

BOOK REVIEW

THE PEASANT VENTURE: TRADITION MIGRATION, AND CHANGE AMONG GEORGIAN PEASANTS IN TURKEY

BY PAUL J. MAGNARELLA

(Schenkman Publishing Company: Cambridge, MA, 1979; 175 pp)

*This Book Review was written by Aaron Elrich**

Often researchers and reviewers, in the search for new materials and books, neglect older works that are vitally important to our understanding the present. One of these books is Paul Magnarella's *The Peasant Venture: Tradition, Migration and Change among Georgian Peasants in Turkey*, published in 1979 by Schenkman Publishing. Magnarella, an anthropologist by training, lived in the Georgian village of Hayriye in Turkey at a pivotal historical moment – a moment where the more salient signifiers of ethnic Georgianness in a village far away from its ethnic-kin state were being lost. The loss of Georgian uniqueness has been further fueled by the well-documented large scale out-migration of agrarian Turkish citizens to Germany, which further changed the social balance of the town.

The story of Hayriye is an age old story of war and exodus. During the 1877-1878 Russo-Turkish war, Georgian Muslims, who had sided with the Ottomans, were exiled *en masse* into Turkey. Many of them did not stay close to the Georgian border but fled significant distances. Hayriye is located near Bursa to the south of Istanbul, a long way from the province of Artvin from which Hayriye's Georgians were originally from. Beyond the physical distance from Georgian lands, the long years of the Cold War further separated Hayriye's Georgians from their ethnic kin.

So how did an isolated Georgian village in Turkey develop? Magnarella seeks to answer this question on social, political and economic levels. The most fascinating part of the book, however, is Magnarella's explanation of the decline and fall of the social hierarchy in Hayriye as a result of migration. In addition to close anthropological study, the book benefits greatly from rich survey data collected from the Hayriye Village Research study, part of a comprehensive community survey of villages carried out by the Middle East Technical University.

As in many agricultural communities, social hierarchy was intimately tied to wealth. Wealth, in turn, was based on the size and quality of agricultural land holdings of households. In a village of

* *Aaron Elrich* is Regional Development and Outreach Coordinator at the Caucasus Research Resource Center in Tbilisi, Georgia. His current research interests revolve around questions of migration and citizenship policy in the NIS region. Email aaron@crrccenters.org

178 households, less than 10% composed the highest strata of the society in Hayriye and most of the households possessed between 25 and 47 decares of land. Traditionally, the village *agas*, or elders, were respected members of the community drawn from the agricultural elite. Migration, however drastically changed social norms and hierarchy in the village. Indeed, Hayriye's denizens soon had a different reference group – German factory workers. Women, who had often fulfilled traditional social roles in Hayriye, began to work in Germany, after they joined their husbands who had originally migrated by themselves. Those migrants who returned to Turkey from urbanized Germany no longer wanted to live in their village and instead of investing in their decaying Georgian style houses, built concrete blocks in neighboring cities, leading to the depopulation of Hayriye and forced grandmothers and grandfathers to do much more heavy agricultural labor. Most importantly, perhaps, was that wealth became totally unhinged from land tenure. Indeed, many of the poorest of the village's households, who had most wanted to migrate because of their relative economic deprivation, suddenly became some of the wealthiest.

While the study provides many rich insights into the history of Turkish Georgians, it lacks some context because Magnarella could only speak Turkish and not Georgian; furthermore, he could not go to Georgia (because of the Cold War) and witness Georgian practices within Georgia. One fascinating insight is the inability of development workers to develop communal self-help organizations - a phenomenon witnessed across modern Georgia and not present in Armenia. This lends tantalizing evidence to the idea that the Georgian's inability to create coherent social movements, may pre-date Soviet intervention. While Stephen Jones' work, *Socialism in Georgian Colors*, provides convincing evidence of Georgian social mobilization and organization in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, this social organization may have remained superficial and not deeply ingrained into individual Georgian's patterns of behavior. These organizations then may have quickly unraveled with Soviet rule and further deteriorated as Georgians returned to a more subsistence-based society after the collapse of the Soviet Union, since such social organizations had shallow roots.

Unfortunately, returning to examine the question of communal cooperation in Turkey may no longer be possible since migration and urbanization have taken its toll on the able-bodied population of Hayriye, but could still be interesting to compare to other ethnic Turkish villages in the vicinity. Other questions, however, remain pertinent. Magnarella writes that young children were unlikely to speak Georgian before going to school. Likely, returning to the village today most in this community would be monolingual and parents would speak Turkish at home. As the author notes himself, gauging language knowledge among ethnic minorities in Turkey is difficult, since there is strong social pressure from above to speak Turkish and many survey respondents, fearing negative repercussions of speaking Georgian, may not answer. Despite the difficulty at getting at some of the issues of identity and change in Turkey, it would be fascinating to do a follow up study in Hayriye. Unfortunately, not enough of this academic work is done, since it is not theoretically groundbreaking or sufficiently unique for the world of academia in constant pursuit of Kantian originality.