

Caucasus Edition

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Analysis

Karabakh: A Long and Winding Road to Distant and Difficult Peace

By Humay Guliyeva

For Azerbaijanis, Karabakh is a lasting lament and a paradise lost. While growing up, I'd often hear my mother refer to cold springs, foggy mountains and cliffs or the Bülbül² Music Festival in Shusha.³ Many would say that it is good that Bülbül died before the conflict in Karabakh started and he didn't see the subsequent destruction and abandonment of his hometown. I remember a comment my grandmother made when I asked her why do men look so grim in the subway and why don't they look **(Read more on Page 6)**

Constructing and Deconstructing Histories: The Ethnicity Factor

By Milena Oganessian

A cradle of civilization, “a living museum of ancient races,” and the “Mountain of Languages”—*Jebel al-Aisan* in Arabic—these are some of the expressions that have been used to refer to the Caucasus region. These descriptions reflect a rich mosaic of cultural traditions, languages, religions, and identities of the Caucasus. The Caucasus is also associated with the ancient legend of the Golden Fleece that brought Argonauts from Greece to Colchis, an ancient kingdom on the eastern shore of the Black Sea as well as Mount **(Read more on Page 18)**

Blog

‘Outcast’ or The Problem of Re-entry

By Afa

I was inspired to write this blog entry after reading a fellow blogger Jamila Mammadova's "[Key Chain](#)." Jamila writes about her experiences attending a conflict **Read More on Page 2**

Victimization in Peace Work with Histories and Memories

By Edgar Kachatryan

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A Politically Charged Discourse: Identity and Conflict

By Irina Ghaplanyan

That language constructs our reality is a postulate confined not only to social philosophy but also widely adhered to in political science. Identity plays a central **Read More on Page 5**

'Outcast' or The Problem of Re-entry

By Afa

I was inspired to write this blog entry after reading a fellow blogger Jamila Mammadova's "[Key Chain](#)." Jamila writes about her experiences attending a conflict transformation workshop designed to promote a people-to-people dialogue between Armenians and Azerbaijanis on the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh. The experiences and emotions that Jamila describes are common to many of these workshops: hesitation, frustration, anger, and in many cases, transformation of previously held intransigent views and even formation of enduring friendships between the participants from the opposite sides. Jamila, too, went through many of these emotions and by the end of the 12-day workshop she even became friends with an Armenian participant, who presented her with a parting gift: "a key chain with one of Armenia's largest churches on one side and 'Armenia' written on the other." Despite valuing her newly formed friendship and the gift, Jamila writes about her dilemma of displaying the key chain and being viewed as a "traitor" by her Azerbaijani friends and family or hiding it and, therefore, not being true to her friendship.

Jamila's dilemma is not unusual and is often referred to as the "re-entry problem" in the field of conflict resolution. Conflict transformation workshops are designed to probe assumptions and break negative stereotypes and prejudices by creating a safe environment for the participants to express their opinions, fears, frustrations, and also listen to those of the other side. These interactions allow participants to see the "enemy" as human beings and realize that the issue at hand is not as black-and-white as they had been taught to believe. This experience also gives them a glimpse of what a peaceful coexistence would look like: although we may have different views, we can express them and work them out in a civil way. The immediate effects of such workshops are, therefore, increased understanding of the other side and more moderate views about the conflict and how to solve it.

The next step for the participants, then, is to go back to their respective communities and share their experiences and transfer the knowledge and trust they built on an individual level to their societies at large. However, this is no easy task. Upon return to their home countries, participants usually feel pressured to abandon their newly acquired moderation. They feel isolated, rejected, and ridiculed by friends and family. Accusations such as "you're a traitor," "they brainwashed you," or "you probably have [insert ethnicity here] relatives, that's why you sympathize with them" are flung at them from all directions. The task of promoting moderation is even more taxing when the belligerent views are reinforced by media and political leaders. Feeling alone and intimidated, some participants begin questioning themselves and the validity of their newly found moderate views or refrain from sharing them altogether to avoid hostile confrontations.

One way to overcome the re-entry problem is to keep in touch with the fellow participants in order to build the self-confidence needed to promote peace and reconciliation in your community. Chances are they too face the same obstacles and feel isolated. Another way is to utilize new media tools such as blogs to share your views: these are easily accessible to many and allow for a "breathing space" in initiating uncomfortable discussions. Unlike face-to-face conversations where people might feel "cornered," blogs allow for reflection without the pressure to immediately respond. Furthermore, the ability to set the rules and moderate discussions allow for a civil thought exchange.

Although the ultimate goal is to draw in hardliners to reevaluate their rigid views, a feasible first step to take is to connect with more open-minded people, who might not necessarily agree with you, but who would be willing to listen. As the network gradually expands and those outside of this network realize that moderates no longer constitute a small minority and that more moderate views are "in the air," they might also be more willing to join (a phenomenon usually referred to as the "social cascade"). Finally, the most important thing to remember is that these processes take time. So to avoid disappointment and the temptation to give up, it is important to set reasonable goals. Even if you are able to persuade one person to reconsider his or her views, it is one less person wasting his/her energy on hatred and it is one more ally in promoting peace.

Victimization in Peace Work with Histories and Memories

By Edgar Kachatryan

*“Humans are not just the object of history, but the subject.”
Paulo Freire*

Living in a country involved in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and having unsolved issues with its neighbor Turkey, I am working on the direction of studying the interconnections of memories and constructions of the identity of individuals and societies of countries and regions involved in conflicts. Nowadays, looking to the past and understanding the roots of conflicts is becoming more and more popular as an approach in conflict transformation. Due to different historical perceptions of conflicting parties towards their pasts, parties are often unable to engage in meaningful dialogue; this is likely the reason why the work on histories and memories was not considered relevant to peace work for a long time. Lately, the vision of the peace community toward this methodology has changed and they think, “Why not use this methodology as a basis for dialogue? Why can’t telling each other their different perceptions be a topic of dialogue? Why don’t we support people in understanding how these perceptions among their own sides came to be?” The work with histories and memories is an advance that is very closely linked with peace activities and is the most useful method for forming a historical consciousness.

In general, I perceive memory as a construction of the past that depends on identity construction – identity construction “decides” what is remembered and how the past is remembered. In our work we use several key definitions:

- Historical policy: The way to interpret historical events and processes according to the political and social aims of the society.
- Individual memories and narratives: The remembering about past events consisting of always subjective and therefore selective reconstructions of the past based on a person’s own experiences and feelings.
- Collective memories: Memories of a group or collective (such as families, villages, nations, etc). Collective remembering also occurs in a very selective way. Some content and topics associated with the past might be considered taboo in a certain social context, while others could be particularly highlighted.
- Communicative memories: Memories linking members of different generations (such as stories told by grandparents about their past experiences and their emotions) — these can become a part of individual memories or collective memories. As a result of being limited to the time of co-existing generations, communicative memory represents the short-term memory of a society.
- Cultural Memory: The collective recollections that can no longer be passed on directly to following generations on account of the fixed time limitations of the recollections that can be communicated in person. This occurs via cultural codifications such as written texts, photographs, films, monuments, rituals, commemoration days, symbols, and so forth.

A few weeks ago I had the opportunity to attend an event in Berlin organized by the Henrich Boell Foundation and Memorial entitled “Experience of Memorial on Oral Histories,” delivered by Alyona Kozlova and Irina Ostrovskaya. The event featured a documentary revealing the historical truth of Stalin-era crimes; the documentary was based on work done by the Memorial. Participation in the follow-up discussion brought me to the idea for this article to reflect and share my thoughts with our readers on work with memories and history from the perspective of peace-building. By analyzing events from the perspective of the previously mentioned definitions, we will have the following image.

During the Soviet period it was politically, and partly socially, necessary to interpret the historical facts of repression as something vital to protect the power of the Soviet empire. It was so important for the political elite that they did everything possible to suppress individual memories of people who were affected by the crimes of the regime. For example, they even took measures to ensure the guilt was passed on to future generations of those people whose parents were killed for what they supposedly did. As a result of this guilt and atmosphere of fear, facts and stories of those who were killed by or suffered from the Stalinist regime never became part of the collective memory of society. At the same time, these memories rarely become a source of communicative memories because this guilt stops people from passing on memories of those who have suffered.

According to the documentary, the Memorial interviewers tried to create an entire image of the regime from small gaps in memories of people from the former Soviet Union and help them to analyze and reconstruct their own memories. But what I saw afterward was that people started to perceive themselves as victims, which is, of course, to be expected; even people from among the participants of the event started to share their own memories and conclude that they, too, were victims. For me, it was an example of how the communicative memory generates the remembering of those who are listening to the stories and how powerful the construction of memory is.

Although I have great respect for the activities done by the Memorial and their significant experience in this area, what was missed was a space for future-oriented discussion and what to do with this burden of victimization. While this is likely caused by a difference in the goals of peace-building activities and approaches, and those of the Memorial, from my perspective all the results of the investigation provided a very good space for discussion and dialogue on how to move forward and what we can learn from our past. In general, the looking-forward part was missed.

Trying to analyze all the things described, I have tried once again to understand the applicability of this experience to our own context of societies involved in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. I have come to the conclusion that it is very risky in our context to stop this process at the level of victimization.

Comparing with my own context, when the image of victim is actively cultivated by historical policy and all of the parties to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict act this way, we can see that Armenians believe that they are victims because of the Soviet regime, and Azerbaijanis have the same perception about their past. At the same time, their collective, communicative, and cultural memories remind both parties that they are always the victims of the opposite side. We see self-victimization at all levels of memory mentioned above. In this context, most of the memories of societies are about their suffering. The victim image becomes the strongest part of the individual and collective identities of societies. At the same time, people are starting to think that they are not responsible for the situation they have -- they are just victims -- and fall into a trap of their memories.

Creation of a space for analyzing and understanding the real roots of the victimization; having the ability to compare this with the analysis of representatives of the opposing society; when people understand that they are deciding what, why, and how to remember and realize that they are the actors of history of their own memories; putting the focus not on the political interests of the state, but instead on human interests; and creating a joint history of the conflicting parties —all of these directions could be a good start for joint reconstruction of memories.

