

# **National Identity Formation And Education In Post-Conflict Development**

*The Case of Nagorno-Karabakh*

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**ABSTRACT**

Although the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan concerning the mountainous region of Nagorno-Karabakh has been frozen ever since the ceasefire agreement in 1994, the issue is still sensitive and present in Armenian and Azerbaijani communities. However, as nearly two decades have passed since the beginning of it, a new generation of Armenians and Azerbaijanis is entering the public sphere. It is a generation that has never met its neighbour in person; a generation that has barely, if ever, even communicated with it; a generation that has only known its neighbour as an enemy. Because of the lack of communication between the two nations, most of what the younger generations know about the conflict and their counterparts is presented to them in the form of official education. This research looks into the image that is created by that education in terms of 'the self', 'the other' and the frozen conflict. As it is up to those younger generations to eventually re-establish contact, the image that they have of themselves and each other will play a major role in the success or failure of the reconnection. The research found that many similar patterns exist in Armenian and Azerbaijani historic narratives, such as victimisation and ennoblement of 'the self' and degradation and dehumanisation of 'the other'. The major difference is the greater level of emotionality on the part of Azerbaijan. A factor possibly accounting for this difference is the fact that the latter effectively lost the war for now, causing bitterness and, perhaps, a need for self-enhancement at the expense of 'the enemy other'.

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*“... уходит наше поколение, кому от 50 до 70 лет,  
тех людей в Армении и Азербайджане которые знают друг друга.  
Когда придут другие, то они уже точно не смогут договориться.  
А война – это самый последний и самый плохой путь.”*

*“... our generation, those who are 50 to 70 years old,  
those in Armenia and Azerbaijan who know each other, are disappearing.  
When the others come, they will definitely not be able to find a common language.  
And a war, that’s the last and worst possible way out.”*

Azerbaijan’s ambassador to Moscow  
Polad Bul-Bul Ogly, Ogonek, July 2007

## Introduction

The gaining of independence for a country or a people is generally seen as the positive outcome of a usually lengthy and hard struggle against an oppressive, dominant state. There are very few examples in the history of mankind that show a people gaining independence through a smooth and obstacle-free process, and numerous examples of the above-mentioned difficult way ahead for any people wishing it. Most of the recent, newly independent states in modern history were those shaking off the bonds of colonialism, which brings me to the backdrop of the subject of this dissertation: the fall of the last empire, the United Soviet Socialist Republics.

As a result of its crumbling, 15 states gained independence virtually overnight, putting them at the beginning of a long road of nation-building and recovery from the inevitable economic crisis following the collapse of a Moscow based system of economic, political and social orientation. A large part of this nation building for many<sup>1</sup>, if not all of the newly independent states was the re-defining of their national and, in some cases, ethnic identities as a separate entity with their own traditions, history, customs and ways of life. This process was made even more difficult for some peoples as the collapse of the Soviet Union was accompanied by conflicts erupting both within and between them. One such case, and the subject of this work, is the conflict between the Armenians and Azerbaijanis concerning the mountainous region of Nagorno-Karabakh - a majority Armenian-populated enclave within the republic of Azerbaijan.

As the subject of national identity formation is an incredibly broad one, it will be narrowed down to a specific aspect of post-conflict development that I deem a very important one: post-conflict education encompassing the conflict, representation of the 'self' and the 'enemy other'. To explain the importance of this investigation, it should be kept in mind that the border between Armenians<sup>2</sup> and Azerbaijanis has been hermetically closed for 17 years now. Not only physically, but also in terms of communication no contact has been established between the two peoples with a few exceptions<sup>3</sup>. It is thus that we are able to witness the emergence of a whole new generation within the two peoples that has not only never met their neighbour counterpart, but has, for the most part, never even communicated with it. In fact, the only tangible information the younger generations receive about the 'other' and the conflict, except for folklore and stories of the elders, is through official education. It is thus the subject of this dissertation to look into that education and how it represents the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the 'own self' and the 'enemy other', playing a role in the national identity formation of the upcoming generations among both nations.

The subject, I believe, is an important one, as it will soon be up to those upcoming generations to not only attempt to resolve the conflict but also to re-establish contact

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<sup>1</sup> This is not to downplay the long tradition of nationhood and national and ethnic identities of many of the newly independent states' peoples. However, even those peoples with a long-standing tradition of established nationhood still had to re-invent, or redefine theirs to a certain extent, as the socio-political climate they had been living in for the past 70 years left its inevitable traces. Considering the quite oppressive character of the Soviet structure in terms of freedom of national self-expression – which was, at best, frowned upon – much of the traditional heritage was, if not lost, at least forgotten.

<sup>2</sup> Including the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh

<sup>3</sup> For instance official, diplomatic meetings between the heads of states or their representatives, or professional (academic) contacts between a very limited number of people that are usually not advertised. Another, uncontrollable and thus interesting form of communication, the internet, will be discussed later.

and communication afterwards as well as, ideally, friendly relations – or at least friendly coexistence - between the two nations, so necessary for the optimal development of the region. How exactly they will deal with the issue at hand, and how successful they will be will, for a certain part depend on their perception of their tumultuous shared history and of each other; which is why it is interesting to look into the nature of that perception, which is formed largely throughout the impressionable educational years, by the education systems. The link between national identity formation and education is elaborated upon below.

### *National Identity and Education*

Starting with the premise that ‘national identities are, like everything historical, constructed and reconstructed’<sup>4</sup> it is not hard to see the role of education in the process. It is through education, after all, that the younger generations are turned into full-grown members of society. And it is through education, amongst other influences, that they get a sense of their national history, their traditional/religious/ethnic backgrounds and a sense of a shared identity through that shared history. Of course it is important not to downplay the importance of other environmental factors contributing to these influences, (e.g. family, friends, etc.). However, education plays a crucial role, as it is not only a large and influential part of the important early years of a person’s development, it is also (presumed to be) enveloping the entire people concerned, providing them all with identical information and views on their communal past: ‘even though intentions may vary with different countries, national education contains the intention to homogenize the constituent members comprising a nation or a country’<sup>5</sup>. Shortly put, education plays a role in creating and/or strengthening national identities and attitudes, whether or not that is the intention.

The role of education in conflict-affected societies in terms of exasperating the tensions has only started to be examined relatively recently. However, already there is growing concern for its devastating possibilities. For instance, a 2004 UNESCO Colloquium Report speaks of the recent recognition that “weaknesses in educational structure and content may have contributed to civil conflict” and that “an education system that reinforces social fissures can represent a dangerous *source of conflict*”<sup>6</sup>

The significance of education in terms of post-conflict development stems from the assumption that ‘ethnic attitudes are formed early, and that once positive or negative prejudices are formed, they tend to increase with time’<sup>7</sup>. Education being one of the major influences present in a child’s life can thus be assumed to have the capability to play a significant role in the formation of that person’s ethnic attitudes, self-perception and their view of the surrounding world – including the ‘other’ - which may then play a role in their view and possible participation in ethnic conflicts. This is also why this work will only deal with basic school education, leaving aside the later phase of higher education. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, it is reasonable to assume that the majority of children attend school, but that some do not continue on to universities from personal preference and financial or other reasons. Secondly, as school pupils are of a younger age they may still be (more) impressionable than school graduates attending

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<sup>4</sup> Llobera, p.7

<sup>5</sup> Byung-Jin, p.334

<sup>6</sup> Tawil et al, 2003

<sup>7</sup> Bush&Saltarelli, p.3

university, which makes them more susceptible to the subliminal and overt official versions of the history.

### Positive and Negative faces

Education can have a negative or a positive role. To discuss the negative role of education in the present context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, it is important to remember the premise that history is constructed. Similar to the famous assumption that history is written by winners, it is also different for all sides; one and the same event can be told, or constructed, in many different ways by different parties. Depending on whether the goal is to victimise the in-group, to bring some grandeur into its history, to present it as benevolent, merciful, valiant or any other (mostly positive) way, an event can be told in a manner befitting the profile. Certain events get downplayed, while others get stressed<sup>8</sup>.

It is thus that the ‘negative face’<sup>9</sup> of education in the context of inter-ethnic conflicts includes the ‘[frequent expunction of] past histories and current instances of intergroup cooperation and intermarriage [from memory] as the hostilities of the present (...factual and fictional) are projected onto the past’<sup>10</sup>, presenting the conflict situation as deeply rooted and inherent to the region or the peoples involved.

In the specific case of textbooks, several possible tendencies can be distinguished. One such tendency is militarisation of textbooks: wars and conflict situations occupying a prominent place in the history, taking a foreground to all other historic developments. This can lead to, in a way, habituation of violence and its acceptance as a legitimate way to get to one’s goal, pushing values of tolerance and acceptance into the background<sup>11</sup>. Textbooks can also contain ethnic stereotypes, representing steps towards facilitation of the exclusion of certain groups<sup>12</sup>. Another issue is the ‘quantity’ aspect. This refers to the stress put on the in-group characters in history while minimalising the amount of appearances of an excluded out-group.

Thus, the ‘negative’ face of education can mean that ‘educational content, structure, and delivery systems may, in themselves, be *catalysts* of violent conflict’<sup>13</sup> by way of the above methods. In the specific case of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict this could mean that education may play a role in bringing about the renewal of violence and war.

However, education can, of course, also have a ‘positive face’<sup>14</sup>: just as it can bring about intolerance and xenophobia, it can also be used to build tolerance, acceptance and dialogue. A good illustration of such an attempt in the region in question is the ‘Tbilisi Initiative’, initiated by the Council of Europe, which seeks to produce a ‘supplementary common “Caucasian” history textbook’<sup>15</sup>. This involves a non-exclusionist version of the Caucasus history, as it is not to be “written in a triumphalist, polemical or even

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<sup>8</sup> Bush&Saltarelli, p.12

<sup>9</sup> Bush&Saltarelli

<sup>10</sup> Bush&Saltarelli, p.13

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*

<sup>12</sup> ‘UNESCO has recently concluded that the tendency of history textbooks to exalt nationalism and address territorial disputes correlates with the xenophobia and violence found in many countries today’. *ibid*

<sup>13</sup> Tawil&Harley, p.3

<sup>14</sup> Bush&Saltarelli

<sup>15</sup> Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly, Recommendation 1690 (2005)

vindictive style,” but rather “neutral and realistic, and free of ideological and political stereotypes” while, for instance, military issues, although discussed, will not be given a priority place<sup>16</sup>.

