

THAT

**SPORT, BP AND
REPRESSION
IN AZERBAIJAN**

**EMMA HUGHES AND
JAMES MARRIOTT**

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All that Glitters
Sport, BP and Repression in Azerbaijan

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RASUL JAFAROV & INTIGAM ALIYEV PRIOR TO THEIR ARREST
PHOTO: INDEX ON CENSORSHIP









“The great coming-out party of Azerbaijan”

On the evening of 12 June 2015, the Games begin. Fireworks explode out of the National Stadium of Baku, crackling into the city sky. The roar of 68,000 spectators and music from the athletics ground is heard across the hot metropolis and far out over the Caspian Sea.

Across Europe and beyond, the opening ceremony of the Baku 2015 European Games is followed on TVs and laptops. The dancers and music, light shows and pyrotechnics, produced by the company that created the opening of the 2012 London Olympics, is viewed around the world. Fifty nations are taking part over the coming two weeks, with 6,000 athletes competing at the stadium and 17 other venues in Baku. Simon Clegg CBE, chief operating officer of Baku 2015, and former manager of Team GB, has declared: “This is the great coming-out party of Azerbaijan.”

With the wind from the west, the sound of the explosions penetrates the white walls and wire of Kurdexani prison, on the edge of the city. One of those incarcerated there is Rasul Jafarov, sentenced to six and a half years on charges that are ludicrously flawed. His real crime has been to stand up for freedom of speech and democracy. In another cell is Intigam Aliyev, a human rights lawyer who has spent years defending

political prisoners in Azerbaijan, and is now one himself. In another is Khadija Ismayilova, a journalist who investigated the corruption in the Azeri elite and has been in Kurdexani for seven months, still awaiting her trial.

There are more than 100 prisoners of conscience in Azerbaijan. The exact number is unknown, as the state clampdown means that effective monitoring is no longer possible. They include lawyers, journalists, filmmakers, bloggers and many members of Azerbaijan's Muslim community. Indeed, so many prominent intellectuals and youth leaders have been imprisoned in Kurdexani that some Azeris refer to it as “Kur De Khani University”.¹ The last time the world's media focused on Azerbaijan was during the Eurovision Song Contest in 2012. There were demonstrations for democracy in Baku at which the participants were attacked by police with batons. There will be no such protests during the European Games, for all forms of dissent have been silenced.

The clamour of the Games will last 16 days. They follow the design and regulations of the European Olympic Committee. This committee has long dreamed of creating a continental competition that would become a stepping-stone to the four-yearly global games. Such competitions already exist in the Americas, Asia, Africa and the Pacific. This, the first European Games, completes the set.

Azerbaijan's president, Ilham Aliyev, who also heads the country's National Olympic Committee, has been determined to hold a full Olympic Games in the Azeri capital. Under his direction Baku applied to host the 2016 Summer Olympics. It was turned down. In September 2011 Baku bid again, this time to hold the 2020 Olympics. Three days before the final

of the Eurovision Song Contest in Baku, it learnt its bid had again been rejected.²

Undaunted, the president stepped up his campaign. It was said that no other city wanted to bear the financial burden of hosting the European Games, but Aliyev set about securing political support for the Azeris to host this Olympic stepping-stone. In May 2012 he met UK prime minister David Cameron. In the next six months he made visits to, or invited into the presidential palace, 11 European heads of state.³ In June, accompanied by Mehriban Aliyeva, Azerbaijan's first lady, he attended the opening of the London Olympics.⁴ Finally, on 8 December 2012, the president and first lady were in Rome to hear the news that Baku had been chosen by the European Olympic Committee general assembly to host the Games.

These missions for foreign friendship weren't just about securing the Games; they were also to bolster Aliyev's personal position. His re-election as president in October 2013 was never in doubt. Thanks to carousel voting (so named after the practice of bussing people around to cast multiple votes), stuffed ballot boxes and imprisonment of opposition candidates, Aliyev had won 77% of the poll in 2003 and 87% in 2008. He was keen, however, to silence international comments about this fraudulent process.

With the Games won, it was necessary to ensure they told the right story about Azerbaijan and its ruling family. In January 2013, Aliyev set up the Baku European Games Organising Committee, BEGOC. As he asserted at the time, the function of the Games is to build "Azerbaijan's international reputation".⁵ Public relations contracts were arranged,

corporate sponsors lined up. These included three Azeri companies, SOCAR (the State Oil Company), Azal (Azerbaijan’s airline) and NAR (the leading mobile phone company). Both Azal and NAR are part owned by the president’s family.⁶ The most prominent international backer is BP, the global oil company whose head offices and marketing arm are in London. Logos, mascots and a brand were created.⁷ The last was produced by the design company SomeOne,⁸ also based in London. Indeed, with Simon Clegg, who co-ordinated the London Olympics, employed as the Games’ chief operating officer, Baku 2015 is very much a British affair.

In parallel with this came the physical construction in the city of new roads, housing for athletes and new stadia: the National Gymnastics Arena, the BMX Velopark, the Aquatics Centre, the Shooting Centre and the National Stadium itself. In total, 13 new venues will be unveiled before the Games start.

In the spring of 2014 we flew into Baku’s Heydar Aliyev airport and were totally disorientated. As we arrived a fellow passenger explained: “It’s all new, they opened a new terminal a month ago. The old airport’s gone.” The old Soviet airport was orange and brown, with little decoration, and filled with a frenzy of taxi drivers trying to persuade new arrivals that 50 manat (about £30) was the going rate for a ride. The new terminal, designed by Arup’s of London, is a shock of glass and gold. Screens flash images of Baku’s nighttime brilliance. A gilded staircase leads down to a serene lobby, empty apart from a baggage belt and a few people standing around with signs. Outside the taxi drivers move impatiently, trying to negotiate this new arrangement and calculate the best spot to bag a fare. On the drive down Heydar Aliyev Prospekti we

see the construction: the National Stadium on one side and the Olympic gymnasium on the other.

The city spreads out around Baku Bay. On a narrow promontory by National Flag Square is the Crystal Hall, built in 2012 for Eurovision. It seems to float by itself, the hall's honeycomb structure glinting in the sun. It is widely reported that when blocks of flats were destroyed to make way for its construction, residents were dragged from their homes and received only a fraction of the compensation they were due. Now the hall is used for pop concerts; Beyoncé, J-Lo, Shakira and Rihanna have all performed in it. But most of the time it lies empty and off limits, surrounded by a security fence.

In the space of two and a half years Baku has made itself ready to hold a major international sports event, barely a third of the time that a metropolis hosting the Olympics is normally given to prepare. It is an expensive venture, in part due to the haste. It is reported that Azerbaijan's 2014 state budget set aside \$7.7 billion for the event.⁸ In 2015 alone, spending linked to the Games is budgeted to account for a quarter of the government's entire annual capital expenditures.¹⁰ But President Aliyev and his wife, are determined the project should be a success for they still have their eyes on the higher prize of the 2024 Summer Olympics. They are betting on warm memories of the 2015 Euro Games giving them the edge they've previously lacked.

What is the function of this mega project? Is it about the skills of the athletes and the numbers of records broken? What is its political meaning beyond sport? If this is the "coming out party of Azerbaijan", then what will this country "come out" as?

The marriage

Across Europe since classical times games have been thrown to celebrate marriages and alliances, victories and conquests. The Baku 2015 Games are a celebration of a marriage between the First Family of Azerbaijan, the Aliyevs, and the oil corporation BP. These are not just the Aliyevs' games; they are also BP's. The company is the official partner of the Games, but the support it gives is far more than just a sponsorship deal; it extends to the creation of "ambassadors" for the Games and the training of staff. BP is intimately involved in delivering the project.

Elkhan Mammadov is Azerbaijan's judo world champion and a BP ambassador at the Games. In interviews he explains with pride his role in representing both the company and the country: "I am happy after learning about our partnership with BP. Now I feel that I am valued and I will approach this challenge even more responsibly." Elkhan is one of six athlete ambassadors that BP is supporting.¹¹ Some BP staff, such as database analyst for sub-sea operations Zaur Nadirov, are competing.

The sponsorship doesn't end with the athletes. BP has partnered with BEGOC to create the Games Academy Graduate Excellence Programme. There are 162 Azerbaijani

graduates and 26 internationals participating in the programme. It is not sport that is taught at the academy, but event management. Students take six module courses developing skills that equip them to work on the delivery of Baku 2015. After completing the modules, they put their training into practice by taking on operational roles in the Games, receiving mentoring as they go. The Games Academy is reliant on BP's involvement, not just through funding but also in the content of the training and the provision of mentors.

Elyse Maggoiri, seconded from Leeds Beckett University, explains the ambition for the academy: "It will provide us with the experience that we need for future events like the Olympic Games that will hopefully come to Azerbaijan." The academy trains the event management staff needed to make Baku 2024 a reality. BP is helping the Aliyevs achieve that higher prize of hosting the 2024 Olympics.

So why does BP care so much about these Games? Gordon Birrell, BP's regional president for Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey, sheds some light: "We hope these initiatives will help Azerbaijan stand out as a host country that can efficiently deliver major projects." If successful the Games will create, for the Aliyevs, the image of Azerbaijan as an exciting country, full of potential and open to the rest of the world. In order to achieve this the First Family depends upon the assistance of BP. Baku 2015's success will be BP's success.

The regime and the oil company have been bound together since 1994, when they signed an agreement to extract oil from Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli field beneath the western Caspian Sea. This deal became known as the "Contract of the Century". The relationship continues to be one of key importance for both

Azerbaijan and BP. As the company declares in its annual report, it invests more in Azerbaijan than any other foreign corporation.¹² In terms of net oil production Azerbaijan is BP's fourth largest province. In 2014 it extracted more crude in only three other places—Alaska, the Gulf of Mexico and Angola.¹³ But Azerbaijan's importance for BP is not just measured in barrels per day; the country is its security, its backstop. When times get hard BP expects to be able to rely on Azerbaijan.