A Politically Charged Discourse: Identity and Conflict

By Irina Ghaplanyan

That language constructs our reality is a postulate confined not only to social philosophy but also widely adhered to in political science. Identity plays a central role among various elements or constructs within this social reality. What forces define individual and collective identities? How do they define them and why? Various schools of thought within political science answer these questions differently, but many agree that language is a crucial tool in these processes.

It is difficult to underestimate the importance of discourse in shaping constructs such as identity, national interest, and foreign policy. The power to produce this discourse, however, in developing countries, where media is government controlled and civil societies do not have much of a voice, is largely confined to the couloirs of the state apparatus, or the political elite.

The construction of the new post-Soviet identities of the Armenian and Azerbaijani nations was tailored along the historical and cultural trajectories but also through war and, therefore, largely in opposition to each other. What is, however, troubling is the fact that after the war this process as well as the over-securitization of the conflict was virtually "privatized" by the politicians to beef up their political dividends.

The case of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh is ideal for analyzing how over the years a discourse around the conflict can be extremely politicized, over-securitized, and significantly shaped by the politicians. In Azerbaijan, the discourse around the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is dominated by anti-Armenian propaganda, shaping and cementing the perception of the people that Armenia and Armenians are eternal enemies. In Armenia, in the discourse around the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Azerbaijan, the word "Turk," for example, figures prominently, referring to Azeris as Turks, and thus injecting centuries-old distrust and painful history existing between Armenians and Turks.

Civil societies in both countries still do not have enough leverage and power to resist the politically charged discourse. It is obvious that today, the war continues on cyber space, in print media, radio, and TV, and the primary tool of this warfare is language. Azerbaijani warfare is offensive, Armenian is defensive, but both are saturated with over-politicized and over-securitized discourse, continuing to shape hostility towards each other's identities.

It is interesting to note that by articulating this kind of discourse, politicians politically trap themselves. If this politically charged discourse is reduced, it would help those politicians to actually talk about concessions not as failures but as the means to reach a peaceful solution. Therefore, by reducing the politicization of the discourse and increasing its humanization, we increase the significance of constructive peaceful and not the currently destructive processes.

Those Armenians and Azerbaijanis who choose to define their identities not through a hostile perception of each other, but a conscious and constructive understanding of the benefits of peace and neighborly relations, must gradually take control of this hostile "textual warfare" and move it into a positive stream. Much like the authors of this website are doing.

I looked at the towers and thought "that is impossible!"...OK, so let's start working on it!
Philippe Petit, a French high wire artist who
walked between the Twin Towers¹

Karabakh: A Long and Winding Road to Distant and Difficult Peace

By Humay Guliyeva

Preface

For Azerbaijanis, Karabakh is a lasting lament and a paradise lost. While growing up, I'd often hear my mother refer to cold springs, foggy mountains and cliffs or the Bülül² Music Festival in Shusha.³ Many would say that it is good that Bülül died before the conflict in Karabakh started and he didn't see the subsequent destruction and abandonment of his hometown. I remember a comment my grandmother made when I asked her why do men look so grim in the subway and why don't they look each other in the eye. She answered that this is because they have lost Karabakh; how can they now look into each other's eyes without shame? I knew that she was not serious at all, but I remember the reproach in her voice and the uneasiness in the train. Azerbaijani mugham,⁴ announced by UNESCO as a "Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity," has a tune called "Karabakhi shikasta," a deeply moving melody which silences people whenever played and reminds of lands lost. While it would be out of the scope of an academic paper to discuss many emotional aspects surrounding the Nagorno-Karabakh problem, there are several points I want to emphasize about the aim of this paper.

Essentially, these pieces of memory are woven together, of glory and beauty in the picturesque Karabakh Mountains and subsequent images of post conflict refugee influx, humanitarian disaster, tent camps, and the dark chaos in post-Soviet Azerbaijan. The collective memory of the Azerbaijani people regarding Karabakh as of today is defined, framed, and frozen in the past. This May, 15 years will have passed from the date the Azerbaijani-Armenian ceasefire was signed. An entire generation was born and grew up in the tight boundaries of this radical, hopeless, and victimizing framework. The issue of Karabakh has been an answer to every single question ranging from consolidation of power to the rocketing military expenditures. Because there is no vision, today is no different than yesterday, while tomorrow is no different than today. In this paper, I will attempt to look at some lesser known and discussed aspects of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and offer certain recommendations to bring the possible light at the end of the tunnel closer.

Karabakh: The Past

All Russia is peaceful. The wolf and the lamb are grazing together.
The Azerbaijani satirical journal *Molla Nasreddin*, April 1906

To a Western observer, whether people has been on the territory for several hundred or several thousand years may seem irrelevant, but in the Caucasus history plays a vital role and is the focus of an often heated and extensive debate. While Monte Melkonian (1993), a famed Armenian military commander and thinker noted, "The fact that Armenians were constituted as a people in their homeland over the course of several thousand years does not in itself say very much about the political demands we are advancing today," historical rhetoric was especially powerful on the Armenian side and the war was a natural reaffirmation of the right to the "historical Armenian homeland" (p. 3). The history may not be brought up as an argument at least officially these days. Yet, the absolute belief in historical justices and injustices continues to haunt the parties.

The area of Mountainous Karabakh formed part of the greater Armenian state during the rule of royal dynasty of Arshakunis (279-428 AD) (Cornell, 2000, p. 49). Two crucial events took place in this period, one of which was the conversion of Armenia to Christianity and the other, the creation of the Armenian alphabet by Mesrop Mashtots. Karabakh effectively resisted the Sassanid Empire⁵ and kept a form of autonomy until the Arab invasions in the late ninth century. Armenian sources cite the unbroken tradition of national sovereignty of Mountainous Karabakh as the only part of Armenia until the late medieval period as a crucial reason for their attachment to the place.

In the early 18th century, as Peter the Great was showing interest in the Caucasus, the Armenian leadership attempted to approach Russia and Georgia with the aim of concluding an alliance to protect the

region from Ottoman or Persian rule. Yet this didn't happen and in 1735, the Shah of Persia, Nadir, occupied the region and ruled it until his assassination in 1747. This marked the collapse of Persian rule in the Caucasus, and Azerbaijan and Armenia were partitioned into khanates. By the middle of the 18th century, the internal conflicts between ruling Armenian *melik* families destroyed the dominance of Armenian local elite in Karabakh and led to Panah Ali Khan Javanshir's establishment of the semi-independent Karabakh khanate. The population of the khanate was mixed with Armenians, Muslims and other groups living scattered, with overlapping settlement patterns. Russian attempts to control the territory led to the conquests of a number of khanates between 1806 and 1809 and ultimately the first Russo-Persian war of 1812-1813. The Treaty of Gulistan, which ended this war, led to Karabakh officially passing from nominal Persian to Russian rule. As khans and their descendants returned and tried to make use of popular disaffection with Russia to reclaim their thrones, they were supported by Iran, leading to the second Russo-Persian war and second Persian defeat. After the 1828 Treaty of Turkmenchai, Russia encouraged and actively organized a population exchange. A huge number of Armenians left Persian and Ottoman lands to settle in the Russian Caucasus, while a large number of Muslims left the South Caucasus for regions under Persian and Ottoman control. According to Russian census reports, the Armenian population in Karabakh constituted 9 percent of the total in 1823 (the remaining 91 percent was referred to as "Muslims"), 35 percent in 1832, and 53 percent in 1880 (Cornell, 2000, p. 54). The census is not limited to Mountainous Karabakh, but the entire Karabakh khanate. The process accelerated further after the Russo-Turkish war as Russians saw Azerbaijanis as generally unreliable and potential allies to Turks, given their ethno-linguistic affinities. Armenians were seen as devoted to the tsar, reliable, and Russia's natural allies in the region. By the turn of the century, there were over 1,200,000 Armenians in what is called "Eastern Armenia" as opposed to "Western Armenia," located in modern-day Turkey.

The first tensions between Armenians and Azerbaijanis broke out during the first Russian revolution of 1905. Disturbances started in Baku, Nakhichevan, and Yerevan and soon spread to Shusha with the first inter-ethnic riots. While the reason of the clashes as well as the allegations about who struck first remain debated, the central imperial authorities' failure to intervene meant that they saw no reason in stopping the violence, as it would distract the groups from their respective pursuit of freedom (Suny, 1993, pp. 167-168). Violence reemerged in the summer of 1906 in Karabakh with "wholesale battles waged between Armenian and Azeri village communities" and as a consequence, the city of Shusha became rigorously divided into Armenian uptown and Azeri downtown (Van der Leeuw, 1998 p. 70-71). While the number of the dead varies between 3,000 and 10,000, all data suggest that the Azerbaijani side suffered from more casualties than the Armenian. Whereas Azeri mobs were very badly organized, armed Dashnak units fighting on the Armenian side were considerably more effective (Dasnabedian, 1990, p. 81). The events of 1905 marked the symbolically important spill of "first blood."

Blood was spilt again in 1918, this time in Baku. After the October Revolution in 1917, the Baku Soviet Commune was established under the leadership of Stepan Shahumian, Lenin's "Extraordinary Commissar" for seizing power in the Caucasus. The rapture with Musavat⁶ led to sharp divisions as the Dashnak party cooperated with the Bolsheviks, opposed separation from Russia and "identified counterrevolution, as did the Bolsheviks, with... Muslim federalists" (Suny, 1972, p. 204). As the tensions escalated, the Bolsheviks decided to use artillery shelling against Azerbaijani quarters, which caused immediate capitulation and the unconditional recognition of Baku Soviet's power. After Azerbaijani representatives accepted the terms, the Dashnaks took to looting, burning, and killing in the Muslim section of the city. By Shahumian's estimate more than 9,000 were killed during two days. "The Armenian soldiers became more brutal as resistance subsided and for a day and a half, they looted, killed and burned" (Suny, 1972, p. 224). The British vice consul in Baku, Major A.E.R. McDonnell wrote in his report to the War Office that "not a single Musulman of any importance remained" (Alstadt, 1992, p. 86). The March days of 1918 went down in Azerbaijani history as the "Armenian-Muslim fights."