Also, recently, there have been attempts by the international educational professional community to establish an ‘international set of standards and guidelines for civic education’<sup>17</sup>, playing up to the necessity to compromise. This proposition includes standards of curriculum content (e.g. presentation of different views and opinions concerning history); identification of different levels of critical thinking (i.e. engage with the subject, debate and argue for or against something, etc.); participation in civics (i.e. managing a conflict, building a consensus etc.); proposed standards of terminologies (e.g. civil society, constitutional rights, private opinion, citizenship obligations etc.)<sup>18</sup>. The purpose is, in a way, to establish a professional benchmark to which different states can compare their local education.<sup>19</sup> However, if followed, these standards would also guarantee a certain minimum of an overview of the ‘bigger picture’ with its different views and perspectives, leading to a better understanding of the overall issues at hand and of each other.

Furthermore, in order to counter the political manipulation of history, students need to be taught to think critically and have the opportunity to question the information provided, both of which requires skills that should, ideally, be taught within the system of education:

*Critical historiographic skills are essential if young people are to be able to identify the intersection between their personal stories and larger collective histories. Only when young people realize that histories are constructed rather than given, can they even begin to contemplate challenging and changing the behaviour that poisons inter-group relations<sup>20</sup>*

Similarly, where ethnic stereotyping is concerned, if students are taught of the fallacies and dangers of it they will be made aware of the subjectivity of their own tendencies to engage in them and thus given the opportunity to counter them timely.

The above-mentioned positive potential of education, if used to the fullest, would, at the least, lead to the possibility for the development of more tolerant and multi-faceted generations, conscious of different points of view and versions of history, possessing the academic skills to question dogmas, and be aware of their own position in the bigger picture of history.

### *Methodology*

Turning back to the project at hand, the analysis is divided into two parts: Part I will discuss some background information necessary for a full comprehension of the subject, and Part II contains the actual analysis of the school books. In the case of Armenian school education the job was not too hard as the schoolbooks are still standardised,

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<sup>16</sup> Bush&Saltarelli, p.19

<sup>17</sup> ibid

<sup>18</sup> ibid

<sup>19</sup> ibid

<sup>20</sup> Bush&Saltarelli, p.20

following the Soviet system, which means that most (if not all) schools – with the exception of foreign ones – use the same school textbooks. Thus, only one set of history school books – the standardized and ministry approved editions of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade history textbooks<sup>21</sup> - had to be analysed.

The situation becomes more complex when it comes to Azerbaijan. Because of practical and safety reasons, I was strongly advised by everyone I spoke to not to travel to Azerbaijan on account of my Armenian ethnicity. This, of course, made the research much more difficult. However, I was able to establish contacts with some Azerbaijani social and political scientists, who have been incredibly helpful in providing their views and general information. Especially the work of Ilgam Abbassov was used widely, as he has done extensive research into the representation of the conflict and of Armenians in Azerbaijani school education. In fact, part of the motivation for this subject is due to Abbassov's research on Azerbaijan's school books, as it begged the question concerning the situation in Armenia. It is his work that I will mostly be referring to as the Azerbaijani counterpart for comparison.

Two aspects were specifically looked into during the analysis:

- *Language* – what kind of language is used in the educational material? Is it emotionally loaded or presented in a factual, 'scientific' way? In what terms are the events/'the other' described? Are those terms emotionally loaded?
- *Overall presentation*: how are Armenians' and Azerbaijanis' roles in history presented? How are disputed events presented? How strong is the favouritism/victimization of the self and the degradation/dehumanization of the 'other'? Are there any reasons given for the behaviour of 'the enemy'? In other words, is there any attempt to rationalise that behaviour or is the 'other' simply demonized?

Throughout the analysis highlighted events and recurrent patterns and images will be discussed. All translations of examples are my own. While translating I have mainly tried to stay as close to the original as possible in order to convey any subtle nuances it may have.

### *Findings*

The findings of the research were that many similar patterns exist in Armenian and Azerbaijani historical narration in schoolbooks. For instance, prominent common threads include the victimisation and self-enhancement of one's nation accompanied by the degradation and, in some cases, dehumanisation of the 'enemy other'. Also, in a strikingly similar way, all misfortunes and defeats are blamed not so much on one's inabilities, as on external powers and pressures, internal destructive activity of the agents of the 'enemy' and the devious nature of the adversary's alliances with one's greatest enemies.

However, there are some differences as well. The narrative is much more emotional in its linguistics in the Azerbaijani schoolbooks. The animosity is more direct and overt than in the ever more subtle Armenian narrative. While the dehumanisation of and

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<sup>21</sup>It is during those grades that Armenian modern history (i.e. late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present) is discussed.

animosity towards Azerbaijanis in Armenian textbooks can be narrowed down to the description of the events of Sumgait and Baku (see Part I and Part II), in the case of Azerbaijan it seems to be constant throughout the schoolbooks. Also, while the Armenian narrative does not invoke religion as a major factor in the animosity, the Azerbaijani narrative does by practically defining the enemy in terms of religion.

A factor that can be put towards explaining this difference in general emotionality and overtness of animosity in Azerbaijani vs. Armenian historic narratives is the former's loss of the recent war and the ensuing bitterness and need for self-enhancement at the expense of the 'enemy other'.

### *Difficulties*

It should be noted that my inability to physically travel to Azerbaijan does render some difference between the analysis of the one over the other. Although the research by Ilgam Abbasov is a very thorough one it only presents me with a secondary source on Azerbaijani data, while the information on Armenia is strictly primary source. This, unfortunately, could not be avoided due to logistics, but I am quite confident that it still allows for some comparative analysis.

Furthermore, although I have tried to remain as neutral as possible, I do not believe a person can completely detach themselves from their personal background. Consequently, my Armenian ethnicity may have influenced this work despite my attempts to not let it do so.

Finally, it should be noted that although an attempt was made at a symmetric analysis, the reality does not always allow for it. Differences as to patterns and accents on presentation between Armenian and Azerbaijani schoolbooks did not allow for a strict division of the analysis under identical subject headings for both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Some issues and patterns seemed to be more present in the one than in the other, and were thus accorded a corresponding amount of discussion in this dissertation.

## **PART I**

### ***BACKGROUND***

The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the mountainous region of Nagorno-Karabakh, although considered frozen, is still very much alive in the hearts and minds of both nations. For years - ever since their independence but also, to a certain extent in the time before - the issue has been influencing, to differing degrees across time, the internal politics, external relations and the social life in the countries involved. To understand why Nagorno-Karabakh occupies such an important place in the histories and consciousness of both nations, it is necessary to discuss some of the background of the conflict as well as that of Nagorno-Karabakh as a region in itself, and how both have been seen and experienced by the people of Armenia and Azerbaijan. The background history<sup>22</sup> will be followed by an overview of the general attitudes since the ceasefire agreement. Finally, the importance of the region to both peoples will be discussed.

#### *1.1 Nagorno-Karabakh: a brief history*

The background history of the conflict usually starts in the 1920s, with the Sovietisation of Armenia and Azerbaijan and the inclusion of Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) within Soviet Azerbaijan. Although earlier it had been decided to give NK to Armenia, following a protest by N.Narimanov (leader of Soviet Azerbaijan at the time) and the interference of I.Stalin the region was finalised as an autonomous oblast within Azerbaijan, regardless of Armenian protests.

During and after Khrushchev's thaw, in the 1960s-70s Armenians tried again to voice their wishes concerning the unification of Armenia and NK, however, these were unsuccessful. It was only in the late 1980s, during Gorbachev's perestroika that the dormant longing in the Armenians of both Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh awakened. For the first time the promised openness (*glasnost*) seemed to present a real possibility for Nagorno-Karabakh to be transferred from Soviet Azerbaijan into Soviet Armenia.

As a result, the local Soviet of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region of Azerbaijan passed a resolution calling for the above-mentioned transfer on February 20<sup>th</sup> 1988 following rallies in the central Lenin Square in Stepanakert, Nagorno-Karabakh's capital. The resolution was condemned by the Politburo, and the NK Armenians were marked as 'extremists'<sup>23</sup>. In the meantime, the demonstrations in Stepanakert continued, met by counter protests by the Azerbaijani community of neighbouring Shushi.

As the tension escalated, with the central Soviet power seeming unable to deal with the issue, the first deaths fell on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February, when two Azerbaijanis were killed

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<sup>22</sup> Throughout this whole section the subjective nature of history in general and that of Nagorno-Karabakh in particular should be kept in mind. Apart from the assumed subjectiveness of any history in general, in the case of the history of a relatively recent conflict it is even more important to realise that each side has a strong interest in its own version being legitimised. Also, 'versions of "official history" are often integral to the roots of the conflict' (Tawil&Harley, p.10), which is why they should be treated with even more caution. Considering all this I have attempted to only recount parts of history relevant to the subject at hand, while remaining as neutral as possible. For a third-party take on the history of the region in general and the conflict in particular see, for instance, de Waal and Poiter.

<sup>23</sup> De Waal, p.13

during a clash between Aghdam Azerbaijanis and Askeran Armenians. After this, the descent into further violence was quick. Four days later, on the 26<sup>th</sup> February Azerbaijani demonstrations started in Sumgait, which within a couple of days would lead to anti-Armenian pogroms. The number of deaths is still under dispute, as the official number of 32 has been questioned by the Armenian side. The attacks continued for days without Soviet or Azerbaijan state intervention and were marked by fear and chaos. The bloody massacres, turning the Armenian neighbourhoods into war zones, shocked the Armenian communities of Azerbaijan, and started a massive flow of refugees to Armenia. The demonstrations in Armenia and NK that hitherto were marked by elated feelings of optimism and belief in the cause of reunification were now marked by grim determination and disillusionment with the Soviet power that had failed to prevent and/or stop the violence in time, combined with some distinct anti-Azerbaijani sentiment that had not been present before<sup>24</sup>. In addition the shock of the pogroms and killings occurring during this recent massacre brought back historic memories of an earlier one, creating in the Armenian minds a distinct link between the 1915 Genocide at the hands of the Ottoman Turks with the events in Sumgait - and later Baku - and the modern-day Azerbaijanis<sup>25</sup>.