The Shafag-Asiman gas field illustrates how this works. In July 2010, as the Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster unfolded in the Gulf of Mexico, there was speculation in the financial sectors of London and New York that BP would not survive. With investors clamouring for reassurance, BP CEO Tony Hayward embarked on a whirlwind tour to four states, including Azerbaijan. Each visit consisted of a round of meetings in which he tried to reassure governments key to the company's future. In Baku, Hayward met Ilham Aliyev. The Azeri president emerged from their discussions stressing the "successful long-term cooperation between BP and Azerbaijan" and expressing "confidence that this partnership will expand more in the future".¹⁴ The two parties signed an agreement for the new Shafag-Asiman field, committing the company to a 30-year project.

The support was vital. Bob Dudley, who replaced Tony Hayward as CEO, later said that Deepwater Horizon brought BP to within three days of bankruptcy.¹⁵ At a time when the US authorities had effectively banned the company from offshore drilling, the Azeri government gave BP and its investors a vote of confidence. As if to emphasise the point, eight days after becoming CEO, in October 2010, Dudley travelled

to Baku, met with Aliyev and conducted a second signing ceremony for the Shafag-Asiman field.¹⁶

BP is planning to use the Shafag-Asiman field as a test case for its Project 20K high pressure, high temperature drilling. The company hopes that this technology will allow it to extract oil and gas from more than six miles below the seabed, where temperatures can rise to 300 degrees Fahrenheit and pressure can increase to 20,000 psi. This technology is high risk. It is hard to predict the dangers from extracting at such high pressures, and in some of the countries in which BP operates the reputational damage of an accident could be irreparable. The Deepwater Horizon experience shows that this damage is driven by civil society and a relatively free media putting pressure on politicians, who then try to hold the corporation to account. These conditions do not exist in Azerbaijan. If a drilling accident takes place in the Caspian and the company can maintain the support of the president, it will not be held to account by the media, civil society or other politicians.

The company's relationship with the president is key to its Azerbaijan operations. A senior BP executive, speaking in private, explained that for the head of the company in Azerbaijan, Gordon Birell, "the number one priority is their relationship with Aliyev". Keeping Ilham Aliyev happy provides BP with a stable partner that is willing to prioritise fossil fuel extraction over any environmental considerations, social concerns or democratic mandates.

The Baku Games mark 21 years since the "Contract of the Century" was signed. As the marriage between BP and the Aliyevs comes of age, it's time to assess how it came to be and what it has created.

How the marriage came to be

In June 1993, John Browne, head of BP's Exploration & Production division, was in Baku with his team for what seemed like the closing stages of cutting a deal to get access to the Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli (ACG) oil field in the Caspian. Negotiations with the then Azeri president Abulfaz Elchibey, head of the Popular Front government, had been under way for nine months. BP, and the other six companies in the ACG consortium, had agreed to pay a \$70 million "signing bonus" in advance of the deal's completion. But Elchibey was ousted in a ten-day coup led by Heydar Aliyev, the man who had been president of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic and was previously head of the KGB in the country. Through the coup Aliyev returned to rule a state he had dominated for 22 years during the Soviet period. The date he returned to power, 15 June, is now an annual holiday in Azerbaijan: "Salvation Day". In 2015 it will fall three days after the opening ceremony of the European Games.

After the coup, the planned deal on the ACG field was cancelled and the \$70 million was never seen again. But John Browne was determined to ensure the project was not completely derailed. He spotted that Aliyev's autocratic position could actually make things easier for BP by bringing the kind

of “stability” that foreign corporations desired. It meant the company had just one relationship to manage, that with the Aliyevs. The views of Azeri citizens on social, environmental or economic issues were of little consequence. Heydar Aliyev appointed his son Ilham to be vice-president of the state oil company SOCAR. Ilham was central to the final negotiations with the foreign consortium over the ACG field. For its part BP pressured the British government to invite Heydar Aliyev to London for a meeting with Prime Minister John Major and Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd in February 1994. They signed a “declaration on friendship and cooperation” between Azerbaijan and Britain. Notes from a meeting the previous year between Douglas Hurd and BP directors summed up the relationship between the Foreign Office and the company: “[Hurd] emphasised that there were some parts of the world, such as Azerbaijan and Colombia, where the most important British interest was BP’s operation. In those countries he was keen to ensure that our efforts intertwined effectively with BP’s.”¹⁷

On 20 September 1994 the “Contract of the Century” to exploit the ACG oil field was finally signed between Aliyev’s government and the consortium, in which the two largest stakes were held by BP and Amoco, the American multinational.

BP and the Aliyevs’ alliance has been an extremely lucrative one. As Azerbaijan’s hydrocarbon was sucked from beneath its seabed, revenues, power, and people followed—irrevocably moulding a country that was just emerging from Soviet rule. Without the Aliyevs’ support, BP would not have become the dominant foreign company in the new state of Azerbaijan. Without BP’s support, Heydar Aliyev would have found it

difficult to retain power in the year following the coup. This was the beginning of a marriage of mutual convenience.

The marriage cements an alliance between an autocratic family, the demands of capital, fossil fuel dependency, and the strategy of a global military power. Through these forces Azerbaijan has been moulded into an industrial resource colony, following a model familiar to Europe. It has become a zone of sacrifice, a place where ecology, social justice and human rights can be put aside when they threaten to hinder the extraction and exporting of oil and gas. Azerbaijan is being drained by the marriage—drained of fossil fuels, drained of wealth, and drained of democracy.

BILLBOARD OF HEYDAR ALIYEV IN CENTRAL BAKU
PHOTO: PLATFORM





DRILLING RIGS OFF SIXOV BEACH, SOUTH OF BAKU
PHOTO: JAHANGIR YUSIF





What the marriage has created

Once the Games are underway, crowds of spectators, journalists and competing teams will throng the centre of Baku. They will shuttle between the venues, from the Gymnastics Arena and the National Stadium on the hillside in Koroglu down to the Crystal Hall by the bay where the indoor volleyball and handball heats will be held. These venues are not set apart from the metropolis, as was the case with the Stratford Olympic Stadium in London, but lie at the heart of the city. Baku itself will be on display, or at least one face of it.

On show will be the image of a young country, which 25 years ago achieved its independence from the USSR and is now arrayed with the symbols of wealth and glamour. Arrive in Baku at night and it seems like one of the most opulent places on earth. The drive from the Heydar Aliyev International Airport whizzes past in a blur of lights and colour. A daylight walk reveals pristine shopping streets and bright plazas. The boulevard that runs along the Caspian seafront, Neftchiler Avenue (“Oil Workers Avenue”), is lined with boutiques selling luxury goods: Dior, Gucci, De Beers and many more. Yet most of the shops are devoid of customers, for very few can afford their goods.

Here too are the international hotels—Marriott, Four Seasons, Hilton—and nightclubs such as Infiniti. Newly built

skyscrapers of glass and steel house apartments and offices for multinationals such as PricewaterhouseCoopers and HSBC, who use Baku as a hub for business in the whole Caspian and Central Asian region.

As Baku grows so do the ostentatious structures. The Flame Towers, which opened in 2012 at a cost of \$350 million, take their inspiration from Azerbaijan's natural gas wealth. The three flame-shaped skyscrapers dominate the city. At night they become gigantic display screens, which use more than 10,000 high-power LED lights to create an image of the Azeri flag visible across the city. Up close they're less impressive, sealed off by a security fence and visibly dusty. Two of the towers stand empty; the third houses a luxury hotel but little else.

But the sight of new blocks unable to be leased has not slowed construction in Baku. The city's most ambitious project is Khazar Islands. Described by the promoters as a "new Venice", the project will consist of 55 artificial islands in the Caspian Sea with apartments to house 800,000 people and hotels for another 200,000, as well as a Formula One race-track, a yacht club, an airport and the tallest building on earth, Azerbaijan Tower, which will stand at 3,445 feet.¹⁸

Set to open in 2025, the Islands will cost about \$100 billion—more than Azerbaijan's annual GDP. It is the brainchild of Ibrahim Ibrahimov, one of the richest men in the country, who says that he had the vision for the project on a flight back home from Dubai. Khazar Islands could house half the population of Baku, although most of the city's residents are not rich enough to live here.¹⁹ Many are sceptical of the chances of success. If two Flame Towers still stand empty, how are 55 islands to be filled?

It's easy to see why Baku is known as "Dubai on the Caspian". Azerbaijan's neighbour to the east, Turkmenistan, has been largely closed to western multinationals and western consumer culture. Its neighbour to the south, Iran, has been in conflict with western capital and governments for the past three and a half decades. In the late 1990s, however, Heydar Aliyev, assisted by BP, chose to push Azerbaijan down a path akin to several Persian Gulf states. He sought to manufacture a country open to the world, or at least a certain part of the world, by fostering a glamorous internationalism built on tourism, fashion, pop music, contemporary art and sport. The elder sisters of Baku's National Stadium and the Crystal Hall are the Qatar 2022 World Cup Stadium and Yas Island in Abu Dhabi.

The Aliyevs have both created this distinct culture, and in turn have been created by it. Following the death of Heydar in 2003, his son Ilham became president. Since then Ilham and his wife and daughters have built for themselves a status similar to that of the royal families of the Persian Gulf. The cult of Heydar, in whose memory thousands of streets have been named and hundreds of statues raised, serves to establish the Aliyev dynasty and the inevitability of succession. Their status is manufactured through the lifestyle of the First Family, with holidays in St Moritz and Cannes, through their network of friends, including HRH Prince Andrew and Lord Mandelson, and through hosting events like Eurovision and the European Games. From the power of oil comes a culture of power.