In spring 1918, Karabakh and Nakhichevan became scenes of atrocities between the advancing Ottoman Army of Islam⁷ under Nuri Pasha's leadership and Armenian General Zoravar Andranik. On September the Army of Islam took Baku and the Azerbaijani population avenged for March days. According to a special commission formed by Armenian National Commission, about 9,000 Armenians were massacred. The capitulation by Ottomans on October 30 and the Armistice of Mudros led to the replacement of Ottoman troops in Caucasus by British ones. General Andranik tried to annex Karabakh to Armenia but the British reaffirmed Karabakh's belonging to Azerbaijan by appointing Khosrov Sultanov, a Muslim governor in Shusha (Cornell, 2000, p. 58). Sultanov managed to persuade the Armenian Assembly in Karabakh to accept the Azerbaijani jurisdiction, recognizing the realities of geography, economy, and transportation that linked the enclave to Azerbaijan rather than Armenia beyond the Murov mountains (Swietochowski, 1995, p. 76).

There are several points that are important to emphasize in this long and rather morbid prelude to the more modern and relevant timeline of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Perhaps the most obvious point is that the history of Karabakh cannot be divorced from its past and Karabakh cannot be dealt with in a modern context only. The history has been exceptionally well documented to be pushed onto the dusty shelves of the past, neither should it be. The discussion on who started fighting first and who retaliated as well as the desire to outnumber the other side in the numbers of claimed victims is dominant, yet objectively victims exchanged places with perpetrators once their hour struck. The combination of “hear no evil, speak no evil” policy in the Soviet Union coupled with deep, but artificially nurtured belief in the “brotherhood” of all Soviet people proved to be a fatal mistake. Seventy years of living together gave Azerbaijanis and Armenians the unique chance to speak about their pain and if not forget, at least forgive each other for it. The absence of proper dialogue and forced reinterpretations of history were partly culpable to a violent resurfacing of the Karabakh issue.

Many scholars tried to explain the motives behind Karabakh as religious animosity between Muslims and Christians, ethnic enmity between Armenians and Turks (with Azerbaijanis being perceived as Turks and natural enemies), and the manipulation by outside forces. While all of these factors may be relevant to a certain degree, the conflict can be best understood in terms of national identity professed through the sense of belonging to a territory, based on historical ideas and collective myths (Milanova, 2003, p. 4).

The importance of the latter in the formation of national consciousness should not be underestimated. The major myth that made Karabakh so dear to both sides was that Karabakh was an undefeatable fortress and the last outpost for a nation. The very idea had a fundamental influence on the formation of ethnic mentality of all people in the Caucasus, a mountainous region where a distance could be described by the radius of a bullet.⁸ I previously touched upon the importance of Karabakh for Armenians during Arshakuni rule. Azerbaijanis speak fondly about the siege by Persian Aga Muhammad Khan Qajar in 1795, which lasted for 33 days with 80,000 troops. Ibrahim Khalil Khan of Karabakh mobilized the population of 15,000 for a long term defense, during which women fought alongside men. The citadel stood intact. Aga Muhammed Khan captured Shusha in the second siege in 1797 with increased troops; however, several days later he was killed in enigmatic circumstances by his own bodyguards. Ibrahim Khalil Khan returned to Shusha and restored his authority as the khan of Karabakh. During the Second Russo-Persian war, the citadel of Shusha held out for several months and never fell. Hence it was not coincidental that the capture of Shusha (in Armenian sources, the “Liberation of Shushi”) on the evening of May 8, 1992, marked a first significant military victory for Armenian forces in Nagorno-Karabakh, removed Azerbaijan’s last strategic foothold, and proved fatal (De Waal, 2003, p. 180).

Another point is that in the modern history of Nagorno-Karabakh, massive eruptions of violence in the form of inter-communal massacres began with the 1905 Russian Revolution and would re-emerge each time the Russian state was in condition of either crisis or overhaul, during the civil war in 1918 and *perestroika* in 1988. In a way, this shows the loophole in an extremely popular “ethnic hatred” or “ethnic incompatibility”⁹ argument, as both Azerbaijanis and Armenians used the crumbling empire to further their own *political* interests in the region (De Waal, 2003, p. 273). Azerbaijanis, who formed their identity as such only at the turn of the century (under Russian rule, they were identified either as Muslims or Tatars) with the wake of the national consciousness and cultural renaissance, were in very unprivileged spots in their own lands marginalized from key power positions as “disloyal people.” The parallel could be drawn with the Armenian minority in Turkey, as Christians living in a Muslim empire. The alliances which were formed in these incredibly complex situations were rather pro one’s own nation than against the other one; hence, they were more pragmatic and rational, than fanatic and vengeful.

The tragedy of the Azerbaijani and Armenian people is not that they suffered, but that they suffered *at each other’s hands*. The role of diverging national narratives cannot be denied. While the names of Andranik and Shahumian still bring shivers to Azerbaijanis and serves as a reminder of brutal massacres, both are greatly hailed and admired as national heroes in their native Armenia. At the Martyr’s Alley in Baku, the highest spot of the city, alongside graves of those who fought and died in the Nagorno-Karabakh war, there is a memorial to Turkish soldiers who liberated Baku in 1918 from Bolshevik-Dashnak Soviet Forces. Turkish forces were led by Nuri Pasha, Enver Pasha’s brother who alongside Mehmet Talat Pasha and Ahmed Djemal was considered the main planner of the events of 1915, widely known as the Armenian Genocide.

The emergence of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue led many Azerbaijanis to accuse themselves of short-sightedness, shortage of historical memory and excessive hospitality. As feelings and rhetoric hardened, the voices of dissent remembering good times of cohabitation with Armenians fell silent.

While many dismiss good neighborly relations under Soviet times, as being imposed from above, they also tend to forget that before the beginning of the 20th century, Azerbaijanis and Armenians fought no more than any other two nationalities in the region. Hence, the “ancient” hatred is not *that* ancient.

This might sound as too macabre, yet the fact that atrocities were mutual could make reconciliation easier, as after all, no one can claim the exclusive right of being the victim. Presently, however, both nations suffer “national amnesia” where their own pain is greatly exaggerated and the other side’s is dismissed as a “lie.”

Karabakh: Soviet Period, *Miatsum*¹⁰ and a ‘Friendly Extended Fist’¹¹

It was an old village. All the Armenians and Azerbaijanis had intermarried. I remember when they told me, “This won’t affect us; this is a landslide from out of nowhere, which won’t make us quarrel.” In September I went back. By that time they had already divided the square and drawn a border. One half of the village was gone to the Armenians, the other to the Azerbaijanis. An Azerbaijani husband had even stayed in one side with his three children and the Armenian wife had gone over to the other half with three children.

Interview with Grigory Kharchenko, the Moscow official who visited the village in Karabakh in February 1988 and came back seven months later (De Waal, 2003, p. 55).

Men who take up arms against one another in public war do not cease on this account to be moral beings, responsible to one another and to God.

Instructions for the Government of Armies of the United States in the Field (1863)

In December 1920, the Revolutionary Committee of Soviet Azerbaijan under the pressure from central authorities issued a statement that Karabakh, Nakhichevan, and Zangezur were all to be transferred to Armenian control. Stalin, who was a Commissioner for Nationalities published the decision, but the Azerbaijani leader Narimanov denied it (Cornell, 2000, p. 60). Four months later, the pendulum swung back as the “Treaty of Brotherhood and Friendship” between the newly founded Republic of Turkey and Soviet Union included a provision that both Nakhichevan and Karabakh be placed under the control of the Azerbaijan SSR. On this note, Richard Hovannisian (1996) mentioned that, “Soviet Russia, on the international front, sacrificed the Armenian question to cement the Turkish alliance” (p. 293).

For Stalin, who favored the divide among people of the Caucasus to prevent unified resistance, the idea must have been welcome: not only would Armenians be separated into two entities living in the Armenian SSR and Nagorno-Karabakh, but so would Azerbaijanis be physically separated from Nakhichevan. To diminish direct Azerbaijani control, the area was granted the status of autonomous oblast and a decree from Baku on July 7, 1923 officially established this state of affairs. A month later, the capital of Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) was moved from Shusha to Khankendi, and the latter was renamed Stepanakert after Stepan Shahumian.

The decision deepened Armenian feeling of frustration with the loss of Western Armenia despite promises made by Woodrow Wilson and the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhichevan despite Soviet promises. The frustration was well formulated by Melkonian who wrote that, “it is our duty (the duty of progressive Armenians) to study the historical, cultural, national and demographic situation up until 1915, so as to define the approximate frontiers of our historical homeland ourselves. We do not need U.S. presidents to tell us where our homeland is” (Melkonian, 1993, p. 8).

The Azerbaijani counter claim was that sizable Azerbaijani minorities in Armenia, Georgia, or Daghestan were geographically concentrated in specific areas and while constituting the majority were not granted the autonomous status that Nagorno-Karabakh enjoyed. Nagorno-Karabakh was a unique case in and of itself where a national group was endowed both with a union republic as well as an autonomous region in another union republic. Normally, national minorities living outside their national republic would not be eligible for autonomy status, as there were simply too many of those due to Stalin’s numerous dividing lines.

A similar Azerbaijani grievance was Zangezur, a district that connected Nakhichevan to the rest of Azerbaijan, which was transferred to Armenia in December 1920. Zangezur was continuously emptied of its former residents, as according to official Russian censuses its population was 51.7 percent Azerbaijani in 1897, but by 1926 the population had declined to 6.4 percent. During the same period, the ratio of Armenians increased from 46.1 percent to 87 percent. Stalin, with the advise from Lavrenti Beria and Anastas Mikoyan, also signed two USSR Council of Ministers decrees, dated December 23, 1947 (No. 4083) and March 10, 1948 (No. 754), ordering a forced “resettlement” of more than 100,000 Azerbaijanis from the Armenian SSR to the Azerbaijan SSR in the period of 1948-1951 (Polian, 2004). Most of the resettled perished along the way.