What followed was an 'exchange of minorities' so to speak, when practically the entire Azerbaijani and Armenian minorities of Armenia and Azerbaijan respectively left their homes for their titular republics. Although any Azerbaijani or Armenian research is cast into doubt by the counter side, it is reasonable to assume that although some deportations were voluntary and relatively peaceful<sup>26</sup>, considerable force was used with others, causing injury and, in some cases death. The refugee issue is still very much alive, especially in Azerbaijan, where the return of the refugees to NK is seen as one of the major requirements for any peace agreement. It has also been accused by Armenia of using the refugees by keeping them in a refugee status and way of life for years on end, in order to gain in the negotiations.

Both republics spent 1989 and 1990 organising for the cause as well as choosing their future paths with relations between them deteriorating. Following a renewed wave of Azerbaijani protests in the late summer of 1989, Azerbaijan enforced a rail blockade against Armenia, whose 85% of rail traffic came from Azerbaijan, thus causing a devastating effect to Armenian economy<sup>27</sup>.

While both countries were militarising and the tensions between them were escalating, another anti-Armenian pogrom, this time in Baku, followed in January 1990 – commencing on the 13<sup>th</sup> January - which resulted in approximately 90 deaths<sup>28</sup> and a massive deportation/evacuation of thousands. The 'murderous anti-Armenian violence'<sup>29</sup> that turned the centre of Baku into a killing ground lasted several days, until the frightened Armenians seeking refuge in police stations and other public buildings under troop protection were deported to Turkmenistan and Armenia. This latest tragedy was followed, within a couple of days, by another one. On 19-20 January, with the

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<sup>24</sup> Tishkov, p.97; de Waal p.44, Miller&Miller, p.39

<sup>25</sup> de Waal p.44, Cornell,p.6

<sup>26</sup> Especially after a system of exchanges was set up that brought some control over the situation (de Waal, p.62)

<sup>27</sup> de Waal, p.87

<sup>28</sup> de Waal , p.90

<sup>29</sup> ibid

Armenians having been violently expelled, Soviet forces finally entered Baku and, under the pretext of intervening in the anti-Armenian violence, opened random fire on Baku civilians, causing approx. 130 of Azerbaijani deaths and hundreds of injured. That day is, until now, remembered as one of the nation's biggest tragedies.

Another massacre of Azerbaijani civilians, this time by Armenians, followed in early 1992 near the town of Khojaly. In October 1991 the Armenian forces had surrounded the town of Khojaly and cut it off from the outside world. During the Armenian assault in February, one exit was left open for the civilians to leave. However, the caravan of civilians was met with fire while passing by a nearby Armenian village. The estimates as to the death toll vary, but according to, for instance, Thomas de Waal, the most trustworthy one was provided by an official Azerbaijani parliamentary investigation as 485<sup>30</sup>. The events at Khojaly are remembered annually and referred to by the Azerbaijanis as the Khojaly genocide, having become a major communal trauma. The reactions by the Armenian side include a complete denial of guilt (the civilians had been given safe passage and were met by fire when already on Azerbaijani-controlled territory<sup>31</sup>); a result of irregular Armenian military action<sup>32</sup>, or revenge<sup>33</sup> (as the Armenian forces at the spot included many of those having fled from the sites of violence in Sumgait and Baku).

Both sides have been putting the emphasis and stress on the massacres of 'their' nationals (Sumgait and Baku for Armenians; Khojaly for Azerbaijanis) and demonising the other side, thus pushing their own acts of brutality into the background.

All-out war erupted following the final collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of both Azerbaijan and Armenia in late August/early September 1991 and lasted until the signing of the ceasefire on May 9<sup>th</sup> 1994. As a result, Armenians had not only remained in control of Nagorno-Karabakh, but had also gained territories around it, including a land connection with Armenia. In effect, they had won. This outcome is something that should be kept in mind throughout the rest of this work, as I believe it explains much of the bitterness and emotionality in Azerbaijan with regard to Nagorno-Karabakh in particular and Armenians in general, as well as the relatively peaceful attitude of the Armenian victors.

### *1.2 Attitudes since the cease-fire*

In their 2004 analysis of the post-conflict attitudes in Armenia and Azerbaijan, Ali Abbasov and Harutiun Khachatryan state that in Armenia political parties in favour of Karabakh's independence had 75-80% of population support; the ones pressing for its unification with Armenia – 14-19% and the ones in favour of giving up Karabakh to Azerbaijan – only 1%<sup>34</sup>. This clearly shows that even the 10 years that passed after the ceasefire did not make the Armenians change their minds, even if 'unification' had been exchanged for 'independence'.

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<sup>30</sup> de Waal, p.171

<sup>31</sup> Manasyan, p.134

<sup>32</sup> de Waal, p.171

<sup>33</sup> de Waal, p.171-172

<sup>34</sup> Abbasov&Khachatryan, p.83

In Azerbaijan the conflict is, almost unanimously, considered the result of unprovoked Armenian aggression, the consequences of which Azerbaijan must eliminate by ‘any means accepted by international law, including a military solution’<sup>35</sup> [my translation]. In fact, the putting off of the solution seems to result in more and more radicalisation of views amongst not only the political elite of Azerbaijan, but also the population. For instance, a sociological study conducted in 2002 under the emblem of the *South-Caucasus network for social agreement*, supported by the European Commission found that 32% of respondents in Azerbaijan deem the renewal of military action likely while in Armenia this corresponded to 16.6%.<sup>36</sup> However, war does not seem to be excluded as an option altogether in Armenia. In a 2001 interview with Los Angeles Times, the NK leader at the time A. Gukasian stated that ‘if Azerbaijan wants war, it will get it’<sup>37</sup>.

It is interesting to compare the ‘Armenia as aggressor’ view in Azerbaijan to some views in Armenia that were partly the result of a radicalisation movement in the light of the 2003 elections. According to that movement Nagorno-Karabakh and the territories around it currently under Armenian control should not even be referred to as *occupied*, as they are seen as traditionally and historically Armenian (see below), and should thus be referred to as *liberated*<sup>38</sup>. As to concessions, Jirair Sefilian, one of the leaders of the said movement stated in late 2002: ‘our concession was to stop the offensive in 1994 following Azerbaijan’s request. (...) No new concessions should be made’ [my translation].<sup>39</sup>

In other words, while in Azerbaijan there is a certain acceptance of the possibility of a renewal of war in order to get the ‘occupied’ territories back, Armenian views exhibit a readiness to *respond* to violence, although no wish to recommence aggressive military action is being expressed.

Even the very nature of the conflict is seen in strikingly different lights by the two states. According to Isa Gambar, an Azerbaijani opposition leader

*The initiative was on the Armenian side. They began to make territorial claims on Azerbaijan, and they stood behind the beginning of the separatist movement in Nagorny Karabakh. So there is no doubting the responsibility of the Armenian ultranationalists in this question. At the same time we believe that the then leadership of Azerbaijan bears its share of responsibility in the sense that had they taken a more tough and decisive position, then the question could have been resolved within the first few days.*<sup>40</sup>

Robert Kocharyan, (currently president of Armenia and previously at the heart of the Karabakh events) expresses a different view:

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<sup>35</sup> *ibid*, p.30; With the exception of the Social-Democratic Party, which in 1995 proposed a peaceful settlement including the renewal of trade and other communications with Armenia and negotiations with the government of NK. However, it modified its position afterwards and at present does not exclude military action (Abbasov&Khachatryanp.86)

<sup>36</sup> Abbasov&Khachatryan, p.86

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*, p.84

<sup>38</sup> *ibid*

<sup>39</sup> *ibid*

<sup>40</sup> de Waal, p.126

*In 1917, the Revolution happened. When central Russian authority ceased to exist, this problem arose in its most acute form. There was a war for three years and then in effect Soviet troops joined Karabakh to Azerbaijan. So this problem was always there and it was completely obvious that when central authority weakened or ceased to exist, then we would get what we now have. To all Karabakh Armenians, that was completely obvious. There was no doubt about that – and it seems to me that it was obvious to the Azerbaijanis too<sup>41</sup>.*

In other words, while in Azerbaijan it is seen as an act of unprovoked aggression on the Armenian side initiated by ultranationalists, in Armenia it is seen as a logical and consequential step in retrieving something that had been taken from them in the early 20s.

The difference in views is still present, no matter what aspect of the conflict is being considered. According to a sociological study made public in Yerevan and Baku not long before the 2003 elections the question concerning the possibility of military action resulted in interestingly differing answers within the three parties involved in the conflict. In Azerbaijan, the majority of the respondents were of the opinion that no radical changes in the status quo can occur in the near future, but it was stressed that for the liberation of the occupied lands armed force will be necessary, and will occur under a different government<sup>42</sup>.

In Armenian-populated Nagorno-Karabakh the majority was in favour of a peaceful settlement, voicing the conviction that the international community will not let Azerbaijan commence military action. Some were prone to a compromise, while others did not see any reason for one as the war resulted in a winner's position for NK.<sup>43</sup>

The respondents in Armenia believed that Azerbaijan is the source of threat for a renewal of military action. However, the majority were of the opinion that neither Armenia nor Azerbaijan is ready for military action. Only 24.2% of the respondents stated that economically/financially speaking Armenia is ready for war, and 21% voiced a confidence in its military capabilities. Over 70% in Armenia were in favour of a peaceful settlement. The majority, however, saw the secession of NK as a done deal that Azerbaijan should simply accept. In Armenia, a compromise perceived possible from Armenia's side was the return of the surrounding lands except for the Lachin corridor<sup>44</sup>; and from the Azerbaijani side – the acceptance of NK representatives in the negotiations<sup>45</sup>.

All in all there seems to be a relative calmness in prospects for the near future, although there is a certain understanding/acceptance, a grim preparedness, in Azerbaijan that one way or the other, military action (i.e. renewal of war) will be necessary in order to get the 'occupied' lands back, while on the Armenian side (as the 'occupying victors')

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<sup>41</sup> de Waal, p.126

<sup>42</sup> Abbasov&Khachatryan, p.88

<sup>43</sup> ibid

<sup>44</sup> land connection between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh

<sup>45</sup> Abbasov&Khachatryan, p.88

there seems to be a desire towards a peaceful settlement and a wish for a retention of the status quo<sup>46</sup>.