Azerbaijan's heritage has been co-opted in the service of this dynasty. The country's vibrant culture encompasses the

Turkic architecture of the 12th-century Maiden Tower, Avraamov's *Symphony of Factory Sirens* that celebrated the fifth anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution, the 1930s novel *Ali and Nino* by the mysterious Kurban Said, and Baku's reputation as the Soviet capital of Jazz. This history has been selectively mined by the Aliyevs to underpin their own image.

The European Azerbaijan Society (TEAS), directed by the British political lobbyist Lionel Zetter, has offices in six countries and organises talks, film screenings and cultural weekends across the continent. TEAS has held jazz receptions at UK party political conferences, music nights at business forums and photo exhibitions at the Council of Europe. The organisation is as close to the Aliyevs as you can get without being run by a member of the First Family. It was established in 2008 by Tale Heydarov, whose father, Kamaladdin, is Azerbaijan's Minister for Emergency Situations. A leaked US embassy cable described him as possibly "more powerful than the president himself".²⁰ The function of TEAS, as with Eurovision and the Games, is to use culture to build political alliances and establish the Aliyevs and Azerbaijan in the European family.

Similar to the Gulf states, this phase in the history of Azerbaijan is built on a particular commodity, oil and gas. As the crowds move around the centre of Baku over the 16 days of the Games, beyond the horizon of the shimmering Caspian Sea will be the work teams on the platforms in the Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli oil field keeping up production day and night. Crude will be pumped from five kilometres beneath the seabed and along pipelines to the terminal at Sangachal just south of Baku. From here gas turbines will drive it through

the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, across the deserts, fields, forests and mountains of Azerbaijan and Georgia to the Turkish Mediterranean coast. Over the duration of the Games, if production is running normally, 13 million barrels of crude will be exported from Sangachal and loaded onto tankers at Ceyhan, flooding out onto the world market.

The culture of power, the image of international glamour, is presented as both desirable and a natural outcome of a successful oil economy. But it was not inevitable that Azerbaijan would become a petro-state. Baku was the world's largest oil producer in 1900, and the region was the focus of Soviet oil production from 1917 to the Nazi Invasion in 1941. However, the USSR then shifted exploitation to western Siberian reserves. Although Azeri output picked up again after World War II, it peaked in the 1960s and declined rapidly into the 1990s.

Heydar Aliyev, as head of Soviet Azerbaijan, had witnessed this decline. When he gained the presidency of the newly independent state of Azerbaijan, he made a choice to place oil at the heart of the country's economy. He was encouraged in this by western international oil companies, foremost of which was BP. His choice has harmed the people and landscape of Azerbaijan in multiple ways: fostering inequality and corruption, strangling democracy and enabling the abuse of human rights, creating ecological destruction and a culture of carbon intensity.

“Nothing works it’s all for show”

It’s summer in Baku, 2014. We are standing outside the brilliant white curves of the Heydar Aliyev Centre. Designed by Zaha Hadid, it has just won the London Design Museum’s “Design of the Year” award with the judges declaring it: “An intoxicatingly beautiful building by the most brilliant architect at the height of her office’s powers. It is as pure and sexy as Marilyn’s blown skirt.”²¹ It draws us into its white folds as we walk around this calm space. Seen from a helicopter above, the curves resolve into the shape of Heydar Aliyev’s signature. It’s an unconscious echo of Baku’s Tofiq Bahramov football stadium, which will host matches during the Games. Built in 1951 and originally named after Joseph Stalin, it resembles from above the letter C, the first letter in the Cyrillic spelling of his name, in his honour.

There have been remarkably few exhibitions held at the Heydar Aliyev Centre since it opened in 2012. That year it hosted an Andy Warhol retrospective; an exhibition of Tahir Salakhov’s work took place in 2013; and, most recently, *Love Me, Love Me Not* featured contemporary art from Azerbaijan and its neighbours.

The Heydar Aliyev Centre is not a cultural institution for the people of Baku. On our visit it was all shut up, another

building closed to passers by. It is only opened for temporary exhibitions, when the target audiences are foreign journalists, wealthy art collectors, celebrities and politicians. It also provides the backdrop to political events. In 2014 it hosted the 20th anniversary celebration of the signing of the “Contract of the Century”, with Ilham Aliyev, BP CEO Bob Dudley and many heads of state in attendance.

Some 250 homes were destroyed to make way for the centre. Giorgi Gogia of Human Rights Watch explained how residents were forced out of their homes: “The government squeezed people out by cutting off their supply of electricity, gas and water. Sometimes residents would be detained and when they came back, their homes were simply gone. Other buildings were demolished with people still in them.”²²

Opposite the centre is a spaghetti junction of roads where Heydar Aliyev Prospekti meets the heart of Baku. Sitting on the white curves of the building we can see traffic stacked up, horns honking, people jumping out of vehicles and walking in the midday sun. Such an intensity of chaos and noise, the contrast with the centre is jarring. Baku is full of such sharp divisions. While dazzling architecture studs the city like jewels, the metropolis itself is poorly designed. Roads are jammed to breaking point; the noise of blaring horns is constant. The drainage system is inadequate. Heavy storms leave cars battling through muddy rivers. Walking down a side street is like stepping backstage on a film set. Dust and debris are everywhere; whole buildings are torn apart, spewing their interiors onto the street. Baku is a city permanently under construction. Sometimes it appears like the only working part of the city’s infrastructure is the metro system opened

in 1967 and since upgraded. It moves people around with relative speed in comparison to the choked streets above.

Often this Caspian city feels like one giant vanity project, designed to amaze but not to function. While architects have been given licence to realise the grandest of visions, town planning has been brushed aside. Most of the residents live in tower blocks built in the Soviet era. They are spartan but have electricity and water—unless the continual cycle of demolition and reconstruction cuts off such necessities. Further away from the city centre, the housing is more basic. Corrugated iron roof sheets sit on walls of concrete breezeblocks, tar-macked roads give out to dirt tracks along which wander goats and chickens. Even from here the Flame Towers are visible, illuminating the night sky. People in Baku feel this disparity; they despair at how a city so glamorous fails to provide even basic infrastructure. We spoke to a young man at the Baku airport. Desperate to escape, he had saved to go to university in Ukraine. “Nothing here works,” he said. “It’s all for show.”

Despite Azerbaijan’s oil and gas income, spending on basic services like education and healthcare is low. Emerging from Soviet rule, Azerbaijan had a strong tradition of universal education with adult literacy levels sitting at 99.9% Since that time literacy rates have fallen; the number of students who drop out has increased; curriculums, textbooks and teaching methods have become outmoded; and school buildings have fallen into disrepair. Since the dire levels of the 1990s just after the end of the USSR, public spending on education has slowly increased—in 2006 it reached 2.7% of GDP—but this is still well below the 6% average for the region.²³ The teaching profession has lost the status it once

had and salaries have deteriorated. In 2008 they were just half of the average national wage. As a result there is a lack of qualified teaching staff. Classrooms are crowded and staff are required to teach subjects they have little knowledge of. The low wages have led teachers to start unofficially charging fees or imposing private tutoring on students. There is evidence that an increasing number of poor families cannot afford the cost of education.

The curriculum, an area over which the government exerts tight control, focuses on the history and geography of Azerbaijan and the organisation of the political system. Students are encouraged to learn by rote, passive consumers of the facts they receive. As education expert Iveta Silova notes, children are taught in a “very undemocratic way”.²⁴ The purpose of such an education is not to create an active engaged citizenry but passive, supplicant subjects.

Healthcare presents a similar story. Low levels of government expenditure, both as a share of GDP and in absolute terms, have left Azeris paying for most of their own medical treatment. Individual payments covered 62% of total health spending in 2007.²⁵ Many people are left with catastrophic healthcare costs when they face serious illness and poorer people cannot access care at all.²⁶ Some Azeris travel abroad for healthcare, often to Iran.

While oil and gas has prospered in Azerbaijan, other sectors have not. The energy industry is responsible for just over 1% of employment, whereas nearly half the population work in agriculture. The privatisation of collective farms in the 1990s resulted in a huge increase in poverty in rural areas. Today 42% of people live below the poverty line and the gap between

the richest in the city and poorest on the land is immense. Outside Baku it is common to find people without a gas supply in their homes even as gas pipelines heading for other countries run under their fields.²⁷

Absolute poverty levels across the country have fallen since the 1990s as minimum salaries and pensions increased. But the benefits of these wage increases have been dampened by a rise in prices of basic necessities. Higher wages are dependent on strong state budgets, however 84% of government expenditure comes from oil and gas revenues.²⁸ While absolute poverty has decreased there has been a dramatic increase in the disparity between rich and poor. Oil dependency and inequality have gone hand in hand.

HEYDAR ALIYEV CULTURAL CENTRE, BAKU (DESIGNED BY ZAHA HADID)
PHOTO: EANA KORBEZASHVILI









SARA AND HER MOTHER, SARA IS STRUGGLING WITH CANCER
PHOTO: JAHANGIR YUSIF





“10,000 years of salary”

Mid October 2014 at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. Azerbaijan is coming to the end of its six-month chairmanship. Founded in 1949, the Council exists to promote co-operation between European countries. It is responsible for safeguarding legal standards, human rights and democracy. Since Azerbaijan became a member in 2001, the Council has become a key battleground and meetings are well attended by both the Azeri regime and Azeri civil society. The former is keen to make the case that all fundamental rights are upheld in Azerbaijan and the latter press the Council to hold Azerbaijan accountable for the daily abuses of those rights.