In 1979, the Soviet census recorded that 79 percent of the population of Karabakh was Armenian, with Azerbaijanis comprised 21 percent. The similar figure for Armenians was 97 percent back in 1939. The Armenian government accused the Azerbaijani government of intentionally trying to manipulate the demography of the region by economic, social, and political discrimination. In reality, the province's indicators were higher than average economic indicators for Azerbaijan SSR, with the industrial output and capital investments of Nagorno-Karabakh rising by a factor of 3.3 and 3.1, respectively in the period from 1970 to 1986, while the similar figures for the entire country were 3 and 2.5 (Gahramanova, 2007).

The real campaign for the reunification of Karabakh with Armenia started only with *glasnost* and *perestroika* – the policy of maximal publicity, openness, and transparency initiated by Gorbachev in the second half of 1980s. On February 20, 1988, the local Soviet of the NKAO resolved, “Welcoming the wishes of the workers of Nagorny Karabakh Autonomous Region to request the Supreme Soviets of the Azerbaijani SSR and the Armenian SSR to display a feeling of deep understanding of the aspirations of the Armenian population of Nagorny Karabakh and to resolve the question of transferring the Nagorny Karabakh Autonomous Region from the Azerbaijani SSR to the Armenian SSR...” (De Waal, 2003, p. 10). The Pandora's box had been opened.

Rallies in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh demanding reunification followed. First, groups of Azerbaijani refugees fled the Armenian regions of Meghri and Kafan, which had many Azerbaijani villages, after trouble broke out (De Waal, 2003, p. 18). Anti-Armenian pogroms in Sumgayit and Baku on February 27, 1988 and January 13–14, 1990 resulted altogether in approximately 150 deaths and opened a full-fledged violent page of the conflict. By the time Azerbaijan declared independence from the USSR at the end of 1991, it was at war with Armenia and the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh. In the conflict both sides deported thousands and engaged in brutal acts of ethnic cleansing; approximately 304,000 Armenians were expelled from Azerbaijan and 894,737 Azerbaijanis were expelled from Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and seven adjacent territories — 30,000 Azerbaijanis and Armenians perished (United Nations, 2003). In May 1994, the Russian-mediated ceasefire was signed. Since then, the conflict was transformed into a so-called “frozen conflict” or “no peace, no war” situation negotiated by the “Minsk Group” of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The Minsk Group, also referred to as “troika,” is composed of American, French, and Russian co-chairs.

Karabakh: Where the Streets Have No Name¹²

*I want to run, I want to hide
I want to tear down the walls
That hold me inside
I want to reach out and touch the flame
Where the streets have no name...*
U2, “Where The Streets Have No Name”

This section will be devoted to the peace process, its actors, their roles, and aspirations as well as their potential in transforming the conflict and its rhetoric. Relatively few have grasped the changing dynamics as well as the incredible complexities within the conflict. If Azerbaijanis and Armenians themselves have not properly understood the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, it would be quite naïve and optimistic to expect deep evaluations, let alone policy prescriptions by outside observers. The abundant majority of academicians and scholars have went down the path of describing the historical animosities, the relative righteousness of claims, the importance of Karabakh as a cornerstone of national Armenian ideology or of modern Azerbaijani statehood, and so forth. Very few have paid attention to what has happened *inside* the societies during these 15 years as the region has gained visibility and certain geo-strategic importance. While there were certain suggestions that would without any doubt permit more positive dynamics, such as strengthening civil society or enabling more dialogue within as well as between societies, they failed to take notice of underlying obstacles and remained in the realm of wishful thinking. Coupled with this wishful thinking was the urgency and importance of resolution due to the “the safety, security, and stability in the South Caucasus” or “the security of strategic energy supply routes to Europe.” The recent war between Russia and Georgia led to intensified mediation efforts by both Russia and the U.S., to prevent the possibility of the outbreak of hostilities in the region which is presently not too far from Europe and bring back the sides to the negotiation table. The major flaw of this approach is that selling the idea of foreign negotiated peace to highly stigmatized societies will be extremely difficult, if there is no buy-in from inside. There is no point in creating another Bosnia and Herzegovina, with separate entities, separate governments, constant UN representatives on the ground, and the perpetual threat of escalation of hostilities. What makes Nagorno-Karabakh different from Bosnia is also that the momentum for an

enforced peace settlement is long gone. In Bosnia, this happened in the midst of a humanitarian crisis, whereas in Nagorno-Karabakh the worst that could have happened already did, while no one intervened.

To paraphrase Hrant Dink,¹³ Armenians and Azerbaijanis should not just be each other's poison but also each other's antidote. The peace is hardly achieved by halfheartedly put presidential signatures on a paper. It is achieved through the transformation of outlook inside societies, bringing the skeletons out of closet and *rationaly* evaluating the "mutually hurting stalemate." The prospects are not particularly encouraging, as Alvaro de Soto, UN Secretary General's Special Advisor on Cyprus, mentioned in a private discussion that, "Karabakh is one of these conflicts which creates much heat, but not much light."

Armenia and Azerbaijan have come a long way since the early 1990s. The Constitutions have been ratified, electoral processes have been regularized (yet not necessarily democratized), and the armed militia groups have for the most part been reined in. Yet while on the outset, both countries (particularly Azerbaijan) may seem as strong states, they remain weak institutionally. The weakness of the South Caucasian states is interesting when juxtaposed to the strength of the nations living within those states. By strength here I imply the strong sense of national identity, unity and even "uniqueness."

State weakness consists of patterns of flawed legitimacy, in which the domestic use of force becomes common, the state becomes personalized, several political communities vie for power, and the basic idea of a state constitutes an arena of conflict (Baev et al., 2003). Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan have called this a "stateness" problem, which arises when there are "profound differences about the territorial boundaries of a political community's state and as to who has the right of citizenship in that state" (Linz and Alfred Stepan, 1996, p. 16). This partly explains the Azerbaijani position in the conflict as to why Nagorno-Karabakh was a threat to not simply Azerbaijani nationhood, but statehood as the aim of separatists was not to capture power in the capital or change relative divisions of power, but to secede altogether.

The institutional weaknesses of Armenian and Azerbaijani states coupled with a questionable legitimacy derived from their peoples create a perfect niche for national unification for a common cause against a common enemy. Mutual demonization in the societies, lack of virtually any contact, the monopolization of peace processes by political elites, and the crowded peace process have been some of the commonly recognized obstacles. Below I will focus on some more or less known situations between Scylla and Charybdis.

Mutual Demonization

On each side, there is a tendency to highlight the most extreme instances of violence. For Azerbaijanis, these are the massacres at Khojaly¹⁴ and for Armenians, the pogroms of Baku and Sumgayit¹⁵ (De Waal, 2003, p. 172). These instances were not representative, yet they tend to be remembered and portrayed as such, institutionalized within official narratives. According to Marina Kurchkiyan (2005), "poor reporting and inadequate mass communication forced many people to rely on hearsay, while the lack of democratic means of public debate facilitated the rapid growth of stereotypes, prejudice, tunnel vision and hostility" (p. 147-165). The media coverage of the conflict also deserves attention. Since the ceasefire there has been a consistent decline of interest towards the Karabakh problem in Armenia, reflecting the public mood that the conflict has been solved by de facto Armenian effective control (Grigoryan & Rzayev, 2005, p. 49). In contrast, ANS, which is the leading private Azerbaijani TV and radio company, opens its daily news with the words "Armenia's aggression towards Azerbaijan continues."

Yerevan and Stepanakert

The major problem in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict negotiations lies in the inherent conflict of an organization. The OSCE's Minsk Group, which is comprised of states (France, Russia, and the U.S.), is negotiating for states (Armenia and Azerbaijan) to the conflict where the sides that have the most to gain or lose are not represented at the negotiation table (i.e., Karabakhi Armenian and Azerbaijani communities as non-state actors). According to Volter Jacoby,¹⁶ the crucial assumption of the Minsk Group, which turned out to be a mistake, was the widely held belief that Yerevan would have enough influence over Stepanakert to secure the Karabakhi Armenians' compliance with any peace deal reached.

There is a Gordian knot between Stepanakert and Yerevan. It is an intricate relationship, as the "Karabakh factor" has been a determining factor in internal Armenian politics, while at the same time the Armenian state currently has a strong influence over the Karabakhi authorities.¹⁷ Yet having taken Armenia's economic and military support for granted, Nagorno-Karabakh could afford to be a single-issue government in its external relations, whereas Yerevan's relations with its neighbors and wider world have to take a multi-dimensional perspective. In essence, even when Yerevan was ready for compromises, Stepanakert was able to resist and prevail in its arguments, as Nagorno-Karabakh's struggle held a universal appeal for Armenians everywhere as a historical justification for a victimized nation. This led to the

rejection by Stepanakert of the “step-by-step approach,” which was accepted by both Yerevan and Baku. The major aspect of “step-by-step” was that the negotiations on the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh (whether it would be independence, unification with Armenia, or more horizontal linkage to the Azerbaijani state) would be postponed until the withdrawal of the armies, the safe and dignified return of refugees, and the restored trade and communications links. This has been particularly reinforced by “the time is on our side” belief, that the longer Nagorno-Karabakh maintains its de facto independence, the harder will it be to reverse the wheel of history.

Elites and Societies

The extent of social participation in the peace process is effectively zero. Only the highest echelons of the political establishment, as presidents, their aides, and foreign ministers, have been involved in direct contact with the other side. Paradoxically, this is the complete opposite to the early 1990s when mass demonstrations took place in Stepanakert, Yerevan, and Baku related to the issue of Karabakhi independence. Nagorno-Karabakh shaped and defined the nationalistic discourse in both countries and was everyone’s daily concern. While many in Azerbaijan would prefer the demonstrations not to take place and the secession of Nagorno-Karabakh was tragic, the demonstrations were largely seen and celebrated as the culmination of free speech after years of silencing. The current syndromes of elitism, secretiveness, and centralization in the peace process strongly remind of Soviet rule. At the same time, the secretive approaches left the shadow of suspicions above all proposals, which became vulnerable to demagogic exploitation by opposition groups on “selling out” and the subsequent crash due to opposition at home.