### *1.3 Karabakh's significance*

When discussing the history of Karabakh-related hostilities, both parties invoke a large amount of historic arguments. The conflict is usually seen as having started in the early 20s of the last century, when independence was proclaimed by both Azerbaijan and Armenia for the first time and after a long period of subversion respectively. However, when discussing the conflict, very often histories are delved into much deeper than that. Armenians remember ancient Armenian kingdoms in the region long before the arrival of the 'nomadic' Turks<sup>47</sup>, while Azerbaijanis invoke the ancient Albanians<sup>48</sup> as their ancestors, and date the introduction of Armenians to the region sometimes as late as the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries resulting from the flow of refugees from the Russo-Persian wars and afterwards from the Ottoman genocide<sup>49</sup>. These often fruitless yet heated arguments on who was there first, are given great importance.

Even without going into much detail as to the varying versions of the history, the historic character<sup>50</sup> attributed to the conflict contributes to the fact that it's firmly embedded into the national psyches and identities. It thus becomes not just something connected to the recent independence and the resulting border disputes that were not unique for the post-Soviet space; the conflict is rendered a traditional, cultural, historic background that is thus assumed impossible to simply solve by applying standardised international solutions, as it is perceived to go deeper than sheer territory. According to Herzig among both Armenians and Azerbaijanis, 'both official and dissident thinkers gave history a privileged place in validating contemporary political and territorial claims'<sup>51</sup>.

For Armenians the conflict in general and the events of Sumgait and Baku in particular have become intricately connected to their biggest modern-historic trauma: the Armenian genocide<sup>52</sup>. The ethnic, Turkic, connection between Azerbaijanis and Turks has been accentuated, therewith linking the recent eruption of violence with the one in 1915, and bringing old traumas, fear, and victimhood to the forefront<sup>53</sup>. Even linguistically speaking, the fact that Azerbaijanis are very commonly referred to as 'the

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<sup>46</sup> Which is quite understandable, as the status quo involves everything Armenia and the NK want minus peaceful relations with Azerbaijan (and, consequently, perhaps, Turkey) enabling normalisation of communication and trade routes.

<sup>47</sup> Khurshudian, p.5

<sup>48</sup> A culture present in South Caucasus in the middle ages; see Khurshudian, p4; Poiter p6

<sup>49</sup> See for instance Gadjiev p24, Khurshudian p.5, Petition from the Armenians of Mountainous Karabakh to Prime Minister Nikita Khrushchev

<sup>50</sup> See for instance Gadjiev p23, Aliev, Igrar

<sup>51</sup> Herzig 1999, p. 59

<sup>52</sup> 'It is impossible to exaggerate the significance of [the genocide] for the contemporary Armenian thinking, both in Armenia and in the Diaspora. The genocide virtually eliminated Armenians from nine-tenths of their historical homeland in eastern Anatolia, leaving them only the small, mangled territory in the Russian Caucasus. Throughout the Middle East, Europe and North America, it created new or vastly enlarged diasporan communities where the memory of the genocide served as a virtual "charter of identity", even among families who had not directly experienced it.' (Dudwick, p.265) "Armenia: the nation awakes", in Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States, ed. Ian Bremmer & Ray Taras, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993

<sup>53</sup> See for instance Khurshudian p.7

Turks<sup>54</sup>, demonstrates this perceived connection that would not normally have been problematic as it is generally readily accepted by the Azerbaijanis, were it not for the inevitable Armenian link to the genocide and the emotive response it invokes. ‘Beating the Turks’ has become an undeniably major cause of self-assertion for the Armenian nation; for some – to finally win a battle long lost in the past yet still alive in the psychological present, for others – to regain the dignity and self-respect of one that has fought back for his/her lands (the lack of which is sometimes perceived in the behaviour of some of the victims of the Turkish genocide).

The preservation of the Armenian language and culture was equally important. Under Azerbaijan’s rule, it was believed the Armenian communities of Nagorno-Karabakh were not given sufficient opportunity for the development of their language and culture. For instance, teachers of Armenian were only trained in Stepanakert, the regional capital, and were not allowed to study in Yerevan. Also, they would study Azerbaijani history in Armenian, as opposed to the Armenian history of the Armenian people<sup>55</sup>. This was perceived as creating a threat to the survival of the Armenian culture from the region that was seen historically as the beacon for the survival of the Armenian culture and traditions.

The Karabakh region is seen as the home of the survival of Armenian tradition and culture ever since the Middle Ages. Even when Armenia was torn apart by conquering forces, its true heart survived in the mountains of Karabakh. Thus, losing it would mean the loss of a region that has been regarded as key to the preservation of the core Armenian culture throughout centuries<sup>56</sup>.

Furthermore, ‘Nationalist aspirations have focused on Karabakh because it is the only part of the Armenian irredenta that has a majority Armenian population outside of Armenia and that there is a real possibility of recovering.’<sup>57</sup> The paradoxical dispersion of the Armenians over the years, with the majority now living outside of the Republic of Armenia, it is quite unique for them to be a clear and uncontested majority in any given region outside of Armenia proper. Combining this with nostalgia for a lost greatness and the historic shrinking of Armenian territory may shed some light into the strong wish to preserve Nagorno-Karabakh in its current state of Armenian control.

Turning to Azerbaijan, several reasons can be named for the fierce resistance with which the idea of separation from Nagorno-Karabakh was met.

First and foremost, and perhaps, quite obviously, no nation likes giving up a chunk of its territory, so it was quite natural for Azerbaijan to object to the idea. In the specific case of Azerbaijan there is an additional, identity-based aspect of territoriality that made it particularly problematic. The country’s history is marked by a ‘mixed ethno-cultural makeup, its sectarian divisions, and the multiplicity of its minorities’<sup>58</sup> making it difficult to distinguish a unifying national or ethnic identity. According to Tamara Dragadze, it was under Gorbachev, marked by the spirits of glasnost and perestroika, that territoriality found its expression as one of ethnic identity and sense of nationhood

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<sup>54</sup> Hunter, p.248

<sup>55</sup> Yamskov, p.643

<sup>56</sup> *ibid*

<sup>57</sup> *ibid*

<sup>58</sup> Hunter, p.227, p.234

resulting in ‘the strongest sense of territoriality yet documented’<sup>59</sup>. The demands of the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians to unite with Soviet Armenia were thus met with strong protest and demonstrations, as they endangered that territorial wholeness of Azerbaijan, thus consequently presenting a threat to the Azerbaijani identity.

The protests over Nagorno-Karabakh’s wish for secession should also be seen in the context of the mood of the time. In the Azerbaijan of the late 80s the urbanisation, growing demands for education by the increased youth, sharp increases of unemployment and a perceived racism from the other nationalities in the Soviet Union resulted in the nation’s increasing awareness of their deprivation. In the late 80s there was an increasing perception of exploitation by the centre (i.e. Moscow). Azerbaijanis started wondering why they should give up control of so many natural resources, thus putting themselves in a worse position, as was perceived, than many other Soviet republics. Under Gorbachev’s *glasnost* these issues were discussed ever more publicly and the inevitable nationalism that ensued in addition to the already mentioned sense of territory-related national and ethnic identity and the increased Armenian nationalism just over the border, resulted in strong protests and massive demonstrations notably in November 1988 concerning the subject of NK and the perceived Armenian hostility as well as the ‘economic mismanagement and workers’ rights’<sup>60</sup>, blending all grievances into one major force.

Other reasons for the emotionality the issue invokes include a non-acceptance of historically, statistically and politically reasoned legitimacy of the Armenian demands, and a belief that the outside world automatically accepts the Armenian minority’s view dismissing the Azerbaijanis as barbarians causing bitterness amongst the latter<sup>61</sup>

Finally, a note should be made of the importance of the contested region in itself for both nations. Apart from the geo-political and economic reasons for the desire for secession of Nagorno-Karabakh for Armenians as well as the territorial importance of the region to Azerbaijan, another aspect is worth mentioning. As noted by Richard Hovanissian:

*While Armenian cultural and economic activity flourished in this region, it also became an important site of Muslim intellectual and political development. More than Baku, it was this mountainous area that served as the focal point of emerging Azerbaijani identity...*<sup>62</sup>

Historically, the region had been a centre of cultural and ideological development for both Armenians and Azerbaijanis. For instance Shushi, a town considered the historical cultural heart of Nagorno-Karabakh has occupied an important place in the cultural histories of both nations. For the former it is ‘the last outpost of their Christian civilization and a historic haven of Armenian princes and bishops before the eastern Turkic world begins’ and it is not whole without it; while for the latter it was seen as the centre of musical and poetic tradition with many famous Azerbaijani musicians and

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<sup>59</sup> Dragadze, p.275

<sup>60</sup> Dragadze, p.277

<sup>61</sup> Dragadze, p.282

<sup>62</sup> Dudwick, p.274

poets having called it their birthplace<sup>63</sup>, tying the region to the very heart of the Azerbaijani identity.

As pointed out by Altstadt, both Armenians and Azerbaijanis regard Nagorno-Karabakh as 'historic patrimony and the present conflict is therefore bound up with historical claims' that are connected to three distinct historic periods: 'the upsurge of the Armenian and Azerbaijani national movements in the nineteenth century; the period of independence of Armenia and Azerbaijan after World War I and the Bolshevik decisions; and the rise of national assertiveness in the 1980s'<sup>64</sup> which were all one way or the other tied to and interlinked with Nagorno-Karabakh.

In a way, the national/ethnic identities of both Armenians and Azerbaijan have come to encompass Nagorno-Karabakh, connecting identity and territoriality. There are theories supporting the view that in ethnic conflicts the two, indeed get connected:

*The effectiveness of ethnicity as a political instrument emanates from the emotional attachment of individuals to a group. This emotional attachment can also be projected through a sense of belonging to a territory, thus linking identity with territory. In ethnic conflicts, therefore, the real or perceived threats to any ethnic group's identity, wellbeing and survival often have territorial dimensions.*<sup>65</sup>

Consequently, it can be asserted that the Karabakh Armenians' grievances over unequal treatment and threats to their identity<sup>66</sup> strengthened their emotional attachment to the ingroup which was linked to 'a sense of belonging to a territory', namely Nagorno-Karabakh, considered the ancient home of their ancestors and thus already strongly connected to their group identity. Similar things can be said about the Azerbaijanis: having the cultural-historic connection with Nagorno-Karabakh, the threat of losing the territory was projected as a threat, to a certain extent, to the Azerbaijani ethnic identity.