Journalist Khadija Ismayilova is here to tell European MPs about the multiple ways Azerbaijan is violating its membership. After a long day of meetings, Khadija and Giorgi Gogia from Human Rights Watch sit in the Council lobby waiting for a meeting with the president of the Council's Parliamentary Assembly, Anne Brasseur.

It has been a difficult trip. Many of the Azeris who would normally be at the Council are in jail. The most notable absence is human rights lawyer Intigam Aliyev who has bought over 200 cases to the European Court of Human Rights. Everyone knows that Khadija's own arrest is only a matter of time. While

they wait Giorgi asks Khadija to say something on camera, something she wants to tell others if she is arrested. Without hesitation Khadija says: “Keep fighting guys. Keep fighting for human rights, for those who are silenced.” With a slight shake of her head and a small smile she adds: “If arrest is the price of it, it’s okay, it’s worth it.” Giorgi records it on his mobile phone. On 5 December, Human Rights Watch released Giorgi’s video of Khadija; it was the day of her arrest.

Khadija was born in Baku in the late 1970s. Her family was not wealthy; she had to work for her success. Energy and intelligence led to her quick promotion, not family connections. She became a journalist at 21 when the newspaper she was doing translation work for ran short of staff. She was sent out to get a story and never stopped. Her work led to her becoming head of Radio Free Europe’s Azerbaijan service. There she did the investigative journalism that would eventually see her jailed.

Khadija is adamant that she didn’t set out to target the Aliyevs. The first time we met her in the offices of the radio station, just after she’d got off air from her daily show, she told us: “I didn’t go after the president, it’s just whatever business you dig into in Azerbaijan their names pop up.” As she followed the money trail she was piecing together how Azerbaijan’s political elite keeps hold of the country’s most valuable assets. She began publishing stories about the president, the First Lady, their children Leyla, Arzu, and Heydar, their friends and relatives.

She revealed the many companies that they own, the huge profits these businesses make—often through deliberate price inflation on construction projects—and how these

profits are routed through mysterious proxies and siphoned into offshore accounts. She showed how the Aliyev family controls the country's gold and silver mines and Azerbaijan's telecoms company NAR—one of the key sponsors of the Games—and she tracked what they spent their money on, luxurious properties in London and elsewhere. In short, Khadija showed the Azeri people how the elite had grabbed and squandered the country's money. It was incendiary reporting and the Aliyevs could not ignore it.

One week after publishing her investigations into Azerbaijani telecoms in 2012, someone planted a camera in Khadija's bedroom. Months later, when she was in the middle of a story about the interests profiting from National Flag Square in Baku, Khadija received a letter and some stills taken from a video. The letter stated that if she did not cease her activities the video would be published on the internet. The photos were of her having sex with her boyfriend. Khadija refused to stop her work. The video was posted to the internet.

A smear campaign began against her, with articles repeatedly appearing in national newspapers talking about the videos and labelling her a "loose" woman. Although psychologically shaken by the regime's attacks Khadija continued her investigations, refusing to be silenced.

Many other journalists have been persecuted by the regime. Elmar Huseynov ran the magazine *Monitor*, which was openly critical of the Aliyevs. After a decade of harassment, he was murdered in March 2005.²⁹ It is widely believed the government was responsible. Khadija spoke of Huseynov's death: "They killed him at his doorstep. And the first thing I thought when I heard was, 'It's my responsibility too. It's my fault as

well, because he was doing it alone.”³⁰ The murder catalysed Khadija. Not only her investigative work; she also began mentoring younger journalists, supporting other activists, and campaigning herself. Her energy and determination became a bedrock of the Azeri democracy movement. The government was determined to remove her in the hope that all civil society opposition would crumble.

On the day of her arrest, 5 December 2014, she was bundled into a car with cameras flashing and friends banging on the roof shouting her name. She managed to smile and wave, absorbing the melée before being confined to the silence of her cell in Kurdexani prison.

Khadija’s investigations had led to revelations about the Aliyev family being covered internationally. In March 2010, the Washington Post reported: “In just two weeks early last year, an 11-year-old boy from Azerbaijan became the owner of nine waterfront mansions (in Dubai). The total price tag: about \$44 million—or roughly 10,000 years’ worth of salary for the average citizen of Azerbaijan.”³¹ The boy was President Ilham Aliyev’s son, named after his grandfather Heydar Aliyev. Other properties in Dubai were registered as having been brought in the names of his sisters, Leyla and Arzu.

Of the three Aliyev siblings it is the eldest, Leyla Aliyeva, who is the most famous. Born in Moscow in 1985, as Khadija was studying in a Soviet Baku state school, Leyla lived with her parents under the umbrella of her grandfather, who was a member of the Soviet Politburo and said to be the fourth most powerful man in the USSR. By the time she was nine the Soviet Union had ceased to exist and her grandfather was president of the newly independent Azerbaijan, while her

father was head of the state oil company SOCAR. Leyla spent her teens in London being educated in Queens College for Girls, Harley Street.³² At 22 she married Emin Agalarov, a Russian property billionaire. Today the couple have apartments in Baku, Moscow, Paris, New Jersey and London, where their penthouse looks out over Hyde Park. Emin is also a singer, fond of romantic numbers and pop beats. Perhaps the highlight of his career has been performing during the voting interval of the Eurovision Song Contest 2012 in Baku.

Leyla enjoys a number of roles and interests. She is vice president of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation (her mother is the Foundation's president). In this role she sponsors arts project and conservation initiatives in Azerbaijan and abroad. She has founded her own charity, the International Dialogue Initiative for Protection of the Environment, IDEA. In 2007 Leyla launched *Baku*, a glossy arts and fashion magazine first published in Moscow to enhance Russian-Azeri ties. Four years later, an English edition was launched in London. Published by Conde Nast, whose stable includes *Vogue*, *Tatler* and *GQ*, *Baku* is an advertising vehicle for luxury brands and a particular image of Azerbaijan. Leyla is editor-in-chief of the magazine and occasionally contributes her own illustration artworks.

Leyla is also an artist. Working in black and white, she produces room-sized installations covered in hand-drawn hearts, trees and rivers. Her work is competent, although not particularly original. It has been exhibited on four occasions, all in shows that she has financed. In the summer of 2015, she is exhibiting at the Azerbaijan Pavilion in the Venice Biennale. The show *Vita Vitale* brings together works from

an earlier exhibition *Here Today*, which marked 50 years of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) “Red List” of endangered species. Since November 2014, when the exhibition was shown in London, it has lost the involvement of several artists and the IUCN. Some exhibitors, such as the artists Ackroyd & Harvey, have publicly stated that they pulled out because of the human rights situation in Azerbaijan. Others, such as Gavin Turk and Siobhan Davies, have quietly dropped their association.

By all accounts Leyla enjoys a socialite lifestyle. Reports have her running up a £300,000 bill on champagne one evening with friends and shuttling between events in her family’s private jets.³³ Her personal wealth has been estimated at \$50 million. Those who have met her are divided. Some describe her as vacuous, with little interest in anything apart from herself. Others find her charming, engaged and genuinely interested in the environmental causes she champions. Whatever people’s opinions of her personality, it is clear she is a tireless promoter of the Aliyev regime. It is also apparent that her fortune has been amassed from wealth that by rights belongs to the people of Azerbaijan.

As Leyla Aliyev was jetting round the world, Khadija Ismayilova sat in her stuffy Baku office tracing where at least some of that money came from. She revealed how state assets had been slowly sold off in opaque processes to a few of Azerbaijan’s most powerful families. Leyla holds stakes in gold mining, telecommunication and construction companies.³⁴ In 2008 an account for her was set up in the British Virgin Islands tax haven. Her younger sister Arzu also owns a portion of the goldmine, as well a controlling stake in SW Holdings,³⁵ which

owns the Azeri state airline AZAL. Arzu too holds an account in the Virgin Islands. A report by Panorama and CNBC in 2012 revealed that her father, President Ilham, owned a range of offshore companies registered in Panama. Along with his wife Mehriban, he also holds an account in the Virgin Islands.³⁶ Through a myriad of proxy names and front companies, a considerable part of Azerbaijan's oil and gas wealth is being pumped into the offshore accounts of the Aliyevs and other members of the Azeri ruling elite.

This is not the same as the archetypal petro-kleptocracies, such as that run by General Suni Abacha in Nigeria, who simply stored his stolen wealth in Swiss bank accounts. Rather, it seems the Aliyevs have studied the model of the Gulf states, which invest funds in foreign bonds, equities and property. The Qatar Sovereign Wealth Fund, for example, has purchased London's Canary Wharf, the Shard, Harrods, the Shell Centre and a great deal more real estate. The Azeri State Oil Fund has invested in property in London and other cities. This helps diversify holdings away from just oil and gas, and it also purchases political influence.

Through financing art exhibitions in London, Paris, Venice and New York, and funding cultural events in the UK, Belgium, Germany, Turkey and France, the Aliyev family has created a storehouse not only of gold but also of political support. The logo of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation is emblazoned on the signage at Ca' Garzoni in Venice, advertising the Azerbaijan Pavilion at the Biennale. The First Family helped finance the country's presence at the world's premier art exhibition, and Leyla opened the show. This is civilised looting, condoned on the world stage.

“It is a good place to visit”

On 16 April 2015, at the Court of Grave Crimes in central Baku, a sandy wind is swirling grit into people’s eyes. A young man emerges from a doorway. He is pushed head first into the dusty assault, arms behind his back and eyes watering as he is forced into a waiting van. The man is Rasul Jafarov. He has just been sentenced to six and a half years imprisonment for a crime he didn’t commit.