Charismatic Leadership and its Discontents

An excellent point made by Hratch Tchilingirian (2005) is on the “dilemmas of charismatic leadership,” that is over-dependence on and centrality of individual leaders, rather than wider institutions (p. 64). The “charisma” was described by German sociologist Max Weber as “a character specifically foreign to everyday routine structures” based on “the validity and practice of personal qualities” rather than rules. The definition is easily applied to Heydar Aliyev, the late Azerbaijani president who could have subscribed under “*l’etat c’est moi*”¹⁸ by Louis XIV. Charismatic authority in these republics has not simply put the independence of judiciary and legislative branches into question. The larger question is whether a charismatically led state with structural institutional weaknesses could resolve conflicts and offer necessary guarantees of rights to its formerly autonomous regions. The latter is especially relevant for Azerbaijan and Georgia, yet it could have been easily applied to Armenia.

The strong argument justifying Karabakhi Armenian unwillingness of “reunion” with Azerbaijan is the lack of credible guarantees and tolerant democracy even within Azerbaijan. The government’s difficulty in accommodating its own political opposition poses questions to its capacity to reintegrate Karabakhi Armenians, who fought against the Azerbaijani state and are perceived as “enemies.” Despite Azerbaijani president’s promises to grant Karabakhi Armenians “the highest degree of autonomy that exists in the world” (Ilham Aliyev), no details on what this autonomy would be like have been provided. Also, no efforts have been made to determine whether and if a common ground could be found (International Crisis Group, 2005b). The lack of public discourse coupled with constant bellicose statements does not create a fertile ground for peace.

The Arbiters

The OSCE Minsk Group has been regarded with skepticism by both parties for their inability to make any significant step forward, despite 15 years of back and forth negotiations and shuttle diplomacy. The Minsk Group co-chairs are less likely to act exclusively as individual mediators than as representatives of their respective states and interests behind them, largely discrediting their credibility and neutrality. U.S. foreign policy in the region has been particularly contradictory through time. The influence of the Armenian-American lobby has had a strong impact on the formation of current U.S. policy towards the region, often contradicting policies articulated by the U.S. executive branch (Shaffer, 2003). One of the most obvious examples was Section 907 of the Freedom Act introduced in 1992 prohibiting all U.S. government aid to the government of Azerbaijan.

The OSCE as an organization lacks political, diplomatic, economic, or military clout to induce the parties to reach a settlement. The unwillingness of Western countries to commit a peacekeeping force, even after the ceasefire was signed, further reduced the OSCE’s chances of brokering a peace settlement. The only success that the OSCE can claim to have is the creation of a sustained negotiation process that has been active until today. Yet while the presidents may seem to have found a common approach in front of the international community, back at home the discourse is shaped by expressions as “never” and “out of the question.”

This leads us to another critique that during the long history of negotiations, the Minsk Group was focused on peacemaking versus peace building, in other words on signing the final deal instead of trying to change attitudes to create an atmosphere in which peace is feasible. While the Minsk Group would welcome short-term gains, they are not willing to undertake long-term pains.

The Karabakh Factor in Azerbaijan and Armenia

Azerbaijan. As was mentioned, Nagorno-Karabakh was the main key impulse to the awakening of national sentiment in Azerbaijan, drawing unprecedented wide sectors of the population into a movement for social and political reform. Yet at the same, it is interesting to notice how the “Karabakhi card” was used by competing elites in quest for power during the history of the conflict as well as in keeping power currently. The internal dynamics are perhaps too complex and unnecessary to explain for this paper, yet it is important to note that the issue, perhaps implicitly, was used to justify harsh measures repressing protest at the conduct in elections. The need for social stability is consistently emphasized and prioritized, with the motive that Azerbaijan’s defeat in the war had been mostly due to domestic turmoil.

Armenia. While I touched upon the importance of the “Karabakhi card” in Armenian interior political life in the past, the 2008 elections emphasized that the issue is as alive as ever. Serzh Sargsyan’s credentials as Hero of Artsakh (Armenian for Karabakh) were unchallenged and his main rival, Levon Ter-Petrossian, was discredited due to his “soft” and concessionary approach to the conflict resolution. The large protests by Ter-Petrossian’s supporters ended with violent clashes with the police, as a result of which 10 people were killed and a state of emergency was imposed for 20 days.

Yerevan, Stepanakert, and the large Armenian diaspora might hold diverging opinions, yet the conflict among Armenians is itself taboo in political culture. Even when relatively moderate parties refer to “territorial concessions,” this implies the return of occupied Azerbaijani territories outside Nagorno-Karabakh and not the region itself.

Quo Vadimus?

So, where do we go from here? In the last section, I tried to discuss certain tips of icebergs that many actors do not see as they are sailing to the distant horizon of peace. Below, I will try to elaborate on certain ideas, which may be uncomfortable truths.

According to International Crisis Group (2005a), Nagorno-Karabakh may be the world’s most militarized society. There are about 18,500 highly trained and equipped troops in the Nagorno-Karabakh Defense Army, with approximately 8,500 Karabakhi Armenians and 10,000 Armenians. If these figures are accurate, Nagorno-Karabakh’s 65 persons per 1,000 inhabitants under arms would surpass almost all other countries for proportion of population in the military. According to an eyewitness’s account, the frontline border around Nagorno-Karabakh and occupied territories could easily be among the most fortified in the world, comparable to the border between North and South Korea. The landmines remain a crucial issue, as according to experts from HALO Trust¹⁹, it would take at least five to seven years to demine the areas where people walk and travel at a rate of 1,000 mines and other explosive ammunition pieces found and discarded per year.

The indicated figures are a perfect testimony to not simply the absolute nonsense of military resolution, but also of deep mutual mistrust. A peace strategy in Nagorno-Karabakh, based on a sequential/linear approach (i.e., first settling the conflict and only after proceeding with the peace building), turned out to be harmful in positive conflict transformation, as while any feasible solution was not achieved, the gap between societies widened and deepened further with the crystallization of “victor”(Armenia) and “victim”(Azerbaijan) identities. The sequential approach is also not sustainable, as the political resolution will not make much sense if Azerbaijanis and Armenians are not prepared to live together. While realistically, at the moment the final deal seems distant, a dialogue is necessary to break down ingrained stereotypes. The latter is particularly crucial for the young people, as while the generation of my parents lived together with Armenians and had Armenian friends, for the generation born in the 1980s the only images are related to war and the long, sad line of graves of young people who died in the mountains of Nagorno-Karabakh. This is important in Armenia as well, where Azerbaijanis due to their ethnic and linguistic kinship are often equated to Turks and seen somewhat complicit in the massacre of 1.5 million Armenians during the last days of Ottoman Empire. While this is a gross mistake, the power of ideas and stereotypes is undeniable. Hence, just as the emergence of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue was everyone’s problem, on the same token the solution should also belong to everyone. The dialogue inside the wider part of grassroots leaders, such as leaders of local NGOs, refugee camp and community leaders, and the narrower level of academics, scholars, and students should be encouraged. Apart from being one of the most common sense peace-building approaches, these initiatives would diminish the need to seek external justice and question different

statements supporting one or the other side as “whose justice?” The latter is crucial in a region as the Caucasus, which during its long history saw invasions and conquests from Persians, Ottomans, Arabs, and Russians, hence the fear of hegemony is (and will be) intense. As Murad Petrosian, Karabakh politician and the editor of the newspaper “Chto delat’?”²⁰ noted, “if the construction of the peace begins without fundamental changes in public consciousness, then it will soon share the fate of Palestinian peace. *The key to real peace* for Armenians lies not in the ruling elites of Azerbaijan but in Azerbaijani public consciousness, likewise for Azerbaijanis, the key lies in the public consciousness of Armenians.”

Again, while these “feel good” measures may sound plausible and constructive from any angle, the implementation of such initiatives will require a deep democratization of Azerbaijani and Armenian societies coupled with the increase in the influence and empowerment of Azerbaijani internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Azerbaijani politics²¹. Only this way would Azerbaijani society reverse a recent trend in the public consciousness stemming from a defeat complex, underachieved national aspirations, and perceived victimization of a nation. In a truly democratic society there would be no need for nationalist ideology as a panacea and answer to every question.²²

Status

The conflict started with a status and it has to end with a status. This is one of the uncomfortable questions, which block development in the negotiations every time they are posed. In short, the position of the Armenian side is “territory for status,” where the seven occupied Azerbaijani territories adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh will be given back once the Azerbaijani side recognizes the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh. The Azerbaijani side argues that once territories are given back, trade and communications could be restored, borders opened, refugees returned, and the status question could be negotiated at a later stage. Armenians perceive the seven territories as a national security question, but also as the major trump card they don’t want to give away for free.

One question that Azerbaijani society should decide is what is non-negotiable versus which concessions could be made. While *de jure* and on every map and encyclopedia Nagorno-Karabakh is portrayed as a part of Azerbaijani territory, it has not been so for the last 15 years. Azerbaijan has not exercised any effective control over those areas. Azerbaijani citizens have not been able to travel to their territories, neither have the locals been able to live there. The blockade has not been effective in forcing Stepanakert to step back as the Armenian diaspora pours a lot of money into the region, one famous example being the construction of a good road along the Lachin corridor linking Nagorno-Karabakh to mainland Armenia. While this money will not create a Switzerland out of Nagorno-Karabakh, it will be enough for the staunch opposition to any idea of restoration of status quo before the escalation of the conflict. If what Azerbaijan truly wants is the return of the refugees to their houses, then this is a perfectly legitimate right that all sides could agree upon. Currently, Baku is against a confederal solution, where Stepanakert would have broad powers to manage its internal affairs and maintain its fundamental political integrity. On the other hand, while Yerevan is staunchly against any “vertical” relations between Baku and Stepanakert, it has not rejected a confederation based on horizontal power sharing. In an interview with International Crisis Group (2005b), former President of Nagorno-Karabakh Arkadi Gukasian said that horizontal association with Azerbaijan is not ruled out, as long as there is no subordination. This would allow Azerbaijan to save face and guarantee the return of refugees. Serious mechanisms to guarantee the minority rights of Azerbaijanis should be put in place. While it is natural that Azerbaijanis would not and should not accept living in Nagorno-Karabakh united to Armenia under Armenian jurisdiction, any other solutions such as loose confederation or even independence should be acceptable. The strength of the Azerbaijani state is not in the reach of its territories on the maps, but in the development of its people and the enforcement of their legitimate rights. It is crucial to note that “it takes two to tango,” hence both sides should be fundamentally on the same page about provision of security to people and committing to not undermine the peace process.