Thus, on the one hand, the Armenians 'regard Nagorno Karabakh as part of their historical land where their right to self-determination should be fought for and preserved at all costs' and equal its loss to a marginalisation of the Armenian people in the region through the shifting of the ethnic balance towards Azerbaijan<sup>67</sup>. On the other hand, in Azerbaijan, reaffirming control over Nagorno-Karabakh is seen as a security precaution out of a fear that the separation of Nagorno-Karabakh will mark the 'beginning of Azerbaijan's disintegration'<sup>68</sup>, which demonstrates the territorial nature of the Azerbaijani identity and the importance of its territorial wholeness.

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<sup>63</sup> de Waal, p.189

<sup>64</sup> Altstadt, p.105

<sup>65</sup> Milanova, p.3

<sup>66</sup> Petition from the Armenians of Mountainous Karabagh to Prime Minister Nikita Khrushchev

<sup>67</sup> Milanova, p.5

<sup>68</sup> ibid

**PART II: ANALYSIS**

Turning to the actual subject of this work, the analysis of Armenian and Azerbaijani schoolbooks will, as already mentioned, be divided into two main sections. *Language* and *overall presentation* of the conflict and the adversary in schoolbooks of both nations will be looked at using highlighted events.

**2.1 Language**

Especially in the area of conflict theory, language, being one of the most important tools of (individual or group) identity construction, contains more than just a clear and simple delineation of terms agreed upon by humankind to be used while referring to certain concepts and ideas. Language carries with it the power of subliminal and overt empowerment and glorification of some and degradation and dehumanisation of others. The famous example of the ‘freedom fighter’ vs. ‘terrorist’ perhaps most clearly demonstrates how one and the same concept, idea, or person can be constructed as intrinsically good, just and worthy of admiration by some, and evil, fear inspiring and barbaric<sup>69</sup> by others just through a calculated use of linguistic terms.

When it comes to schoolbooks, it becomes even more important to consider the linguistics with great caution. While adults have been proven to get swept up and influenced by language in the past, it is even more dangerous for children. Whereas some adults will have the intellectual tools and sufficiency of cynicism to wade their way through explicit and less explicit linguistic propaganda, children of an impressionable school age may not even ever become aware of the influence directed at them, which makes them susceptible to the dangers of it. This is why it is important for this analysis to, among others, look at the pure linguistics of the information provided in schoolbooks in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

**2.1.1 Armenia**

The language used in Armenian school textbooks on national history shows a clear attempt at being ‘scientific’ and ‘factual’. In most instances very few emotional terms are invoked when describing historic events or persons. However, there are, of course, some jingoistic references.

**The ‘Self’; Motherland**

When describing the Armenian people, an image of unity and brotherly helpfulness is invoked. For instance, the desire of Nagorno-Karabakh to be annexed to Armenia is also always described as ‘the will of the people...’<sup>70</sup>; showing unity and purposefulness; or that even “the tragedy of Sumgait didn’t dispirit the Armenian people; on the contrary, it unified it even more”<sup>71</sup> etc. Another example of an attempted unification is the referral to Western Armenians (the Diaspora) as ‘our brothers’<sup>72</sup> when discussing the latter’s help during the 1988 earthquake. This presents an attempt to invoke a strong

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<sup>69</sup> All words that, in themselves, also have been constructed to invoke a certain predictable emotive response, which is also usually the reason for their usage.

<sup>70</sup> Armenian history 8<sup>th</sup> grade, p.19, p.51, p.52, p.102, p.107 etc.

<sup>71</sup> *ibid* p.110

<sup>72</sup> *ibid* p.113-114

emotional bond among the entire Armenian nation, especially considering the strong emotive meaning of the term ‘brother’ in the Armenian language/culture<sup>73</sup>.

### External Forces

A different aspect to this self-image of a united people struggling for their cause is created by the representation of Armenians in the light of external influence. With some exceptions<sup>74</sup>, the outside world is generally presented as having betrayed the Armenian people on many occasions. For instance it is described in the discussion of the Turkish-Armenian war in 1920, how ‘England, France, other allied forces and the USA abandoned Armenia for good, leaving it *alone and helpless*’<sup>75</sup> [my italics], all quite graphic and emotional terms to describe a political decision on the part of the West<sup>76</sup>.

When referring to the regions at hand (NK as well as others like Zangezur) the stress is continually laid on their being proclaimed ‘inseparable’ parts of Armenia<sup>77</sup> thus rendering a crucial necessity to the preservation of the regions in question as Armenian, in a way invoking the territorial axis of the national identity. Although it is not clarified what will happen in the event of (continued) separation, the multiple repeating of this term with regard to the territories can be expected to plant a certainty of belief in the cause, as the alternative almost seems to endanger the wholeness of the national identity not just by way of territoriality, but also in the way of tearing out the essential national heart.

### Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis.

An interesting case of the representation of ‘the other’ is presented in the discussion of the Sumgait and Baku events. The following passage about Sumgait will perhaps be best to summarise the general mood in the descriptions:

*Realising that political methods will not succeed in stopping the Karabakh movement, the Azerbaijani authorities, with the permission of the SU Central Committee institutions, opposed the movement with brutal force and a policy of violence. From the 27<sup>th</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup> February 1988 a massacre of the Armenian population of the town of Sumgait (25 km from Baku) was organised. According to official data) 27 Armenians were brutally submitted to a torturous death on the hands of the barbarian crowd. However, some witness accounts state that in Sumgait somewhere around 100 people died and 300 were injured. The barbaric actions were accompanied by massacres and looting. As turned out later, the Sumgait genocide was thoroughly organised by the Azerbaijani authorities.*<sup>78</sup>

<sup>73</sup> i.e. as that of the highest level of closeness between men or man and woman; calling someone ‘my brother’ means you really do consider them as such and would spare no effort to help them in any way possible.

<sup>74</sup> Notably the help received after the earthquake of 1988, where the help of the entire outside world is stressed with gratitude and the separate projects by different nations highlighted. (Armenian History grade 8 p.113-114)

<sup>75</sup> Armenian History grade 8, p.30

<sup>76</sup> As the West were in dispute with the Red Russian Revolution and siding with the White Russian cause. Armenia was “siding” with the ‘other side’; Communist Russia

<sup>77</sup> e.g. Armenian History grade 8 p.19, p.50

<sup>78</sup> Armenian History grade 8, p.109

The similar events in Baku are later on referred to as a ‘new genocide’,<sup>79</sup> the latter being perhaps one of the most emotionally loaded words in the Armenian language.

Several things can immediately be noted about these passages in terms of linguistic and emotional representation. The attacks being described in terms of ‘brutal force’ and ‘policy of violence’, including descriptions like ‘brutally submitted to a torturous death’, ‘barbarian masses’, ‘barbaric actions’, ‘massacres’, ‘genocide’ etc. will be likely to invoke a very strong emotional reaction, corresponding with the one that the tragic event has had for the Armenians ever since it occurred. It is difficult to analyse this event in the light of its relatively recent occurrence and undoubtedly tragic character. As the occurrence of it in itself is beyond any doubt, as are the atrocious characteristics of many of the murders, it begs the question of how much emotionality is too much. It would not be sensible for the future attitudes for the texts to be too detached and blasé about any destruction of human life. The situation gets more complicated if we start considering the future influence of these texts on the upcoming generations and the need for them to, at some point, re-establish communication and find a common language with the progeny of those whose parents were referred to as ‘barbarians’ in their schoolbooks. It is especially striking, as the Khojaly killings are not only not referred to in similar terms, but largely ignored in Armenian schoolbooks, as will be shown later.

Thus, although it would be wrong, in my opinion, to downplay the horrors of Sumgait and Baku and the equally horrific acts at Khojaly as the emotional legacy is very much present throughout the Armenian and Azerbaijani populations respectively, and would be better off out in the open, it would perhaps be wiser to present a fuller picture. In the case of Sumgait and Baku that picture would, for instance, include the many Azerbaijanis who risked their lives to save their Armenian friends and neighbours. This would help avoid the present generalisations, presenting Azerbaijanis not quite as a homogeneous mass, and, simply put, human. As it is now, no mention is made of these counterparts of the ‘barbarians’, inevitably causing the conclusion that the entire Azerbaijani people were out to murder Armenians under the leadership of the official authorities.

As to the organised nature of the massacres, although many theories have been put forward with regard to it (e.g. the phone lines of the Armenian residents cut off, hardly or no emergency services available etc.)<sup>80</sup>, it has not been proven. This, however, is not mentioned in the schoolbooks, where the authorities’ organisation is presented as fact.

### *2.1.2 Azerbaijan*

In Azerbaijani schoolbooks the patterns are quite similar although much more emotionally loaded and obvious.

#### The Enemy: Armenia and Armenians

For instance, terms used in the description of people and events include ‘perfidious foreigners’, ‘traitors and cheaters’, ‘drowned in blood’, ‘new massacre’, ‘the lost sweetness of freedom’, ‘the bloody wound of a border’<sup>81</sup> and others<sup>82</sup>. In the meantime,

<sup>79</sup> Ibid

<sup>80</sup> For more details see The Karabagh file, ed. Libradian, Gerald J.

<sup>81</sup> Referring to the border with Iran as a result of the Russo-Iranian wars (Abbasov, Ilgam, p.73)

the Azerbaijani people are described as being the victims of these threatening foreigners, the leaders of Armenians, Georgians and other ‘infidels’ who wanted to lead the Turkic bravehearts to self-destruction by sowing disputes among the Turkic brotherhood<sup>83</sup>.

Oftentimes, the central image of The Enemy is connected to the so-called ‘infidels in black’<sup>84</sup>. In the 5<sup>th</sup> grade (approx. 12 yrs old) textbook it is at some point clarified that the ones thus referred to are none other than Armenian and Georgian feudal lords. After that the concept of the ‘infidels in black’ is mentioned several more times, until completely blending in with Armenians<sup>85</sup>. It is interesting to note the attachment of religious differences to the conflicts. While, according to Ilgam Abbasov, the actual Islamisation of Azerbaijan is not lingered on<sup>86</sup>, the religious differences of the adversaries are stressed by the above denomination. This is quite striking, as the author believes that the reasons for the active construction of this enemy image of the ‘other’ is the recent war over Nagorno-Karabakh, which, while consistent with the constructed image of the enemy being overwhelmingly Armenian, had nothing to do with religion<sup>87</sup>.