We last saw Rasul the previous June. He was in a good mood, showing us the studios he had set up for dissident musicians. He told us how hard things had become in recent months as the Azerbaijan regime made it impossible for independent NGOs to register foreign grants. Yet he took it all with characteristic good nature. He was excited by ideas he had and besides the government hadn’t stopped him yet.

Young, handsome and charismatic, Rasul shot to prominence in Azerbaijan when he spearheaded the Sing for Democracy campaign to coincide with the Eurovision Song Contest in 2012. The campaign highlighted the lack of democracy in a country where the ruling family have held onto power through fraudulent elections, attacking independent media and arresting people for so much as making a “Harlem Shake” video.

Euro pop was a serious matter for the Aliyevs. Eurovision

was the perfect chance to show the world they were running a modern, secular, European country. Rasul caused the regime considerable embarrassment when he persuaded Loreen, the eventual winner of Eurovision 2012, not only to meet with him but also publicly give her support to the campaign. The Swedish singer told reporters: “Human rights are violated in Azerbaijan every day. One should not be silent about such things.”³⁷

Since then Rasul has focused on supporting political prisoners in Azerbaijan. In 2014 he announced the launch of Sport for Rights to focus on the European Games. He emailed us about the campaign. He was optimistic but was getting increasing pressure from the regime. He had been taken in for interrogation. Rasul ended the email on a typically upbeat note: “But they still didn’t decide to arrest me!” He sent the email on 1 August; the next day he was arrested.

Rasul was charged with illegal entrepreneurship and tax evasion. Originally sentenced to three months pre-trial detention, he was held for eight months and was eventually sentenced to six and a half years in jail. Human Rights Watch called the charges “bogus”.³⁸ During the trial, the “victims” called by the prosecution stated that they had been fully paid by Rasul and did not regard themselves as victims. When they tried to present documents to prove this the judge refused to look at them. The purpose of the trial was to intimidate Rasul and any others who might be considering speaking out against the regime.

Some 4,000 kilometres or so west of the courtroom, at almost the exact moment that the sentence was passed on Rasul, the CEO of BP, Bob Dudley, was addressing the com-

pany's annual general meeting at the ExCeL Centre in London. "I was proud to represent BP in September as we marked the anniversary of an agreement we first signed in Azerbaijan 20 years ago," he declared. "That deal to produce oil became known as the "Contract of the Century". It has brought new prosperity to the people of Azerbaijan—and I would suggest to you all, it is a good place to visit—but it also paved the way for new business deals and future partnerships."

We questioned Dudley from the floor of the meeting about the human rights situation in Azerbaijan. His reply included his earlier phrase, "I urge you all to go to Azerbaijan; it's a great place." After the meeting closed, one the BP social responsibility team expressed exasperation: "Why did he say three times that Azerbaijan's a great place to visit? Is he working for their tourist board?"

There are many in Azerbaijan who disagree with Dudley's assessment. The country is beautiful and vibrant, but its beauty is marred by the violence of its rulers.

NGOs and law firms have been unable to register foreign grants, their bank accounts have been frozen and staff have been banned from foreign travel. Many groups have been forced to stop work all together.

Leyla Yunus, one of the country's most respected human rights advocates, and her husband, Arif Yunus, were charged with treason—a sentence that could see them spending the rest of their lives in jail. Human rights lawyer Intigam Aliyev was arrested a few days after Rasul. Eight months later, in April 2015, he was sentenced to seven and a half years in jail. There are serious concerns about Leyla, Arif's and Intigam's health.

After many months in detention, eight activists from the youth movement NIDA! were sentenced to between six and eight years in prison. Opposition politicians such as Ilgar Mammadov were also given long sentences.

The election monitor Anar Mammadli was sentenced to five and a half years in prison and the founder of the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety, Emin Huseynov, was forced into hiding in the Swiss Embassy after being stopped from leaving the country. Emin is still there and has now been charged with tax evasion and abuse of powers, meaning that were he to leave the embassy he would immediately be arrested.

Isa Shahmarly, a former chair of the Free (Azad) LGBT group, hung himself with a rainbow flag in his Baku apartment, writing in a note that Azerbaijan society was "not for me".

Seymour Hezi, a columnist with the *Azadliq* newspaper, was attacked at a bus stop. When he tried to defend himself with a bottle he had in his hand, he was arrested by police who appeared to be watching from close by.

Ilgar Nasibov, a journalist who worked at the Nakhchivan Resource Centre, the only independent rights group in the region, was beaten unconscious and left with multiple broken bones and temporary loss of vision in one eye.

On 26 December, three weeks after Khadija Ismayilova's arrest, the offices at Radio Free Europe were raided and closed down. Staff were detained for questioning and their computers seized. The station must now operate from outside the country.

Such a list of names, brutalities and injustice. The past year in Azerbaijan has seen a burgeoning movement full of creativity and optimism stamped on hard. Far from present-

ing a more liberal face as it prepares for the eyes of Europe to be once more turned in its direction, the regime has been getting ever more repressive as it clamps down on dissent in the run up to the Games. The democracy movement appears all but destroyed. Yet most of those in prison understood where their politics, journalism, blogging, monitoring, legal work and other activism would lead. This is what makes them remarkable. As Intigam Aliyev said when he was sentenced, "In this country it is a crime to have an alternative opinion, to talk about election fraud and discuss issues of political prisoners. I do not regret my arrest. Even while in prison I plan to continue my work. Through our arrests our struggle continues."

International events such as the Games define a place of struggle. This is why a long list of restrictions has been imposed on the citizens of Baku during the Games. Street vendors will be banned from the streets. Old cars will not be allowed in the downtown area. Beggars will be forcibly removed from the city. Residents will be asked not to hang clothes on balconies, and anyone unfortunate enough to die during the Games will not receive a burial until after they have finished.³⁹ A mythical version of Baku will be projected during the fortnight, one in which there is no poverty, no hardship, and where even death itself is defeated. No doubt for many of the foreign attendees of the Games, it will seem like "a good place to visit".



LEYLA & ARIF YUNUS BEFORE THEIR ARRESTS
PHOTO: DINARA YUNUS



ANAR MAMMADLI
PHOTO: AZIZ KARIMOV









Sand in the world's eyes

As the Eurovision Song contest was beginning in May 2012, and on the day Prime Minister Cameron met President Aliyev, BBC's *Panorama* programme broadcast "Eurovision's Dirty Secret" detailing the corruption and human rights abuse at the heart of the Azeri state. Interviewed for the programme, Fakhraddin Gurbanov, Azerbaijan's UK ambassador, said: "We are only 20 years old ... 20 years is not much time ... I don't say we're perfect—we do have problems, of course."⁴⁰ Three years later, in May 2015, Simon Clegg, CEO of the Games, was asked about human rights in Baku and replied: "It should be remembered that this is a very young country, which is finding its way after decades of Soviet oppression."⁴¹ These are the routine responses from the government and key partners such as BP: Azerbaijan is emerging from its past; free speech is enshrined in the constitution.

For over two decades the story from the UK Foreign Office, the US State Department, the European Commission and BP was that as Azerbaijan gains revenue from its oil wealth the state would liberalise, become more democratic and less corrupt. They promoted the idea that when Ilham Aliyev took over the presidency from his father the tone of the government would change and it would shake off its Soviet

legacy. This process would be hastened when the really big oil income started to pour into the coffers of the Azeri State Oil Fund, three years into Ilham's presidency in June 2006, when the Baku-Tiblisi-Ceyhan pipeline began to pump one million barrels of oil per day onto the world market. None of this happened.

As Rasul Jafarov explained to us: "Before the oil and gas incomes came to Azerbaijan we had more democracy and freedom. The main income from oil came in 2006 when the Baku-Tiblisi-Ceyhan pipeline started to operate. And from that time the situation started to deteriorate. We have problems with journalists, political prisoners, religious believers being arrested—if you criticise the government you can be easily interrogated and prosecuted under fabricated charges."

In 2011 the global oil price averaged over \$100 per barrel and the Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli project was generating substantial profits for the Azeri state. At the same time, Total announced a major offshore gas find in the Caspian; the Azeri duo Ell & Nikki won the Eurovision Song Contest in Dusseldorf and won Baku the right to host the 2012 contest; Zaha Hadid's Aliyev Centre project was well underway; and Conde Nast launched *Baku* magazine in London. All these events might have given the impression that Azerbaijan was becoming not only richer, but also more democratic. Yet oil wealth and success did not bring democracy. Instead it fixed the Aliyevs' determination to hold onto power in the best way they knew: by strategically suppressing dissent.

It is clear that the fall of the Ukraine president Viktor Yanukovich deeply affected Ilham Aliyev. He had developed a

close connection with Yanukovych after he became president in February 2010. As with Aliyev, Yanukovych had spent the first 40 years of his life in the Soviet Union, although unlike the Aliyevs his family was extremely poor and not part of the Soviet elite. In the four years of Yanukovych's troubled presidency Aliyev made three official visits to Ukraine and held formal meetings with Yanukovych seven times in the presidential palace in Baku. The connection between the two continued right to the end of Yanukovych's presidency—the protests in Kiev's Maidan Square started two days after Aliyev's last official visit. Three months later, on 21 February 2014, Yanukovych was forced from power. He fled from the Ukraine and his opulent palace was looted. Yanukovych now lives in hiding and is on Interpol's wanted list. It is likely that Aliyev and his advisors read the fall of his presidency as in part being driven by the US and EU giving support to Ukrainian dissidents and the opposition, while Russia failed to adequately defend its ally.

This fuelled Aliyev's drive to suppress internal dissent while maintaining alliances with foreign powers. It is this that makes the marriage to BP and the building of a position through international events so crucial to him. But the challenge for the president is that while Eurovision and the Games bolster the position of the ruling elite they also create moments of possible openness that civil society can utilise.