Of course, this sketch is not ideal. It is extremely hard to imagine such a vision in the leadership and in society as well, where it would be seen as a “defeatist approach.” It will be very hard to rebuild Nagorno-Karabakh and the seven adjacent territories, where no infrastructure has remained and essentially everything has to be started from scratch. Painful decisions regarding who has to pay for what, who should be settled where, and who should be resettled from where will have to be taken. No doubt that it will be contentious. Also most of my perspectives come from an Azerbaijani side (a highly unusual one), and I do not have a particularly deep knowledge of Armenian realities. However, the resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh might shift the entire paradigm in the Caucasus. It might pave a way for the creation of a “brave new world” where the win of one side is not necessarily the loss of the other one.

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Footnotes

- ¹ Obsessed with towers since he accidentally read the news about their construction in the dentist's office in 1968, Philippe traveled to New York on several occasions to make observations. "The artistic crime of the century" took six years of careful planning and Philippe walked over the wire on August 7, 1974. (Source: Documentary "Man on Wire.")
- ² Murtuza Mammadov was a famous Azerbaijani opera and folk music performer, who was nicknamed as "bulbul" by neighbors ("nightingale" in Azerbaijani) since his childhood. He studied music and vocal arts in the Azerbaijani State Conservatoire as well as La Scala Theatre in Milan, Italy. Able to blend national manners of performance with traditions of Italian vocal school, he was also the first musician to publish study guides in teaching students how to play tar, kamancheh and balaban, the traditional music instruments of Azerbaijan.
- ³ Located in the picturesque Karabakh mountains, Shusha (also known as Shushi) was a popular mountainous climatic resort in the Soviet Union. Shusha was extremely popular with Azerbaijani musical and poetic traditions, as well as famous for its carpets.
- ⁴ A highly complex system of modal music with close ties to Persian musical tradition, with songs based on medieval and modern poetry of Azerbaijan. Love is a common theme, with both worldly and mystical love of God.
- ⁵ The last pre-Islamic Iranian empire with the Sassanid period witnessing the highest achievement of Persian civilization.
- ⁶ The oldest existing political party in Azerbaijan, founded in 1911. Bolsheviks viewed Musavat as a false friend of social democracy and vilified them for representing Muslims, whom they regarded as a deviant and disloyal minority within the empire. During the February revolution of 1917, which collapsed Imperial Russia, Musavat wanted a democratic republic that would guarantee the rights of Muslims.
- ⁷ The Army of Islam was a military unit established between March-August 1918 by Enver Pasha, War Minister with the purpose of conquering new lands in the South Caucasus for the Ottoman Empire at the wake of Russian decline.
- ⁸ Leo Tolstoy in his "Hadji Murat" described the villages in this mentioned manner.
- ⁹ The argument was made by Serzh Sargsyan, former defense minister and current President of Armenia, who said that "our cultures are not compatible. We can live side by side, but not within each other."
- ¹⁰ Armenian for "reunification," a movement that started with the collection of 80,000 signatures in Nagorno-Karabakh in 1988 to petition the Soviet Government for the secession of the region from Soviet Azerbaijan and its reunification with Soviet Armenia.
- ¹¹ The reaction of Azerbaijani intelligentsia to the peaceful nature of the demonstrations in Nagorno-Karabakh and Yerevan
- ¹² A song by Irish rock band U2. The soloist Bono was inspired to write the lyrics by the notion that it is possible to identify a person's religion by the streets on which they lived, particularly in Belfast.
- ¹³ Hrant Dink was the editor-in-chief of bilingual Turkish Armenian newspaper "Agos." A prominent member of the Armenian minority in Turkey, he was an active advocate of Turkish-Armenian reconciliation and human and minority rights in Turkey. Dink was prosecuted three times under Article 301 of Turkish Penal Code for "denigrating Turkishness" and was assassinated in Istanbul in January 2007 by a 17-year-old Turkish nationalist.
- ¹⁴ In the small, yet strategic town of Khojaly, located between Stepanakert and Agdam, 613 civilians were murdered by Karabakh Armenian forces on February 26, 1992. Some women and children were scalped. The day of a massacre had symbolic revenge significance as it was a run up to the fourth anniversary of anti-Armenian pogroms in Sumgayit. Armenians refer to the massacre as the Battle of Khojaly or Khojaly events. Thomas de Waal notes more honest and brutal summation by Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan: "Before Khojaly, the Azerbaijanis thought that they were joking with us, they thought that the Armenians were people who could not raise their hand against the civilian population. We were able to break that [stereotype]. And that's what happened. And we should also take into account that amongst those boys were people who had fled from Baku and Sumgayit."
- ¹⁵ The pogroms in Sumgayit, which were led by Azeri mobs and targeted ethnic Armenian population, took place on February 27 1988. The official death toll released by Procurator General was 32 people, 26 Armenians and 6 Azeris. According to Thomas de Waal, the brutality of Sumgayit was a catastrophe not just for Armenians, but for Azerbaijan as well, and "ordinary Azerbaijanis were horrified and confused."
- ¹⁶ Volter Jacoby worked as Assistant to the Personal Representative of the OSCE's Chairman-in-Office for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in 1998-1999. In 1999, he completed a PhD on the politics of Armenia.
- ¹⁷ The "Karabakh factor" is indeed undeniable in Armenian politics. Robert Kocharian, the president of Armenia for 10 years from 1998-2008, was an ethnic Karabakhi himself and one of the founders of the *Miatsum* (Unification) organization. He was Nagorno-Karabakh's second elected president. The preceding president Levon Ter-Petrosian was forced to resign after agreeing for a "phased" settlement of the conflict which would postpone the agreement on Karabakh's final status and its nature of relations with Baku. The current president of Armenia, Serzh Sargsyan, is also an ethnic Karabakhi from Stepanakert. Sargsyan was the Chairman of Nagorno-Karabakh Republic Self Defense Forces Committee and is considered to be one of the founder's of Nagorno-Karabakh's armed forces. Sargsyan is also known for organizing several battles in the Nagorno-Karabakh war.
- ¹⁸ "I am the State" in French.

¹⁹ Registered British charity and American non-profit organization whose purpose is to remove the wreckage of war, in particular landmines.

²⁰ “What is to be done?” in Russian.

²¹ Throughout most of the 1990s, Azerbaijan gave higher priority to resettling refugees from Armenia than promoting the social and economic integration of IDPs, which were anticipated to return soon to their pre-war homes. While currently with increasing oil revenues many IDPs are being resettled, they are still under tight governmental control.

²² I find it worthy here to quote Levon Ter-Petrosian, who expressed it succinctly and with convincing clarity: “What do they mean by a national ideology? Only one thing — which the whole nation should accept. A whole nation accepts one single ideology only in totalitarian systems, only in ideologized states. If there is democracy, no one can impose any ideology. Today, every ideology in Armenia is a national one to me, because each of them projects the best way of solving the national issues in itself. If a nation is forced to accept a national ideology, that is the end of democracy” (Astourian, 2000, p. 34).

Constructing and Deconstructing Histories: The Ethnicity Factor

By Milena Oganessian

A cradle of civilization, “a living museum of ancient races,” and the “Mountain of Languages”—*Jebel al-Alsan* in Arabic—these are some of the expressions that have been used to refer to the Caucasus region. These descriptions reflect a rich mosaic of cultural traditions, languages, religions, and identities of the Caucasus. The Caucasus is also associated with the ancient legend of the Golden Fleece that brought Argonauts from Greece to Colchis, an ancient kingdom on the eastern shore of the Black Sea as well as Mount Ararat, the location where Noah’s Ark was supposed to have ground to a halt. The Caucasus has been at the crossroads of great civilizations for centuries, each of them leaving their traces on the region. Due to its location on the ancient trade routes between East and West as well as North and South, it is a meeting place of Greek, Roman, Persian, Slavic, Turkic, and native Caucasian cultures. The area also has attracted the interests of the Byzantine, Persian, Russian, and Ottoman empires, the Soviet Union, and recently the European Union and the United States.

The Caucasus, however, has also been known for its violent conflicts and wars leading to massacres and massive population displacement. During the final stages of the disintegration of the Soviet Union from the late 1980s till the early 1990s, a number of ethnic groups in the Caucasus have experienced violent conflicts that continue to this day, impeding the peaceful development of the region. Numerous studies have sought to explain the roots of post-Soviet conflicts by developing and applying various theoretical approaches and proposing ways to understand and possibly resolve these conflicts. The following discussion focuses on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict that first erupted in February 1988 and led to a war between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 1992–1994. The argument of this paper is built around the notion of ethnicity. Why ethnicity? One of the reasons is that ethnicity and divisions along ethnic lines still have a strong meaning and expression in a post-Soviet South Caucasus; people identify themselves based on their ethnic heritage rather than civic nationalism. This study attempts to synthesize a number of theoretical approaches to the notion of ethnicity and ethnic conflict. It draws on the strengths of these frameworks to analyze the role of history-writing in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. These frameworks include primordialism, instrumentalism, and constructivism. A theory of “symbolic politics” will also be discussed. Finally, this paper considers some possible ways, including anthropological knowledge that can contribute to the process of conflict resolution. The conflict around Karabakh is very complex and its full understanding cannot be confined to one paper. Therefore, this is merely *one* interpretation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Definitions and Theoretical Approaches

Ethnic conflict has been a driving force behind many of the bloody wars around the world. It is argued that the concept of ethnicity helps to shed light on the root causes of certain conflicts as well as to understand the nature of these conflicts. The word “ethnicity” is derived from the Greek *ethnos* that denotes a collectivity of humans living and acting together. Interestingly, there is no agreed general definition of the notion of ethnicity. Rather, numerous anthropological studies stress that ethnicity should be defined and understood within the contexts of each particular case under investigation. In this regard, the diverse concepts of ethnicity play an important role in the “politics of group differentiation... in the culturally diverse social democracies of Europe, and North America and, increasingly, globally” (Jenkins, 2008, p. 10).