The 1918 Baku pogroms, lead by Stepan Shaumyan (Armenian in origin) are referred to as genocide - perhaps as a retort to the Armenians’ manifold use of the word - and remembered annually on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March, becoming a communal trauma for Azerbaijanis.

‘Armenian bandits’ are also blamed for the Baku revolt of 1920, which, we are told, had as its goal the distraction of the Azerbaijani forces from its northern borders leaving them undefended. ‘The infidels in black had done their black deed yet again...’<sup>88</sup> This is another example of almost a fairy-tale-like evilness of the ‘infidels’, who, as already mentioned were mainly seen as being Armenian.

The enemy appears again in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade (approx. 14 yrs old) textbook, for instance in the title of a sub-chapter: ‘the reflection of the struggle of our nation against the “giaours<sup>89</sup> in black” in the Dastana<sup>90</sup>’, with the notable change of ‘infidel’ into the even less neutral ‘giaour’. Again the same explanation is given as to the ethnic background of the ‘giaours in black’ and their cause of disintegrating the Turkic brotherhood from the ancient past onwards<sup>91</sup>

Finally, this image is completed, nicely fitting into the conspiracy theory that is drawn back into ancient times: ‘during many centuries our enemies the ‘infidels in black’ – Armenians and their patrons – have used many a perfidious and foul scheme to weaken

<sup>82</sup> Abbasov, I., p.66

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p.64

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p.67

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, p.68

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, p.66

<sup>87</sup> The conflict may be and has been described as territorial, ethnical, even historic, but never as religious in its core.

<sup>88</sup> Abbasov, II, p.68

<sup>89</sup> Whether or not the term is considered offensive depends on the dictionary; however I do know that Armenians generally consider it offensive.

<sup>90</sup> A famous heroic epos in Azerbaijan.

<sup>91</sup> Abbasov, II, p.68

and isolate our state'.<sup>92</sup> This suddenly puts Armenians at the core of the causes of Azerbaijan's historic problems.

Furthermore, from interviews conducted by Ilgam Abbasov with pupils, it becomes clear that when asked about 'the enemy', the pupils automatically associate it with Armenians<sup>93</sup>. In fact, the author notes that the words 'Armenians' and 'enemy' have practically become synonyms<sup>94</sup>, which perhaps goes to demonstrate the effectiveness of the educational policy.

#### Azerbaijan and the Azerbaijanis

After a discussion of unification of the Azerbaijani community under the commonality of Islam the authors conclude that 'finally, a united Azerbaijani people was formed'. In the conclusion of the formation of the Azerbaijani nation, the authors of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade textbook say that this united people inherited the traditions of the Oguz<sup>95</sup>, adding the old saying, that 'an old enemy cannot become a friend'<sup>96</sup>.

Ilgam Abbasov notes how national heroes often play the role of national martyrs, and are glorified for it: 'those who sacrificed their lives for their motherland, for the freedom of their people, died for a just cause – they will not be forgotten'<sup>97</sup>

#### External Forces

Armenians are further referred to as the 'side-kicks of [Russian] Tsarism' who 'maintained direct contacts with Russia and promised to help her occupy South Caucasus, including ... Azerbaijani territories'<sup>98</sup>

Considering all of the above, the terms used to refer to (mostly) Armenians and, in some cases, Russians and other 'giaours' have a very clear dehumanising role, defining the adversary not only as different in a degraded sense, but also as a treacherous, deceitful, conniving entity out to cause disruption among the Turkic brethren and take away their historic lands, dating the conflict back into the murky waters of the ancient past.

#### *2.1.3 Comparison*

Looking at both Armenian and Azerbaijani education in terms of the linguistics of the representation of the conflict, the self, and the other, several things can be noted. The most obvious similar pattern in both is the victimisation of the self as a nation. The own nation is furthermore presented as brave, valiant and inhabiting its ancient lands that are thus rightfully its own. However, the well-being of the in-group nation and attempts at preserving the historic motherland are met with the treacherous, deceitful 'other's' undertakings pointed solely at the destruction of the in-group through any means and any allies possible.

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<sup>92</sup> *ibid*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, p.77-78

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, p.77

<sup>95</sup> confederation of Turkic peoples whose homeland, until at least the 11th century AD, was the steppes of central Asia and Mongolia. (<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9056846/Oguz>)

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, p.68

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, p.66

<sup>98</sup> Abbasov, Ilgam, p.70

There is, however, a difference in the level of emotionality and bitterness in the narration. The Azerbaijani narration seems to be more emotionally loaded and direct in its linguistics, not slinking from offensive terms and open and direct verbal assault throughout much of its texts. The representation of the 'enemy' is slightly subtler in the overall Armenian schoolbook narrative, mainly limited to the descriptions of the Sumgait and Baku events.

## ***2.2 Overall Presentation***

Finally, below a discussion follows on the overall representation of the 'other' in the narratives of Armenian and Azerbaijani schoolbooks.

### *2.2.1 Armenia*

#### Motherland; the Self

A major common thread in the narrative is that of 'historic motherland', and the 'mother nation'<sup>99</sup> when referring to the NK territory, Armenia or the Armenians of Armenia. Apart from providing historic legitimacy to the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenian claims, this denomination also invokes emotive images of orphanly cut ties with a mother entity, rendering another instance of the necessity for Nagorno-Karabakh to be connected to Armenia in one way or the other.

#### External Forces

As already touched upon, the Armenian people are generally described in the schoolbooks as being united despite (or perhaps because of?) their sufferings at the hands of foreign forces. In fact, most of Armenia's international relations are seen in this light; for instance when the question of the Armenian territories came up in 1920 'Based on their geo-political interests, the Western countries took Turkey under their protection, since the issue of the Armenian territories was pretext for them to extract concessions from their allies'<sup>100</sup>; and that in 1920 'in Karabakh as well as in Zangezur the instalment of protection by English military authority which (the state of England) first and foremost had an interest in the Azerbaijani oil'<sup>101</sup>. This may perhaps explain why the Armenian Western-oriented politics just before its sovietisation in the early 20s are described as 'dead-end'<sup>102</sup>.

It is also external pressures that are blamed for the first Armenian Independent republic's ending: 'the first Armenian State that had only existed for two and a half years ceased to exist. The republic was not able to resist the strong external pressures'<sup>103</sup>. The formulation invokes some dramatism around the misfortunes of the first Armenian State that had to die so young because of external pressures.

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<sup>99</sup> *ibid* p.51, p.107, p.110, & Armenian History 10<sup>th</sup> grade p.256

<sup>100</sup> Armenian History grade 10 p.236

<sup>101</sup> Armenian History grade 8, p.19

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, p.21

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, p.33, see also Armenian History grade 10 p.199

The Military

When discussing Armenian military, much stress is put on heroism exhibited, deaths and injuries suffered, and the external factors in case of defeat; illustrated by the following passages:

*'The main reason for Armenia's loss [of the Turkish-Armenian war] was the force inequality and the fall of its army's fighting capability. The mood in the army was that they were dealing with a russo-turkish united powerful force'<sup>104</sup>*

...

*In December 1993 (...) in the Azerbaijani army Afghan mercenaries, Turkish soldiers, as well as mercenaries from other countries were fighting the Armenians. The Armenian forces were able to heroically resist and undertake a worthy counter attack on all the divisions of the front.*

...

*The enemy's total number was significantly higher than the Armenians'. The [Turkish-Armenian] war had an unsuccessful outcome for the Armenian side, regardless of the in some cases obstinate resistance of the Armenian soldiers.'<sup>105</sup>*

And finally, the Armenian army is described as:

*a sturdy shield in the cause of defence of the independence. To serve in that army is the proof of national dedication and is an issue of pride for any Armenian.*

These examples demonstrate the self-image created as that of a valiant, heroic fighting force in constant self-defence that keeps getting overpowered by the sheer weight of numbers of their enemies. A culture of pride for the military success is being nurtured next to the quite overt hints to prove one's national dedication by serving in that source of pride, the national army.

Events

Turning to the representation of events, it has already been touched upon how traumatic events like the Sumgait and Baku killings are reconstructed with quite a lot of emotionality. A related example on a representation of an event is the discussion of the so-called exchange of minorities between Armenia and Azerbaijan that took place after the eruption of violence. The conclusion of the description given is as follows:

*... the expelling [of the Armenian population from Azerbaijan in the spring of 1988] was accompanied by killings and looting of possessions.*

(...)

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<sup>104</sup> Armenian History grade 8, p.30

<sup>105</sup> Idem, p.30

*[In the autumn of 1988] while the Azerbaijan-based Armenians were simply robbed of everything, persecuted and were subject to a violent expulsion, Armenia created acceptable conditions for the Armenia-based Azerbaijanis. They were given the opportunity to sell their houses or exchange their apartments with the Azerbaijan-based Armenians. At the same time their possessions and family members were provided with transportation for their move.*

*In other words, the Armenian population of Azerbaijan was forcefully expelled, while the Azerbaijani population of Armenia emigrated in an organised fashion.<sup>106</sup>*

Although it would be logical to expect a more or less violent expulsion of Azerbaijanis from Armenia, especially following the events in Sumgait that had just taken place earlier that year and the, previously discussed in the textbook, violent expulsion of Armenians from Azerbaijan, it is nonetheless stated and stressed that the exodus of Azerbaijanis from Armenia was organised and occurred in an orderly fashion, with all the necessities provided for those departing. As I am neither historian nor witness to the events, I am not in a position to declare with certainty one way or the other, especially since the answer largely depends on the ethnic background of the source<sup>107</sup>. However, it seems logical to assume that at least some of the expulsions could not have been quite as peaceful as presented, taking into consideration the shock and grim change of mood in Armenia that followed the Sumgait events.