Emin Huseynov, co-founder of the Institute for Reporters Freedom and Safety in Baku, said in July 2014 at the launch of the Sports for Rights campaign, not long before he was forced into hiding: "We want to use this event (the Games) to bring the human rights situation to the attention of the

international, particularly the European, community. 15,000 athletes will come from 49 member states. There will be journalists, fans, official delegations—that's a lot of international attention.”

Indeed, the engagement of investigative journalists in the issues of Azerbaijan and the coverage of them in the international media is far stronger now than at any time in the past two decades. The run up to Eurovision generated a number of documentaries on US and UK channels.⁴² In parallel, the attention paid by the international human rights NGOs has risen dramatically over the past five years with the engagement of Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Global Witness, Article 19, Index on Censorship, Bankwatch, Re: Common and many others.

Strengthened by this foreign support, and distressed by the wave of arrests and imprisonments, 12 Azeri civil society groups and individuals wrote to Bob Dudley, CEO of BP, on 17 September 2014, just prior to the 20th-anniversary “Contract of the Century” celebrations in the Heydar Aliyev Centre. They declared:

“The situation in Azerbaijan has never been worse. As a company that supports the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, it is time for BP to rethink its relationship with Azerbaijan. This is why we, as members of Azeri civil society, are now demanding:

- 1. That you call on the Aliyev regime to release all 98 political prisoners and in particular raise the cases of Leyla and Arif Yunus, Rasul Jafarov and Intigam Aliyev.**

In addition to ask for assurances that other human rights defenders, such as Emin Huseynov, won't be arrested.

- 2. That you end your sponsorship of the 2015 European Olympic Games in Baku. This event is being used to legitimise Aliyev's violent regime among the international community. We are therefore calling on sponsors to withdraw their support.**

"We, the undersigned, are asking you to use the 20th anniversary of the "Contract of the Century" to reconsider your relationship with the Aliyev regime. As long as BP is working hand in hand with this repressive regime to extract our country's hydrocarbons you are enabling repression and the corrupt use of our resources. Until a democratic and accountable government is in power we call on you to cease your activities in our country, in recognition of the detrimental impact they have had."⁴³

Rasul Jafarov and Khadija Ismayilova were signatories. Rasul signed from prison.

A month later, Elodie Grant Goodey, BP's head of societal issues and relationships, issued the company's formulaic response: "BP has long history of conducting its business activities in Azerbaijan responsibly and is already doing much that demonstrates our respect for human rights."⁴⁴

For the time being, with the marriage partner BP being so studiously tight-lipped about the situation in Azerbaijan, the Aliyevs have been successful in their suppression of dissent and the maintenance of international support. With the

imprisonment of journalists and activists such as Khadija and Rasul, the ability of the outside world to see beyond the image of Baku presented at the Games becomes ever more constrained. The support for the Aliyevs as “acceptable autocrats” that comes from BP, the US and the UK throws sand in the world’s eyes.

WOMEN WHO LIVE ALONG THE PROPOSED EURO-CASPIAN MEGA PIPELINE
PHOTO: PLATFORM





What the marriage wants to create

On 17 December 2013, Leyla Aliyeva, as vice-president of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, alongside her father Ilham and mother Mehriban, played host in the Heydar Aliyev Centre to an event vital to her family's position. Around her, in the auditorium of Zaha Hadid's building, were Gunther Oettinger, European Commissioner for Energy; the prime ministers of Georgia, Bulgaria, Albania, Croatia and Montenegro; the Turkish energy minister; the Italian foreign minister; a senior official from the US Department of Energy; UK foreign secretary William Hague; BP CEO Bob Dudley and regional president Gordon Birrell; and SOCAR president Rovnag Abdullayev.⁴⁵ This was the ceremony to celebrate the signing of the final investment decision for Shah Deniz II—a gas field off the coast of Baku. The Aliyevs and BP are working together to build the Euro-Caspian Mega Pipeline, a gargantuan piece of infrastructure that will pump gas all the way from the Caspian to Italy.

Rovnag Abdullayev was keen to highlight the importance of the signing: “This is a truly historic day for Azerbaijan. This project paves the way for Azerbaijan's future and the region's future ... It establishes Azerbaijan as an important energy supplier to Europe, fulfilling a vision we have had for so many years.”⁴⁶

While Azeri oil has been pumped and shipped to Europe for years, this would be the first time Caspian hydrocarbons were sucked directly to the continent through just one pipeline. The infrastructure is in the earliest phase of construction. If it is completed, over the next five years 26 new gas wells will be sunk in the Caspian Sea and the Euro-Caspian Mega Pipeline will be dug into the soil of six countries: Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey, Greece, Albania and Italy. There are also plans to extend it to Bulgaria, Montenegro, Croatia, Romania, Hungary, Austria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia. At a cost of \$45 billion, it will create a huge construction site with trucks and excavators digging through the farmland of thousands of villages, through forests and deserts, across rivers and the seabed of the Adriatic. It will leave a “security corridor” 4,000 kilometres long through southern Europe, in which troops and police are likely to be stationed to protect this “strategic asset”.

The EU has committed itself to a shift to a low-carbon economy by reducing its carbon dioxide emissions by 80 to 90% by 2050.⁴⁷ This demanding transition will require a massive investment in renewable energy systems, improved public transport and energy efficiency. Instead public money is being pumped in the construction of the Euro-Caspian Mega Pipeline and the accompanying gas field via public banks such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. If completed, by 2050 the pipeline will have pushed over 1,000 billion cubic metres of gas through this steel artery, and in the process put just over two billion tonnes of CO₂ into the atmosphere. Our resources are being spent on locking the European economy into a carbon system that

creates climate change, rather than forging a new sustainable path.

If built, the pipeline would cement the BP-Aliyev alliance until at least 2055, by when Ilham would be in his nineties. At the signing ceremony he made special mention of BP alongside the Azeri state oil company SOCAR, an entity closely controlled by the regime: “I express my gratitude to the two leaders of Azerbaijan’s energy sector, SOCAR and BP, which are strategic partners. Between BP and SOCAR there is 20-years experience of cooperation. The agreements that we will sign will allow us to extend this cooperation by 40 years and longer.” His statement was a reaffirmation of the vows made at the “Contract of the Century” ceremony in September 1994.

The pipeline is vital to both the Aliyevs and BP. The entire structure of the Aliyevs’ rule is underpinned by oil and gas revenues. Without that income stream the edifice would begin to shake. Similarly BP, which has sunk \$10 billion into the initial development phases of the Shah Deniz field,⁴⁸ would suffer a substantial financial blow if it were unable to realise that investment. This could prove lethal to the corporation, already weakened by the Deepwater Horizon disaster.

For 16 years from the first extraction from the Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli (ACG) field in 1997 to 2013, there has been a steady increase in output from the BP-led field. But in December 2015, BP announced that oil production was slightly down in 2014. The field is passing its production peak far earlier than the ACG consortium had predicted. This trend is expected to continue and the rate of decline speed up.

Clearly Azerbaijan has hit “peak oil” with its existing fields and unless it can replace oil production with the extraction

and export of gas from new fields, Azeri state revenues will fall rapidly. This is the promise of Shah Deniz II, a gas field pumping hydrocarbons to Europe and revenues to Azerbaijan for the next four decades. If all goes to plan, that income would start to accrue from gas sales to Turkey by 2018 and to western Europe by 2020. BP is the dominant shareholder in the Shah Deniz field, the gas terminal and the export pipeline to Turkey—and is the largest non-Azeri stakeholder in the pipeline as it runs on from Turkey to Italy.⁴⁹ There are five other gas fields⁵⁰ under development that might come on stream and BP is major player in two of them.⁵¹ The Aliyevs are dependent on the success of the Euro-Caspian Mega Pipeline and are dependent on BP as the key player in this vast project.

The scheme, which BP CEO Bob Dudley described as “one of the largest and most complex ... undertaken by the global oil and gas industry” has been under discussion since 2000. Over the past 15 years a raft of different versions, promoted by various states and corporations, have been promised and then withered away. When Dudley was appointed CEO in October 2010 the future of the venture was still in doubt, and he has driven it through to the point of the ceremony announcing the final investment decision in December 2013. Just as Heydar Aliyev and John Browne were fathers to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, the new gas pipeline can be seen as the child of Ilham Aliyev and Bob Dudley. In the wake of the Deepwater Horizon disaster, BP has sold off \$40 billion⁵² worth of assets from Egypt to Vietnam, from the USA to Russia, but it has maintained its investment in Azerbaijan even as other international oil companies have pulled out. Perhaps the personal

chemistry between Dudley and Ilham Aliyev is strong. They are, after all, both extremely rich men in their fifties; Dudley's pay from BP for 2014 was £8.3 million plus share options worth £6.5 million.

The Azeris are not the only ones tied into the pipeline. Gas from a project like this is pre-sold on long-term supply contracts to wholesale users, such as national gas grids or electricity generators. In this case, it has already been sold to corporations in 24 European states. Almost half the nations competing at the Games are moving to tie in parts of their energy supplies to Azerbaijan.⁵³

During his time as UK foreign secretary, William Hague emphasised that the pipeline would deliver “energy security”. The notion is being pushed by the UK, the EU and the US, as they present the project as a means of reducing west European dependency on Russian gas exports, especially in the shadow of the ongoing conflict in the Ukraine and the stand-off between NATO and the Russian government. But the Euro-Caspian Mega Pipeline could actually provide a way for more Russian gas to be pumped to Europe. The volume of gas coming from Azerbaijan would be tiny compared to that supplied to EU states by Gazprom via existing pipes. A Gazprom official dismissively remarked that Azeri gas will be “just about enough for a barbecue”.⁵⁴ Russian gas, pumped through the planned Turkish Stream pipeline under the Black Sea to Turkey, could feed directly into the Euro-Caspian Mega Pipeline⁵⁵ and onto the west European grid without going through Ukraine. The citizens of Azerbaijan and EU states, especially the Greeks and Italians, as well as the shareholders of BP, will have paid for an enhanced delivery system for Russian gas.