As for the definition of an ethnic group, which can also be perceived as a minority in a particular state, it is generally viewed as a group of people within a society who are thought to have a common ancestry, share common culture, and “who, in addition, participate in shared activities in which the common origin and culture are significant ingredients” (Yinger, 1994, p. 3). For Anthony Smith (1991), an ethnic group is “a type of cultural collectivity, one that emphasizes the role of myths of descent and historical memories, and that is recognized by one or more cultural differences like religion, customs, language, or institutions” (p. 20). Depending on local contexts, the definition of an ethnic group may also be expanded to include additional features and explanations.

In conflict studies, the notion of ethnicity is viewed and interpreted based on particular theoretical approaches to conflicts. Primordialism, instrumentalism, and constructivism are some of the theoretical

frameworks that provide different perspectives for understanding the relationship between the notion of ethnicity and ethnic conflict. Primordialism views ethnicity as mostly an immutable and fixed characteristic of identity stemming from the “natural” division between various groups that is based on common language, collective memory, history, and culture. In other words, ethnicity is perceived as “one of the ‘givens’ of human existence,” which “exists in nature, outside times” (Smith, 1991, p. 20). For primordialism, conflict arises from these divisions and “ancient hatreds.” On the one hand, primordialism contributes to the understanding of the intensity and longevity of an ethnic conflict. On the other hand, primordialist theory cannot fully explain why conflicts break out in some places and time and not in others. One of the reasons that make primordialism particularly relevant to the questions posed in this paper is that Soviet and the majority of post-Soviet research on ethnic studies and history has been strongly influenced by the primordialist approach.

In contrast, instrumentalism views ethnicity as completely fluid and changeable. According to instrumentalists, ethnicity gets politicized and is often used by the elites as an instrument to advance their political and other interests. In this sense, “Ethnicity is simply a way of aggregating individuals for collective ends which is seized and used by politicians for political advantage” (Robertson, 1997, p. 269). Thus, ethnicity leads to conflict when ethnicity is played out, and there is something to gain from the conflict. While instrumentalism can reveal the overall political and economic structure of a society and help analyze the creation of new identities within these structures, this approach ignores cultural and psychological factors that lead to violent ethnic conflict. Instrumentalism can explain the relationship/connection between the writing of history, including its manipulation and politicization by the elites, and the structural changes like the collapse of the Soviet Union and the need for new identity-building and nation-building.

Constructivists, in turn, view ethnicity as “... social and relational—neither real nor completely malleable” (Robertson, 1997, p. 269). Therefore, the concept of ethnicity is not quite fluid and has a constructed nature; it is based on social interactions. Contrary to primordialism, constructivism does not view ethnicity as conflict-generating *per se*. Rather, it is mainly social relationships between agents, structures, and institutions that can lead to ethnic conflicts. In addition, emotions, memory, and ideas can influence identity and behavior of people. Constructivists perceive a shared history of an ethnic group as either mythical or invented (Kaufman, 2000). Constructivism provides good explanatory tools that are, however, sometimes hard to apply, and the approach is weak on causality. Some constructivists suggest that it is possible to “deconstruct” certain concepts and ideas, even histories, and work toward building understanding and trust between ethnic groups in conflict. In this regard, anthropological methods of studying and understanding “the Other” are relevant.

The three approaches to ethnicity and ethnic conflict briefly discussed above clearly demonstrate that the concept of ethnicity is complex. Thus, depending on an interpretation of ethnicity, the explanation of conflicts may vary. The rest of the paper draws on strengths of each of the approaches discussed above as well as Stuart Kaufman’s theory of “symbolic politics” and applies these perspectives to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It also analyzes the connections between the concepts of ethnicity, the writing of history, identity formation, and conflict resolution measures.

Nagorno-Karabakh: A Brief Historical Sketch

“The land of Artsakh, the central and largest part of which was better known throughout the 20th century as “Nagorno Karabakh” or “Mountainous Karabakh,” is one of three ancient provinces of Armenia located in the eastern end of the Armenian Plateau.... Artsakh is important for Armenia’s history and civilization in many ways...”¹

“Karabakh is one of the ancient regions of Azerbaijan. The name of this inseparable part of Azerbaijan consists of two different Azerbaijani words: “gara” (black) and “bag”

¹ NKR Office in the USA. “Nagorno Karabakh (Artsakh): Historical And Geographical Perspectives.” Retrieved from http://www.nkrusa.org/country_profile/history.shtml

(garden). The combination of these two words is as ancient as the nation of Azerbaijan.”²

The history of the South Caucasus differs, depending on the perspective one takes. As Suzanne Goldenberg (1994) notes, “History is a dangerous thing in the Caucasus” and is highly controversial (p. 10). Two main opposing versions of the history of Nagorno-Karabakh are prevalent; both Armenians and Azerbaijanis claim the territory of Artsakh/Karabakh as central to their national identities. Karabakh also has an important cultural meaning for both. Indeed, in Thomas de Waal’s words,

For Armenians, the meaning of Karabakh lay in the dozens of Armenian churches dotted around the territory, its tradition of local autonomy through the “melik” princes of the Middle Ages and the martial reputation of Karabakh Armenians. For Azerbaijanis, the associations were primarily with the khanate based around the great eighteenth century city of Shusha and with the great cultural flowering of composers and poets such as Vagif, Natevan, and Uzeir Hajibekov (De Waal, 2005).

The name Nagorno-Karabakh reflects the imprints of Russian, Turkic, and Persian influences. *Nagorno* or *nagorny* means “mountainous” in Russian, *kara* means “black” in Turkish, and *bagh* denotes a “garden” in Persian. Armenians call this region Artsakh, while Azeris call it Yuqari or Daghliq Karabakh. The current territory of Nagorno-Karabakh comprises 4,400 sq. km. According to the 1989 Soviet Union census, the population of the region was 186,000 people, the majority of which was Armenian (Soviet Union Census, 1989). Today, the population of Nagorno-Karabakh is entirely Armenian.

Some of the major clashes between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Karabakh first erupted in 1905-1907 during the so-called the “Armeno-Tatar Wars.” A number of wars, massacres, and deportations continued throughout 1918 and 1920 following the collapse of the Russian Tsarist Empire, and the emergence of independent Azerbaijan and Armenia. The two states continued fighting for the control of three disputed regions: Nakhichevan, Zangezur, and Karabakh. The current territorial boundaries of Karabakh trace their roots to the early 1920 and the incorporation of the Caucasus into Soviet proper. On July 3, 1920, the Kavbuiro—the Caucasian Regional Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party—assigned Karabakh to Soviet Armenia. However, in 1921, the decision was changed and Nagorno-Karabakh became an autonomous part of Soviet Azerbaijan. Three years later, in 1923, the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) was established. Until the fall of the Soviet Union, the Karabakh Armenians would continue making appeals to the Soviet government for putting Nagorno-Karabakh under Armenian control. No major clashes occurred until the late 1980s.

The claims for separation from Azerbaijan renewed after Gorbachev’s new policies of *glasnost and perestroika*. In 1988, Soviet Armenians joined NKAO Armenians to demand the unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia. In 1991, after Azerbaijan declared its independence from the USSR, the leadership in NKAO declared its own independence from Azerbaijan. The same year, Azerbaijan resorted to military operations to force the region into submission which led to a war between Azerbaijan and Armenia in 1992. By 1993, Armenians occupied Nagorno-Karabakh and large portions of south-west Azerbaijan. In May 1994, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Nagorno-Karabakh signed the Bishkek Protocol and the 1994 Moscow cease-fire agreement. The mediated cease-fire has been maintained since 1994. However, numerous negotiations and international mediation attempts have failed to resolve the problem of the future status of the region. Today, the conditions surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh are described as “no war, no peace” with Nagorno-Karabakh being *de facto* independent.

History, Ethnicity, and Conflict

A number of factors shape an ethnic identity. Among others, history and memory play an important role. An ethnic group that has no memory of its cultural past and has no link to connect that past with the present behavior, identity, or ideology is “virtually unthinkable” (Eller, 1992, p. 29). According to Eller, an ethnic group defines “what we really are” in terms of “what we were” as their cultural past or tradition. In this regard, “the language the group has ‘always’ spoken, the religion it has always followed or that it converted to at some ancient time, the customs, the clothes, the stories and music, the values and morals—these

² Institute of History named after A. Bakykhanov of ANAS. “Karabakh: Etymology, Territory and Borders.” Retrievee from <http://www.all-of-azerbaijan.com/karabakh-history.php>

things are effective identifiers and legitimizers of the group” (Eller, p. 29). History and memory are particularly important in constructing, deconstructing, and conceptualizing the past and shaping group identity. According to Ronald Suny,

... Histories [...] are based on memories organized into narratives. Whatever actually happened is far less important than how it is remembered. What is remembered, what has been forgotten or repressed, provides the template through which the world is understood. Nationalist violence or inter-ethnic cooperation and tolerance depend on what narrative, what tales of injustice, oppression, or betrayal are told. Tellers of tales have enormous (though far from absolute) power to reshape, edit, share their stories, and therefore to promote a future of either violence or cooperation (Suny 2001, p. 864).

This paper discusses the way ethnicity has been interpreted in Soviet and post-Soviet scholarship and its impact on shaping of group identities as well as the construction of political ideologies that, in turn, feed into the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The interpretation of ethnicity among Soviet and the majority of post-Soviet scholars is mainly based on the primordialist approach. Beginning from the 1970s, the works of a Soviet anthropologist Yulian Bromley had a significant impact on Soviet and post-Soviet research in ethnic studies and history. According to Bromley, “*ethnos* is a historically stable entity of people developed on a certain territory possessing common, relatively stable features of culture (including language) and psyche as well as a consciousness of their unity and of their difference from other similar entities (self-awareness) fixed in a self-name (ethnonym)” (Bromley, 1981, p. 27). It is also important to bear in mind that Bromley’s theory of ethnicity was developed within the Marxist framework, which views the historical past of a particular society as an evolutionary transformation through various social formations, communism being the final. Bromley and his followers, therefore, took a primordialist approach on the concept of ethnicity, something that is rather fixed and exists throughout all social formations (Banks, 1996, p. 17–18).