Having discussed the Armenian representation of Armenian tragedies of Sumgait and Baku earlier, a note should also be made on how the textbooks deal with Azerbaijani tragedies. A good example is the Khojaly massacre. Although it is mentioned, the mentioning is kept to a minimum. In fact, the total of the mentionings of even the word 'Khojaly' in the two history books dealing with modern Armenian history comes down to the following passages:

*In a particularly difficult position was the capital of NKR, Stepanakert. As a result of continual day and night missile bombardments from Khojaly, Shushi and Aghdam, it suffered destruction and numerous deaths. To ensure the safety of the population, from the winter of 1992 onwards, the self-defence forces of NKR had undertaken the destruction of the firing points of the adversary. In late February, the Azerbaijani military division located in Khojaly was destroyed by the Armenian freedom fighters.<sup>108</sup>*

in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade textbook; and

*In May 1988 already with the initiative of the Shushi regional committee an expulsion of Armenians began. In September blood shedding events took place*

<sup>106</sup> Armenian History grade 8, p.111

<sup>107</sup> Third-party sources, however, are not very clear either. For instance the CRS Congress Brief of 2003 states that 'Armenians have since [beginning of the conflict] fled or were driven from Azerbaijan and Azeris fled or were driven from Armenia and Karabakh, as well as from Azeri regions around Karabakh'. The involuntary nature of it is, in either case, clear. (Migdalowitz, p.2)

<sup>108</sup> Armenian History grade 8, p.132

*in the **Khojaly region**<sup>109</sup>; in the meantime the entire Armenian population of Shushi was expelled.<sup>110</sup>*

*From early 1992 onwards the self-defence forces of Karabakh proceeded to counter attack. The enemy left the strategically important village of Khojaly in panic. **On May 9<sup>th</sup>** under the leadership of **general Arkady Ter-Thadevosyan**, with a brilliant undertaking, the Armenian freedom fighters liberated the heart of Karabakh, the ancient Shushi.<sup>111</sup>*

in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade textbook.

It is thus clear that the events at Khojaly are not recognised and/or not recounted to schoolchildren. While no mention is being made of the civilian Azerbaijani casualties, the Armenian soldiers, notably referred to as ‘freedom fighters’, are described in terms of self-defence, brilliance and heroism; omitting any emotionality in describing the ‘extermination’ of Khojaly. The result is that the young generations grow up believing their countrymen –and women - have been nothing but virtuous and valiant throughout their history while their enemies (and sometimes allies as well) betrayed them, treated them unfairly, and/or subdued them to massacres and torture. This victimisation of the self as a people can lead to a genuine-perceived feeling of righteousness that can hinder negotiations and communication on equal terms, as one is always considered the victim and never the perpetrator.

#### Azerbaijan and the Azerbaijanis

Turning to the presentation of Azerbaijanis and Azerbaijan, it is quite consistent throughout the history texts. Starting with the short period of independence during the late 10s-early 20s when, it is stated that

*throughout the entire period of existence of the Republic of Armenia the Turk/Tatar revolt had become a serious fact of the internal life. They were organised and lead by Turkish, Tatar (Azeri) agents’<sup>112</sup>*

and

*‘Musavat Azerbaijan’s anti-Armenian works were accomplished among others through its Yerevan empowered-representative’<sup>113</sup>;*

followed by

*‘the policy of forceful conquering by Musavat Azerbaijan continued in Soviet Azerbaijan’<sup>114</sup>*

<sup>109</sup> It is not clarified whether these were Armenian or Azerbaijani killings, however, it is implied that the losses were Armenian.

<sup>110</sup> Armenian History grade 10, p.258

<sup>111</sup> Armenian History grade 10, p. 273

<sup>112</sup> Armenian History grade 8, p.13

<sup>113</sup> *ibid*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid* p.19

and noting that after Soviet Azerbaijan had officially declared to give NKR to Soviet Armenia

*‘that decision was not realised. Azerbaijan was doing everything to sabotage the fulfilment of the decision, in order to annex the Armenian territories’<sup>115</sup>.*

In all, the image created here is of that of an interfering, untrustworthy, sabotaging force, doing everything to gain territories that aren’t rightfully its own. All this presents us with a constructed identity of the ‘other’ that is not only dangerous, but is also not to be trusted; an image that presents the future generations with major problems at the negotiation tables, as a minimal level of trust is required for any success in re-establishing communication.

### 2.2.2 Azerbaijan

#### Victimisation of the Self

According to Ilgam Abbasov, the revision of history that took place as a result of the collapse of the SU and the ensuing construction of ethnic myths in Azerbaijan, as in many other post-Soviet nations, included the reconsidering and elimination of ‘dark spots’ in that history<sup>116</sup>. In a way, the schoolbooks present the ‘official discourse, reflecting the new vision of the national history’<sup>117</sup>

Much of the history is dedicated to the people who sacrificed themselves for the motherland and suffered at the hands of the Enemy<sup>118</sup>. This inevitably goes towards the construction of the self as a nation and of enemy identities including the heroes that fought them. The latter are generally presented as martyrs. According to Ilgam Abbasov every next hero is faced with a more tragic fate than the last. However, perhaps to make it all worthwhile, ‘the sacrifices of those who gave up their lives for their motherland’ are glorified<sup>119</sup>.

Also, all that is really given are facts of the struggles and battles, and not so much the reasons for them or the times in which they took place. In the books of the early grades (e.g. 5<sup>th</sup>) the Enemy is not even specified. This tendency to simply inform the pupils of the attacks suffered without the historic socio-political climate or the motivation behind the attacks may, if anything, lead towards further victimisation of the self. It is in these, still quite abstract discussions of ‘the enemy’, that the image is created of an enemy that can attack the motherland at any given moment.<sup>120</sup>

#### Construction of the ‘historic enemy’ (Armenia and Armenians)

The emotionality of the schoolbook texts, already discussed above, is especially present in the descriptions of the ‘historic enemy’<sup>121</sup>. In the context of this construction of the enemy it is interesting to note the role of Armenians, presented as central. For instance,

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid, p.50

<sup>116</sup> Abbasov, Ilgam, p.62

<sup>117</sup> ibid

<sup>118</sup> E.g. the story of ‘our ancestor Uruz’ (ibid), who accepted a terrible death to save his mother from the hands of the enemy’ (Abbasov, Ilgam, p.66)

<sup>119</sup> Abbasov, Il., p.66

<sup>120</sup> ibid, p.64

<sup>121</sup> ibid

in the description of the conquering of Azerbaijan by the Russian Empire noticeably more is said concerning the involvement of Armenians in it than of the Russians themselves. It is said that as a result Armenians were moved to Azerbaijani lands for the creation of a 'loyal Christian state'<sup>122</sup>. This also goes towards the construction of Armenians as the intruders with no historic rights to the territories they now inhabit<sup>123</sup>.

Armenians, in fact have a recurring role in the woes of the Azerbaijani people in the image of the 'infidels in black' (discussed earlier). It is mainly they that cause the cracks within the brotherhood of Turkic people and Muslims in general, and do everything they can to generally weaken the Azerbaijani society.

The author also notes the role of religion in the construction of the enemy, already touched upon earlier. By denominating the enemy as the 'infidels in black', the religion difference becomes a central aspect of the overall identity construction. This is quite unnecessary and perhaps even dangerous. Since the 'infidels in black' are unveiled as, mainly, Armenians and their allies and/or patrons, this could bring a new dimension into the animosity that is already present between the two nations. This would present a new development, as the present conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh so far has not been defined by religion. The author also notes the unification of the concepts of Turkic (i.e. Azerbaijanis) and Muslim people. In fact, they almost become synonyms of each other, while the 'infidels' and 'giaours' starting out initially as an abstract entity are soon narrowed down to, as already mentioned, Armenians and their patrons or allies at the time<sup>124</sup>. These gross generalisations and division into two main camps is a very illustrational demonstration of the psychology of 'othering'. This is consistent with, for instance, James Waller's psychological model<sup>125</sup> of othering, and represents the steps of differentiation and definition of the in-group and the out-group, as well as the degradation of the out-group. This, combined with the earlier notion of blaming the 'infidels in black' for many of Azerbaijan's setbacks completes the model and the process.

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid, p.65

<sup>123</sup> This line of thought is also clearly expressed by one of the teachers interviewed by Abbasov in the course of his research. Subject G., with a 20 year experience in education, while answering the question whether or not an 'enemy' image should be constructed in schoolbooks states: 'Can you call the move of 100.000 Azerbaijanis from Armenia a simple re-location? That animosity was never present from our side, while it always was in Armenian minds (...) Armenians are not an Asian people anyway, they came from Frakia, they're a Balkan people. The territory of modern Armenia – those are not Armenian lands. We are a people with a short memory and unfortunately don't remember everything. (...) While an Armenian shows his son the genocide memorial and says 'Turks did this, they are your enemy'. We don't have that. We forget' (p.75) This also demonstrated an interesting case of the perceived threat emanating from the 'other', contributing to the construction of his/her identity as ominous and the need for self-defence and the remembrance of past animosities.

<sup>124</sup> For instance, in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade textbook an assimilation of Russians and Armenians into one unified force that stands in the way of Azerbaijan's development takes place (Abbasov, Ilgam, p.70). Also, any empires seeking to conquer Azerbaijan are said to have used 'Armenian nationalists' as their tool (Abbasov, Ilgam, p.71). Finally, the interchangeable use of the terms 'Armenians' and 'the infidels in black', next to the overt definition of those infidels being the Armenians and their patrons, contributes to this narrowing down of the enemy through gross generalisation.

<sup>125</sup> According to this model a 'social death' is required before the object of othering can be killed physically. There are three mechanisms of this social death: us-them thinking (or differentiation), dehumanization of the victims, and blaming the victim. (Waller, p.236)

External Forces and Enemies

Another pattern throughout the history books is the explanation of events deemed negative for Muslims in general and the Azerbaijani people in particular by actions and plots of the enemy<sup>126</sup>. Such events include the division of Muslims into Shi'a and Sunni; the conflicts between several sultans; the animosity between the Safavid and Ottoman empires and the conquering of Azerbaijan by the Russian Empire.

The other enemies of the Azerbaijani people are considered to be Russia and Iran. In fact, as Abbasov notes, the authors of the schoolbooks date this animosity back to the 10<sup>th</sup> century, when neither the Russian nor the Azerbaijani nations are believed to have existed<sup>127</sup>. Nevertheless, battles are recounted with the numbers of the attacking Russians rising noticeably from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> grade textbooks, thus also increasing the heroism of the defending predecessors or ancestors (not clarified) of the modern Azerbaijanis. As already mentioned, later on the narrative assimilates Russians and Armenians into a unified force standing against the development of Azerbaijan.

