercised by men. Another example of symbolic violence is related to menstrual cloth, which women hung up to dry on cloth lines in front of the tents: “According to the camp’s unwritten rules, men should not see women’s clothes or underwear” and “to hide them from men, women usually hung them under other garments” or “they tried to dry them over a fire as soon as the men left the house. Sometimes the men returned earlier than expected and/ or before the clothes that time to dry properly, so women were forced to use clothes when they were still wet“ (p. 66). In trying to hide them from men or wearing them when they were still wet, which caused health problems, women gave in to symbolic violence.

Movlud also describes situations of direct sexual violence: Some men became “unmanageable” and entered the tents of lonely women at night. The women could not even scream, because it would have made living in the camp even more difficult. Neighbors would blame her, suggesting that "she was also willing to be involved”", insult her and expel her from the camp (p. 62-63). Remaining silent, women complied with the unwritten rules of the camp and obeyed their destiny. Also, almost no women divorced her husband in the camp if she knew that he was misbehaving. They feared what they saw happen to single women if they were to divorce their husband. In turn, this fear encouraged their husbands to conduct immoral behavior without worrying (p. 63). The difficulty for single women was that they do not have an “arkha” – a male guardian who could protect them: “In the case of an Azeri woman, people always ask, ‘Who is her man? Who is her guardian’” (Tohidi, 1999, p. 86). This might be related to the social stigma attached to divorced women because mothering is regarded as “a woman’s primary role and most important source of gratification” (Tohidi, 1999, p.85). Thus, an intact family in which children grow up is supposed to be the norm. Women are considered as the reproducers of the nation; and if women do not contribute to the “national pool” they can be deprived of the position as carrier of national identity (Tskhvariashvili, 2018, p. 70). Some men in the camp greatly overstepped ethical boundaries, bringing prostitutes to their tents, and having sex with them in front of their wife and children (Movlud, 2022).

Women Held the Social Fabric Together

Women in the camp were victims of direct sexual as well as symbolic violence, and they complied with this. However, Movlud concludes that women were in the end the stronger ones, the ones who prevented the whole system from

collapsing. Women created some sense of normality and structure, cooking for their families and working on the cotton fields. Hence, in staying silent and enduring the situation, they came out as the stronger ones. Movlud explains: “I always wondered how these millions of refugees could live without a home, but they did not remain homeless. They lived within their families and kept the model of the family intact” (G. Movlud, personal communication, September 20, 2022). In her view, the women self-sacrificed themselves, covering “their drug addicted husbands, the degradation of their husbands, of their sons and brothers”. These women did everything “so that in the family there was some food at least three times a day, and so that the family sat together”. Movlud concludes that the fight situation showed that women were morally stronger, but also physically, because they did the hard work on the cotton fields whereas men did not work there. This is also underlined by Najafizadeh (2013, p. 14): “IDP/refugee women, whilst hopeful of returning to their homelands, believe that “life must go on” and that they should seek to maximize their current situation and to improve their lives and the lives of their families”. “IDP women confronted the challenges of displacement with a degree of resilience and with determination to empower themselves and to change their families’ lives for the better (p. 15). Thus, in complying they prevented the system from collapsing. It does not mean that the women were not aware of the situation, perhaps the quote of a respondent in Tohidi’s (1999) study summarizes it well: “Oh, it just appears that way. Only men think that we depend on them and by thinking so they feel satisfied and powerful. Let them take care of us under this illusion. We know very well who in reality is the power here and who (p. 88).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the amount of sexual and symbolic violence can be described by the exceptionality of space of the camp, which is separated from the normal life in a symbolic, but also in a practical sense. The camp is a “hybrid of law”, a space between legal and illegal, where state law is not observed and where surveillance by the state is absent. Movlud explains that essentially the previous control exerted by the Soviet powers broke down. The only policeman in the camp is Mashadi who rules according to his own rules. New social hierarchies were emerged in the camp which were much more visible in the institution of the “camp representatives”, which exploit their function, take commission fees of food packages and “rape single women at night”. However, a new normality and unwritten camp rules emerge as well. In the camp, the individual is stripped of

his previous life and experiences an extreme form of moral degradation. Men cannot fulfil their previous function as the breadwinner in the family. The individual becomes the *homo sacer* who is alive but yet not sacrificed. In this state of moral degradation, men are perhaps more likely to commit sexual violence since they are at a stage of existence where nothing else matters. In addition, men sought to compensate for their loss in social and symbolic capital and perhaps demonstrated masculinity in the domination over women's bodies. This can be seen in line with Tskhvariashvili's explanation that men reproduce power structures experienced in public to the private, intimate sphere. Perhaps men were also more ready to commit sexual violence because some women who were divorced or single lost their status as "the guardians of the nation". Women complied with the symbolic violence exerted by men. However, ultimately, Movlud describes that it was women who kept the social fabric together and who emerged as stronger than men. As one of Tohidi's (1999) informants remarks: "A man to a household is like a gem to a ring, we Azeris say. But the gem stands on top, is nothing without the ring" (p.53). What is more, perhaps "submission in private is a coping mechanism for Azeri women caught in the midst of the struggle against patriarchy . . . and the protection of their men's sense of masculinity" (p. 89). Hence, it is a coping mechanism.

Naturally, it has to be kept in mind that Movlud's work is subjective and only provides a single perspective on refugee camp life in Azerbaijan in the post-conflict situation. However, as an autobiographical novel it delivers important insights on camp life, which are absent in official reports. Future research is welcome, which would extent the view on IDP's experiences in Azerbaijan.

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