After the 1990s, the majority of post-Soviet historians continued to interpret the past and perceive ethnicity through the prism of primordialism. With the breakup of the Soviet Union, a new national identity emerged in newly independent states that began to supersede the old Soviet collective identity. In this process, the national elites, the so called “*intelligentsia*,” including leading historians, have played an important part in transforming and “driving the process of history-writing, thereby striving to find a consensus on their nations’ past as a basis for national mobilization” (Minasyan, 2009, p. 10). Often, these initiatives developed within specific political contexts and have been used as an instrument to mobilize the masses. In this regard, Vicken Cheterian, a journalist and an analyst, observes the continuity rather than change in politicizing history-writing in and after the Soviet Union. He writes,

The role of historians was not limited to developing a version of history in which the role of the nations they represented had a dominant role and that of neighboring nations was diminished. Nor was it limited to preparing politicised and clashing versions of the past in the work context created by Soviet policies. In the early years of mass politics, at the height of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, they played a direct role in articulating political positions and demands, addressed initially to the Soviet leadership in Moscow, based on the specific vision of history their profession has developed in the previous years. Those demands rotated around the idea of territorial exchanges and the upgrading or downgrading of the political status of certain regions, and in particular that of autonomous republics and regions. The politicized work of historians fitted well with the Soviet tradition whereby historians prepared studies that directly reflected official ideology, or tried to justify it. Thus the role historians played in the period of Soviet collapse can be seen as a continuation of, and not a break with, the Soviet legacy. In the late 1980s many historians ceased to be historians and entered the arena of political struggle, by providing the ideology of mass mobilization (Cheterian, 2008, p. 80).

The politicization and manipulation of history can serve as an instrument to advance the political and nationalist agenda in order to mobilize the masses. The introduction of Gorbachev’s *glasnost*, the break-out of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and the eventual dissolution of the Soviet Union, all have opened up new trends in history writing within Armenia and Azerbaijan. The theme of Karabakh has become one of the key research topics among Armenian and Azerbaijani scholars that continue to drive the countries’ opposing official histories on Nagorno-Karabakh. Some of the dominant trends in the process of

history-writing in Armenia, for example, include the expansion of the scope of the historical research to encompass the connection between the notion of ethnic identity and the territories of Armenian settlements throughout the past (Minasyan, 2009, p. 12). The Armenian historiography concerning Nagorno-Karabakh focuses on the period of the 1920s, when the region was integrated into Azerbaijan proper.

Among others, one of the ideological trends in recent Azerbaijani historiography has been the emphasis on proving the ancient roots of the nation and justifying claims to the territory of Karabakh. This argument is often employed to counteract Armenian ancient history. In addition, “the aspiration to prove its [Karabakh’s] historical bond with Azerbaijani khanates, state, the Azeri speaking population and its meaning for Azerbaijani culture with Shusha as its center” is another focus of Azerbaijani history writing (Gasimov, 2009, p. 7). In short, the works of Armenian and Azerbaijani historians and scholars resemble a “battle” of opinions, positions, and mutual accusations.

Up until today, there are still strong perceptions of ethnic divisions along racial (Aryan vs. Turkic), religious (Christian vs. Muslim) and linguistic (Indo-European vs. Turkic) lines used by the representatives of Armenian and Azerbaijani circles to stress the differences and create a wider gap between the two camps. As time goes by, these sentiments grow stronger producing chauvinistic and biased literature on both sides. Clearly, the first conflict that erupted in the late Communist period of the Soviet Union, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, is not over yet, while the debates around “ancient” histories and attempts to reconstruct the past continue to nourish the conflict today.

Some of the factors that contribute to the violent conflict include myths and symbols. Stuart Kaufman’s (2001) theory of “symbolic politics,” laid out in his book *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*, provides another way to understand the depth of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and seek possible solutions. In this approach, the meanings of myths, emotions, and fears that drive ethnic groups and lead groups to conflict can be relevant to understanding the process of history writing. According to the author, ethnic wars occur because of the politics of myths and symbols that are rooted in emotions. These myths also generate hostilities between ethnic groups, in this case, Armenians and Azerbaijanis that contribute to mass mobilization and justify violence. In this regard, mutual prejudice, fears, and a “hostile myth-symbol complex” resulted in a competition for dominance, a security dilemma, and then violence between the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis beginning in 1988. Kaufman (2001) writes that “the conflict occurred because of a fundamental clash between an Armenian myth-symbol complex focused on fears of genocide and an Azerbaijani one emphasizing the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Azerbaijani republic” (p. 49). Indeed, for the Armenians, Nagorno-Karabakh became a symbol of national identity and independence, a symbol of past and future losses as well as the prospect of reunification with Armenia, while for the Azerbaijanis, Karabakh was a means to strengthen weak identity and nationhood as well as to prevail. This, in turn, advanced both sides’ politics of nationalist extremism that eventually led to war between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In this approach, Kaufman argues that myths, fears, hostilities, and then security dilemma led to violence, while nationalist politics further triggered the war. (p. 49)

What is Next?

It is very important to draw a clear distinction between the study of history as a scholarly field and the (mis)use of history and its further politicization. While the former is crucial in understanding the past and the present, the latter can become rather dangerous. Today, the way history is perceived by many in the South Caucasus continues to play an important role in shaping ethnic identities and feeding into the conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. Realistically, it is hard to speak of a concrete way to settle the conflict. Collective memories, fears, and “ancient” histories continue to promote alienation between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. Moreover, all major attempts to resolve the conflict, including international mediation, have failed. Numerous meetings between the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan have not yielded any breakthrough in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The fact that the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, although *de facto*, exists as an “independent” entity with its own governing bodies should not be taken lightly either. Even though it does not enjoy the support of the international community, Nagorno-Karabakh functions as an independent political unit.

Also, the geopolitical factor is likely to continue to play an important role in either preventing or facilitating the resolution of the conflict, depending on the balance of power and the interests of the major parties involved in the regional and global politics. The 2008 Five-Day War between Georgia and Russia has once again demonstrated Russia’s strong political and economic interest in the South Caucasus. At this stage, what is needed is to continue opening up more possibilities for constructive and engaging

dialogue that would address concerns, fears, and mutual interests of the parties involved in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The goal of the dialogue should be aimed at defusing stereotypes and deep-seated biases as well as building trust at the personal level. It is important to understand what the common interests and the commonalities are that bring these groups together as well as the ways in which the perceptions of history feed into the existing conflict. Assurances are also needed at the state level to prevent any violent outbreaks. The strategy of promoting joint educational and cultural efforts supported and maintained at the local, regional, and international levels could also play an instrumental force. Producing common history and/or analyzing official versions of history may be challenging but not impossible to do.

Conclusion

A synthesis of theoretical frameworks presented earlier, the expanded understanding of the concept of ethnicity, and the role of history, all help to illuminate different facets of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. A primordialist view of history helps to understand the intensity of the conflict and the role of the Soviet and post-Soviet interpretation of the concept of ethnicity in writing national histories. Instrumentalism focuses on instances when history can be politicized by certain groups in power to serve particular ends. The theory of “symbolic politics” considers myths and symbols to understand the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. As already discussed above, constructivism, interprets ethnicity as socially constructed and as subjectively defined, “which emphasizes the ways in which group identities emerge and change over time” (Harff and Gurr, 2004, p. 97). This theoretical approach suggests that peaceful coexistence between ethnic groups, one that is based on trust, is possible. In this regard, Robertson (1997) writes “For constructivists, ethnicity can be transformed from a resource in and cause of conflict into a form that can be used to construct trust between groups. Confidence building measures that provide information and solve problems of credible commitments between groups can resolve the ‘security dilemma in ethnic conflict’” (p. 279). Thus, according to constructivists, it is possible to change the very nature of interaction of groups by a re-conceptualization of the notion of ethnicity.

Another way toward conflict resolution between Armenians and Azerbaijanis could be through the critical examination of national histories. As Robertson suggests, “Political myths and the ethnic entrepreneurs that use these constructions for group cohesion can be inhibited by the production of non-biased, non-national histories, media outlets, and institutions that encourage political entrepreneurs to mobilize different aggregations or to develop interests in different non-ethnic cleavages” (p. 279). A question arises: how can this be possibly done? One way of looking at the problem is through anthropology. Anthropological perspectives and methods of participant observation and ethnographic data gathering can certainly play an important role.

Oftentimes, the ways in which groups perceive each other are influenced by deep-seated cultural biases. One of the tasks of anthropologists in understanding *the Other* is to attempt to “deconstruct” claims and concepts, compare and analyze symbols, structures, meanings, and values used by ethnic groups by engaging in intensive fieldwork and working cross-culturally. A self-reflexive nature of anthropological perspectives and the methods of applied anthropology can identify and reveal cultural biases of the researchers and the researched as well as improve the communication process. In addition, “... most anthropologists would rather concentrate on showing the ways in which historical accounts are used as tools in the *contemporary* creation of identities and in politics. Anthropologists would stress that history is not a product of the past but a response to requirements of the present” (Eriksen, 1993, p. 72). Anthropological theory can also serve as a resource for policy-makers in order to help them understand how to interact with *the Other* successfully. Asking specific questions, documenting, addressing various contexts (e.g. political, social, cultural, global, etc.) that affect ethnic groups, and studying claims to space and resources are some of the main pillars of anthropological knowledge that can be applied to conflict resolution. This, in turn, can reveal and open up new perspectives for a constructive dialogue around Nagorno-Karabakh.

Native literatures may also unravel some clues to dialogue and understanding. In the historic section of old Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, there is a monument to an eighteenth-century troubadour, or *ashugh*, Sayat Nova. Armenian by birth, Sayat Nova wrote and performed his songs in Azerbaijani, Georgian, and Tiflis Armenian. In fact, the majority of Sayat Nova’s songs were in Azerbaijani. The monument of Sayat Nova symbolizes the unity of the peoples of the South Caucasus. The literature of Sabir, a prominent Azerbaijani literary figure in the early 1900s, calls for a peaceful coexistence and cooperation between the Azerbaijanis and the Armenians. When it comes down to native songs, musical

instruments, cultural norms and values shared by the peoples of the Caucasus, it is clear that there is a way towards a deeper understanding and possibly peace.

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