



(AN)ARCHIVE

CHILDHOOD, MEMORY, AND THE COLD WAR

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# Blackberry Picking<sup>1</sup>

*Rahim Rahimov*

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*It was the late 1980s and he was around 8–9 years old in the town of Imishli in a Muslim-majority, Turkic-speaking Azerbaijan—a republic of the former Soviet Union. He used to go for blackberry picking during the summer with his parents, brother, uncles, aunts and cousins. They would do blackberry picking at a forest near the Araz river during the summer school holidays. The area was not far from the USSR-Iran border and the river was also a natural border for both countries. Iran was on the other side of the river, while this side of the river was also home to a Soviet military base.*

*The forest was made up of dense thickets of blackberry bushes. They wore dresses with long sleeves. The long sleeves protected their arms against spiky blackberry bushes pinching them. They also served as protection from bees. Alongside blackberry picking, he and his cousins played there, and had lunch. This lunch was hilarious in a party atmosphere, like a picnic, which was not very common to the community in particular at that time. And they played a hide-and-seek game but in a different way. They found blackberry bushes with bigger and ripe blackberries simultaneously picking berries and hiding there and others trying to find them.*

*Yet the ripe black and unripe red blackberries made him particularly joyful. The colorful berries represented a little but important shine to his child life, which otherwise might be characterized as not very colorful.*

*They went there in the afternoons and came back home in the evening. They all got on one big vehicle, which was normally used to carry produce to markets. The vehicle had two blue dolphins painted on its sides. Before going*

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1 This is a childhood memory produced as part of the Reconnect/Recollect project discussed in the introduction to this book.

*for blackberry picking, they had arranged a kind of carpet on the vehicle floor to sit on.*

*On the way home in the dark, his mother pointed to the lights appearing in the dark at a distance, saying that maybe those are the homes of their extended relatives that were left on the Iranian part when the Soviet-Iranian border was shut, and the Araz river became the border or dividing line rather than only a river. By the way, the word 'Araz' symbolizes division for most Azerbaijanis and a lot of works are associated with Araz in the Azerbaijani culture, in particular, poems and literature.*

*At home, his mother as well as aunts would make jam and compotes from the blackberry. He was happy about that not because he liked the jam but because his dad liked it. This meant they would again go for blackberry picking.*