This gives the lie to those that try to dress up the pipeline as a way of liberating the EU from Russian gas control.

In the longer run, European decision makers have their eyes on the likes of Turkmenistan, Iraq and Iran as suppliers for the Euro-Caspian Mega Pipeline. But this requires investment in yet further pipelines, including the ecologically risky Trans Caspian Pipeline, and dealing with the Turkmenistan regime, whose human rights record is even worse than the Aliyevs.

And the people who will profit most from it are the couple exchanging vows—the Aliyev regime and their British companion of two decades, BP.

The end of the marriage?

On a grey Baku Sunday in March 2015 a large crowd gathered at the Mehsul sports stadium,⁵⁶ a far more modest affair than the city's National Stadium being constructed on the other side of town. Thousands came holding Azeri flags aloft; the reds, blues and greens flickered brightly in the strong wind. The rally was about the sudden devaluation of the Azeri currency, the manat, in February and the sharp spike in food prices that followed. The crowd chanted: "Stop the plunder! Thieves in power, go! Resign!" The impact of the devaluation was starting to bite; people had lost their savings and the price of staples had rapidly increased. As the rally's Facebook group explained: "Consumer goods, real estate, construction materials, equipment, automotive spare parts—everything is so much more expensive."⁵⁷

In February 2015 Elman Rustamov, head of the Azeri Central Bank, announced that the manat would be unpegged from the dollar. Soon afterwards it was devalued by 33.5%. This was concrete evidence of how the drop in the global price of oil, which had halved in the previous six months, was hitting the Azeri economy. Despite the state's tight control of the media, reports leaked out of unrest in towns across the country beyond the bubble of Baku. This news surfaced in

the same week in which it became clear that the Baku European Games Organising Committee had effectively arranged for competing teams from other nations to be paid to attend. Such a strategy is extremely rare in the history of the Olympics⁵⁸ and demonstrates just how determined the Aliyevs are to ensure the Games are seen as a success. It also shows how they are placing the reputation of the Games, with its global audience, above the well-being of ordinary Azeri citizens. As Ali Kerimli, from the opposition Azerbaijan Popular Front, said at the rally, the money spent on the Games could instead be “directed to address the serious social and economic problems, raising the minimum wage and pension”.

If Azerbaijan’s economic problems continue, so will discontent within the country. Since mid-2014 protests have become scarcer in Baku, yet thousands turned out for this rally and the regime was forced into letting it take place. The pressure cooker of repression could explode if economic hardship is thrown into the pot.

The Baku 2015 Games makes the BP-Aliyev marriage, and the alliance behind it, appear robust, but it is more brittle than it seems. Under the strain of global events, there are cracks appearing. The rapid fall in the oil price, halving the income of the Azeri state, comes at a time when, as we’ve seen, production from the oil fields is moving into decline. This is a double hit to the economy of Azerbaijan. The oil price, which is set globally and not in relation to the output of the Caspian Sea, could remain low for several years. The cost of Azeri oil is relatively high compared with what is produced in Saudi Arabia. This is due to the complexities of offshore oil extraction and because the crude only reaches the world

market at Ceyhan, after it has been pumped 1,800 kilometres across the Caucasus. As with other high-cost production locations, such as the North Sea, if the global price drops below a certain level BP will be pumping oil from the ACG field at a loss. When the Shah Deniz II ceremony was taking place at the Heydar Aliyev Centre, the global oil price, to which the value of Azeri gas is tightly linked, was \$105 per barrel; at the time of writing it is \$55.

Consequently the economics of the Euro-Caspian Mega Pipeline come under close scrutiny. Two of the partners in the project, Total and Statoil, have sold their stakes since the final investment decision was signed in December 2013, amid grumbings about its expected profitability. Elshad Nassirov, vice-president of investment marketing at SOCAR, conceded to the *Financial Times* that the project will be less attractive in a lower oil price environment. As long as the global oil price stays below \$60 a barrel, this vast undertaking will make a loss.

The big question is, how long can the Azeri economy cope with such a low price? And what will be the impact of a sustained halving of income on the relationship between the Aliyevs and BP? We have already seen tensions. On 10 October 2012, Ilham Aliyev, in a statement to the Cabinet of Ministers broadcast on Azeri TV, accused BP of costing Azerbaijan \$10 billion in lost revenues, not maintaining ACG production levels and failing to implement the “Contract of the Century”: “I was promised that very serious changes would be made in a short period of time ... measures would be taken to keep the production at a stable level and what is more the people who made those gross mistakes would

be replaced ... I do not see these promises kept. On the contrary, I think they are playing for time. Therefore, I consider that it is absolutely unacceptable.”

To the amazement of the citizens of Baku, there was a sudden barrage of anti-BP rhetoric in the Azeri media. The following day the company issued something of an apology: “We are fully committed to Azerbaijan ... We are working with SOCAR to address ACG production issues as quickly as possible.”⁵⁹ Within three weeks the regional head of BP in Azerbaijan was gone and had been replaced by a Baku old hand, Gordon Birrell. The following month Bob Dudley was being officially received in Aliyev’s palace.⁶⁰

The storm blew over. But it gives a foretaste of just how sour the marriage could get in the face of collapsing revenues flowing from the ACG oil field to the Azeri coffers. And it is important to understand how vital Azerbaijan is to BP at this particular time. The corporation has been operating from a position of intense capital stress, with its share price languishing in relation to its peers as a result of the Deepwater Horizon disaster. The decline in production at the ACG field, and more importantly the halving of the oil price, makes BP ever weaker. There is recurring talk of the company being taken over, most recently by Shell in autumn 2014 and then by ExxonMobil in the winter and spring of 2015. The loss of its assets in Azerbaijan would be devastating to BP, which is why senior staff are so worried about gaining an extension to the “Contract of the Century” beyond 2024. This fundamental need on BP’s part explains why it remains committed to the Shah Deniz field and the Euro-Caspian Mega Pipeline even as other oil companies pull out. Its judgement whether

to back the Aliyevs' project is not just made on commercial grounds but because it is BP's means to retaining political favour with the Azeri state.

While the underlying economics may make the marriage between BP and the Aliyevs fractious, there are also cracks appearing in the wider alliance behind the arrangement. Since the coup of 1993 in which Heydar Aliyev took power, Washington has been unbending in its support for the Aliyev family. This was emphasised in September 2012, when the US ambassador to Azerbaijan, Richard Morningstar, began in post. Morningstar made an official visit to the Baku square that is dedicated to the memory of the 'Glorious Leader Heydar Aliyev'. He laid a wreath and bowed before the vast statue of the former president. There was outrage amongst the Azeri opposition at this unprecedented display of deference. *Azeri Report* wrote: "Since when have the US ambassadors become required to join personality cults of foreign dictators?"

However, the mood of the relationship between the superpower and the satellite may be changing. In December 2014, during the closing days of his term of office, Richard Morningstar oversaw the release of a statement denouncing the arrest of Khadija Ismayilova—who is, after all, a key employee of the American media channel Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. In February 2015, Morningstar was replaced as ambassador by Robert Cekuta, but the new trend in US policy has continued. On 16 April, the US Department of State declared: "We are deeply troubled by the decision of an Azerbaijani court to sentence prominent human rights activist Rasul Jafarov to a six and a half-year prison term on

charges widely considered to be politically motivated...we urge the authorities to release Mr. Jafarov and others.”⁶¹ A week later the embassy issued a similar statement denouncing the sentence of seven and a half years passed on Intigam Aliyev, and called for his release.

The EU and UK seem to be following the lead of the US. The Foreign & Commonwealth Office stated: “The United Kingdom is deeply troubled by the sentencing of Rasul Jafarov to six and a half years, following questionable allegations.”⁶² A similar statement was released after the sentencing of Intigam Aliyev. Privately there is concern in the Foreign Office about UK backing for the Aliyevs. A former ambassador to the Caspian region said: “Don’t be too sure about throwing all your support behind the ‘stable’ Aliyev dynasty and their skyscraper palaces. Things may turn out differently one day.”⁶³

The EU’s rationale for supporting the Aliyevs is that Azerbaijan will be a long-term, stable provider of gas to member states. When, in December 2013, the ceremony at the Heydar Aliyev Centre inaugurated the Shah Deniz II field and the Southern Gas Corridor, it looked as if the previous 12 years of political wrangling over the route to export Azeri gas to western Europe had come to a conclusion. But 18 months on the fate of the Euro-Caspian Mega Pipeline is once again unsure. In Italy the pipeline plans have been in turmoil. Such is the strength of opposition to the construction in communes in Puglia that it has led to a political battle in Rome between on one side the government, which is determined that the pipeline should be built, and on the other side the regional authority of Puglia and the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Activities and Tourism, which have refused to approve the

pipeline. This has slowed progress on the project and led to speculation that the pipeline will never be constructed across the seabed of the Adriatic. Alternative proposals have been floated that it should finish in Albania and feed into a pipeline system running north into Croatia. This would disrupt the economics of the project and further delay the scheme.

The vigorous opposition from citizens along the route was clearly unexpected by those who drove the project in Baku, London, Washington and Brussels. So too was the political earthquake in Athens. A 500-kilometre stretch of the pipeline runs through Greece. The agreement between the Greek government of Antonis Samaras and the pipeline consortium was signed on 27 June 2013. However, two weeks after the election victory of Syriza in January 2015, the new government disputed the terms that the previous administration had agreed to. In particular, Panagiotis Lafazanis, the Greek energy minister, objected that too little income would be generated by the transit of gas across Greek territory and demanded greater involvement of Greek construction companies in construction work in Greece. He flew to Baku and met Ilham Aliyev to request a renegotiation.

The response, delivered a week later by Elshad Nassirov of SOCAR, was a firm refusal. Nassirov did not pass up the opportunity to rub Greek noses in it by casting doubt on any Greek company's reliability as a partner in the construction, saying: "Another issue is to find a solvent [Greek] company that will not lead to a delay in the construction of the pipeline."⁶⁴ But the dispute will not be so easily settled and if Greece exits the euro, things will become even more fraught for the project.

The core of the EU's argument in support of the Euro-Caspian Mega Pipeline is that western Europe needs more gas, and will continue to do so over the coming half century. However, the European gas market is currently undergoing a steep decline. Demand for the fuel in 35 European countries has been falling rapidly since it peaked in 2008. In the seven largest markets there have been falls of up to 26% in the past four years. The biggest consumers of gas are electricity-generating plants, and only in Turkey and the UK is there a strong drive to build more. It is not just that these trends are undermining the rationale for the pipeline; they also have an immediate impact on the companies behind it.

E.ON was a key partner in the section of the pipeline running from Greece to Italy, holding the third largest stake. But in December 2014 the corporation announced that it would split its operations so that one company would handle its gas and coal interests and another its renewables. Meanwhile, E.ON sold its holding in the pipeline. The CEO of E.ON, Johannes Teyssen, declared: "We are convinced that it's necessary to respond to dramatically altered global energy markets, technical innovation, and more diverse customer expectations with a bold new beginning."⁶⁵ Many observers see this as a harbinger of the future of the European electricity market, as renewables take an ever-greater share.

Just at the point when the long-term economics of gas in Europe are looking doubtful, there is an upswell of opposition to the construction of new power plants as people recognise that such projects lock economies into the systems that drive climate change. In November 2012, a team of activists from No Dash for Gas! occupied the cooling towers of EDF's West

Burton power station in Nottinghamshire, England, to oppose the construction of the power plants, demonstrating this burgeoning resistance.

Such direct actions against gas plants tie closely with the anti-fracking groups in European states from Britain to Bulgaria. They form part of a wider resistance to fossil fuels most recently manifested in the divestment movement and the #KeepitintheGround campaign run by *The Guardian* newspaper. As these initiatives link to opposition to the pipeline in Italy and the democratic opposition in Azerbaijan, the line of the pipeline becomes an artery for groups who are pushing an alternative to the plans of those in Baku and BP.

As the Euro-Caspian Mega Pipeline becomes more expensive, more difficult and more contested, the bond between the Aliyevs and BP is placed under greater strain. Will this complicated venture prove too much for the marriage? Is BP happy to be the only international oil major supporting this controversial pipeline from start to finish? The fissures are beginning to show. Will the alliance between BP and the Aliyevs make it through to when Baku hosts the Formula One grand prix in 2016? Or to the completion of the Euro-Caspian Mega Pipeline in 2020? Perhaps it will come apart before the “Contract of the Century” is renewed and the summer Olympics take place in 2024.

The beginning of a new nation

The process by which the Azeri state arrests, puts on trial and then imprisons those it deems to be dissidents tends to make foreign observers see them as lone actors or individual “victims”. But they are part of a movement working to shape the future of Azerbaijan. The choices they make, to be publicly visible, to stand up in the knowledge that the state will harass, intimidate, abuse and incarcerate them, should be understood as strategic and deliberate acts. The history of those who have struggled for liberation, people like Nelson Mandela or Aung San Suu Kyi, can help us understand what is being born in Azerbaijan when we hear of the imprisonment of Rasul, Khadija, Intigam and over 100 others.

The fields and grasslands, villages and towns of the land that is now Azerbaijan have been inhabited for 12,000 years. Just over four generations of Azeris have lived through the maelstrom since the industrial exploitation of oil around Baku began in 1872. During that time there has been a repeated cycle of boom and bust. The body of Azeri society has gone through huge upheavals both in the phases of oil expansion, when capital has flowed in from London, Paris, Moscow or New York, and in the periods of contraction, when output has declined and with it the country’s international standing.

The dominance of the Aliyev family is as much a feature of the oil industry as the gleaming buildings of “Dubai on the Caspian” and the Games themselves.

Many of those arrested for their opposition are in their twenties or thirties. Should they retain their health, they will live to see Azerbaijan in the 2060s. It is their generation that is faced with the task of building the society that will exist beyond the income from the oil and gas fields. The Aliyev family has participated in the creation of a state whose tax take is 84% dependent on fossil fuels.⁶⁶ As this revenue begins to decline the nature of that state will inevitably alter. With the fall in the world oil price, it may well be that the years around 2015 will be a transformative period.

At this turning point, there falls the Games. The ceremonies of Baku 2015 may in effect celebrate the marriage, but they are also held in defiance of those who oppose that marriage, among them those who wrote to Bob Dudley in September 2014 asking that BP withdraw from its sponsorship of the Games.

On Friday 12 June, Leyla Aliyev will take her seat in the National Stadium, alongside her parents and siblings. The flags of 50 nations will flutter in the breeze above the crowd waiting for the spectacle to begin. As the Games open, Khadija Ismayilova will be only a few kilometres to the north in Kurdexani prison. Internment has not silenced this fierce critic. In the first six months of imprisonment Khadija managed to smuggle three letters out of jail, although she was punished for these acts of defiance by solitary confinement, cell searches and a bar on visitors.

Khadija’s message remains the same: keep strong and keep

fighting. She urges her supporters to: “Speak up publicly and loudly. I don’t believe in human rights advocacy behind closed doors.” Her time in jail has been spent reading and writing. She is translating a book. She tries to support other prisoners by helping draft appeal statements. In a letter published in March 2015 Khadija wrote, “Prison is not the end of life. I am learning the wrongdoings of the penitentiary and justice system. I take it as a challenge.” She remains “full of hope that truth and justice will win”.

The stories of Khadija’s prison work echo the idea of the jail being “Kur De Khani University”. When Intigam Aliyev was sentenced, he said: “I do not regret my arrest. Even while in prison I plan to continue my work.” Perhaps, when we look back on 2015, we will see that the Games created a mirage of Azeri society; that away from the manicured glamour of Baku’s centre, a new nation was germinating in the shadows watered with courage and determination; that the seeds of a new country were stirring in Kurdexani.

Several years ago, Zardusht Alizade, who runs a journalism school in Baku, commented to us: “The oil will end, BP will leave, the elite will move to their fancy houses in London and Paris. And what will be left behind? Lots of empty skyscrapers that we can’t clean.”

The Greek government spent €8.5 billion on the infrastructure of the 2004 Athens Olympics. A decade later the aquatic centre, the baseball stadium, the beach volleyball stadium and the Olympic village all lie in ruins, with scrub growing through banks of seating and smashed tiles in the drained swimming pools.⁶⁷ The stadiums of Baku, which today appear so permanent, may suffer the same fate. The Aliyevs,

assisted by BP, have their eyes on holding the 2024 Summer Olympics in Baku, but this grandiose vision could expire before then. In the same year, the “Contract of the Century” is due to have run its course and a new oil deal for the ACG field will be cut between the Azeri government and the international oil corporations that court it. Will BP gain this new contract, the marriage continue and the Aliyevs host the world Olympics?

Or, by then, will the Aliyevs’ rule have begun to crumble and something new started to grow up, perhaps from the seedbed of Kurdexani? As the relationship between the people of Azerbaijan and the dwindling reserves of carbon beneath the rocks offshore begins to change, a new flowering can begin.

PROTEST IN MEHSUL SPORTS STADIUM IN MARCH 2015
PHOTO: JAHANGIR YUSIF





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Those struggling for human rights, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of press and the right to democratic participation in Azerbaijan.

Those who decry the draining of the wealth of Azerbaijan by a tiny ruling elite with the assistance of international banks, accountancy firms, lawyers, estate agents and art dealers.

Those who refuse to surrender the next three decades of the life of Azerbaijan to the domination of the Aliyevs and BP, and the industrial structures that underpin them.

Those working to shift European society away from its dependency on fossil fuels and towards addressing the challenge of climate change.

Those defending the rights and livelihoods of communities impacted by the construction of oil and gas infrastructure in Azerbaijan and along the pipeline routes from the Caspian Sea to western Europe.

Those citizens in the UK, US and across Europe who, inspired by the actions of fellow Azeris, are challenging the corporations and governments who argue for, build and maintain that infrastructure.

All of these parties represent a different alliance, one that is building a democratic, ecological and just society across Europe from the Caspian to the Atlantic.

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Platform combines art activism, education and research to campaign for social and ecological justice. For two decades Platform has focused on the social, economic and environmental impacts of the global oil industry.

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The inaugural European Games Baku 2015 are about much more than medals. Held in Azerbaijan at the height of a systematic crackdown on human rights and democracy, the Games are the first of a series of international sporting events the country is hosting.

All That Glitters explores how these Games belong to Azerbaijan's Aliyev regime and the British oil company BP and how sport is being co-opted in the service of a dynasty and fossil fuels.

A sequel to Platform's *The Oil Road — Journeys from the Caspian Sea to the City of London*, this publication returns readers to Azerbaijan's capital, where a new generation of lawyers, journalists, politicians and activists is struggling for its country's freedom. *All That Glitters* unpicks the heady mix of sport, repression and hydrocarbons that is blinding the world to the grim reality behind the showcase of Baku.



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