*Comparison*

It is interesting to note how similar some of the patterns of the narratives are. In both nations' schoolbooks the self is victimised as well as presented as heroic and valiant, while the 'other' as the source of all troubles and standing in the way of one's development and prosperity as a nation.

However, the Azerbaijani narrative seems to be noticeably more drastic and overt in terms of animosity and degradation of the other. Since the necessity of the construction of the image of the enemy could be argued to have its roots in the recent Nagorno-Karabakh war, this difference in 'dramatism' could also, perhaps be explained similarly. Even though the conflict is considered merely frozen and not by any means resolved, the current status quo has been in place for over a decade now. That status quo is twofold. On the one hand, it presents us with the Armenians, who have practically achieved all objectives, being in control of not only Nagorno-Karabakh but (five full and two partial) adjacent regions, and being well underway to creating a fully functioning *de facto* state. The Azerbaijanis, on the other hand, have not only lost a chunk of territory, they were also the ones forced to call for the ceasefire. In other words, according to the status quo, Armenia won and Azerbaijan lost.

This division of roles can perhaps be used to explain the difference in animosity and emotionality when it comes to the image of the 'other'. The bitterness over the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh and the war (for now), have caused the radicalisation in the perception of Armenians by Azerbaijanis, while the realisation of all objectives and the victory lead to a relative peacefulness of mind and a benevolent wish for negotiations and a peaceful final settlement among Armenians. Furthermore, as a side note, it should be kept in mind that while the biggest modern enemy for the Azerbaijanis is, indeed, Armenia, Armenians have had a bigger enemy for over a century: Turkey. This bigger enemy, in a way, pushes Azerbaijan more into the background in the social comprehension of the theoretical 'enemy hierarchy'.

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<sup>126</sup> Abbasov, Ilgam, p.71

<sup>127</sup> Abbasov, Ilgam, p.69

**FINAL REMARKS**

Before concluding this project, some notes are worth considering. One concerns the development of the Internet as a means of communication – providing possibilities of sidetracking the social taboo on communication between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. The second note concerns future possibilities and developments in terms of education in the context of conflicts. Finally, a recent, quite unusual, meeting demonstrates the realisation about the younger generations having been pushed afar.

***Internet***

The emergence of the Internet as a major means of practically uncontrolled communication in a way casts into doubt the concept of ‘hermetically closed borders’. It is thus necessary to note the developments in that area and the possible influence the Internet could have on the perception of ‘the other’ among both Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

To get an idea of the nature of communication through the Internet, two online forums that are good examples of platforms for communication were looked at: [www.openarmenia.com](http://www.openarmenia.com) and [www.day.az](http://www.day.az) of Armenian and Azerbaijani origin respectively. Although this cannot be called proper research<sup>128</sup>, and it should be noted that from contact with Armenians I have come to understand that these two represent the more progressive web sites, most of the communication I came across on those websites showed signs of, at least a willingness to engage in debate. On both websites Armenians and Azerbaijanis<sup>129</sup> discuss numerous subjects and themes, from politics to sports, and generally coexist quite peacefully. There are still some instances of heated debate and arguments going ‘ugly’. However, the sheer fact of this communication is in itself, I believe, a positive one. It in fact points out that Armenians and Azerbaijanis are able to engage in conversation and debate successfully even if they mostly remain adamant about the rightness of their standpoint. As to the occasional ‘cyber fights’ – those are quite understandable as the conflict is still very recent and hasn’t had the chance to subside emotionally. Even though this ‘virtual reality intermingling’ is still very limited, any communication is better than none at all.

***Future Developments***

Having discussed the present situation it is important to look at future possibilities for education reforms and improvement.

An interesting development can be observed in Armenia. A new 8<sup>th</sup> grade textbook on Basics of Social Studies, already approved by the Ministry of Education and to be published August 2007, specifically deals with issues of communication and argumentation. In the case of the former, the pupils are taught about the nature of communication (including concepts like feedback and acknowledgement of the speaker) and encouraged to practice debating by way of role-plays. This includes analyses of arguments in terms of validity and accurateness and inevitably involves critical thinking

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<sup>128</sup> A more thorough investigation into internet communication between the two peoples would, however, be very interesting in terms of future research.

<sup>129</sup> Although it should be noted that the vast majorities of users on both websites are of the titular nationality.

and consideration of the adversary's arguments and thus, possibly, a better comprehension of the other's standpoint.<sup>130</sup>

In the case of argumentation, the positive and negative possible consequences are discussed (conflict resolution vs. the undesirability of conflict situations) and the children are encouraged to again, through role-play, argue the cases of different sides to an argument. This will, hopefully, make the children consider their own stand and the stand of others on certain issues in an argument, leading to a realisation of the 'bigger picture' and rationalisation of the adversary's standpoint<sup>131</sup>. Although it is still early to speak of the cognitive consequences this method of teaching might bring – as it is only being implemented from this year onwards – all these are qualities vital for any negotiations and re-establishment of communication with the 'other' that has previously not been accounted a rational and comprehensive role in the argument.

Although, to my knowledge, no similar program has yet been established in Azerbaijan, the mere existence of such initiatives in the region points towards some hopeful, even if still distant, prospects in the reconnection between the two peoples.

### ***Meeting in Nagorno-Karabakh***

A final development that should be taken a note of is the very recent and quite extraordinary meeting between the Armenian and Azerbaijani Ambassadors to Russia described in the 9-15 July issue of the Russian *Ogonek* magazine. What made the meeting so extraordinary is that it took place in Nagorno-Karabakh, marking the first time since 1994 that official representatives crossed the border<sup>132</sup>. It was followed by a meeting with the Armenian president Robert Kocharyan in Yerevan and Azerbaijan's president Ilham Aliiev in Baku.

Interestingly enough, the Azerbaijani ambassador Mr. Bul-Bul Ogly had been, according to himself, an adamant antagonist of any communication at all between Armenia and Azerbaijan. When asked about his motivation for the sudden change of heart he based it on the realisation of the failure of the previous policy of isolation. He continued that as the older generations of Armenians and Azerbaijanis that had known each other are slowly disappearing, the ones to replace them will not have any means to find a common language as they have been pushed further and further apart<sup>133</sup>. This, once again, demonstrates the importance of preparing those upcoming generations for the task before them; that of finding understanding and a common language where previously, in their lifetime, there has been only animosity and conflict.

This realisation on the part of the states' officials represents a major step towards the re-establishment of friendlier relations, if not of full agreement in the short term. It also goes to demonstrate the level of alienation suffered by young generations of Armenians and Azerbaijanis: it was noticeable enough to create an unseen precedent.

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<sup>130</sup> Basics of Social Studies grade 8, pp.105-111 (NB: page numbers may be different once published)

<sup>131</sup> Ibid pp.115-118 (NB: page numbers may be different once published)

<sup>132</sup> In fact, a minefield had to be cleared for the meeting to take place (Loshak&Gulieva, p16)

<sup>133</sup> Loshak&Gulieva, p.17

**CONCLUSION**

The importance of education has been stressed many times by many people throughout history. However, in the light of modern history, and the experiences we have had with propaganda and mass hysteria, education cannot simply be seen as the transferral of knowledge unto the younger generations. Knowledge and especially historic knowledge, is rarely – if ever – value-free. It is thus not only the nature of that knowledge that we need to pay attention to, it is also the presentation, mood and subliminal messages transferred to the younger generations along with it.

The subject of this work has been the presentation of history and the ‘other’ in Armenian and Azerbaijani education. The education discussed here has been school level, because of the young age of the subjects and the assumed higher attendance rate of school vs. universities, making the former a more all-encompassing group<sup>134</sup>. In that analysis linguistics, highlights and overall presentation of the history of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the ‘enemy’ were looked at. The findings concluded the existence of very similar patterns in both Armenia and Azerbaijan with regard to that presentation: both peoples presentations of themselves included victimisation and self-acclamation, while at the same time degrading the ‘enemy other’ and blaming all misfortunes on the enemy and other external forces.

However, Azerbaijani rhetoric seems to be more emotionally loaded and straightforward in its degrading presentation of Armenians than vice versa. This difference can be explained by Azerbaijan’s loss of the recent war, the ensuing bitterness and the need at justification/vindication, as well as the Armenians, perhaps, seeing a ‘bigger’ historic enemy in Turkey.

It can thus be concluded that some aspects of the ‘negative face of education’<sup>135</sup> are present in both states (e.g. militarisation of the schoolbooks, stereotyping, ignoring instances of cooperation etc.).

There are, however some positive and optimistic perspectives and possibilities. For instance, although communication between the two peoples is quite taboo, there are some indications of progress. This includes the use of Internet forums where Armenians and Azerbaijanis seem to be able to communicate relatively peacefully, even if both remaining true to their respective standpoints. If they can achieve this in cyberspace, then perhaps the realisation of it is not too unimaginable in real life. Also, new initiatives should be noted, such as the new Ministry approved schoolbooks in Armenia specifically dealing with argumentation and communication issues, encouraging role-plays, debates and, consequently, rationalisation of the adversary, i.e. some of the positive aspects of education. This would theoretically supply younger generations with the academic and cognitive tools vital for conflict resolution and post-conflict relationship development.

Putting things into perspective, however, it is important to remember that

*‘education on its own can not be expected to manage or resolve identity-based violent conflicts, just as diplomatic and peacekeeping initiatives on their own*

<sup>134</sup> Although, as another suggestion for future research, it would be interesting to look at the situation in universities and the attitudes of university students when it comes to conflict resolution.

<sup>135</sup> Bush&Saltarelli

*cannot be expected to resolve militarized conflict in the absence of complementary political, economic and social initiatives. Any solution to violent conflict will be sustainable only if it is developed and supported by both governmental and nongovernmental actors within violence-affected societies in ways that are consistent with the fundamental and universal principles of human rights*<sup>136</sup>.

Much is yet to be done on the long way to reconciliation of the two peoples that have been on opposite sides of a battlefield (be it active or frozen) for almost two decades now. However, I would like to believe that a peaceful coexistence is not only imaginable, but is on the other side of a compromise, waiting to commence, even if it is up to the next generations to achieve it. Once they do, it will also be up to them to retain the fragile understanding and nurture the seeds of friendly relations. It is thus important to prepare them for that future, and not keep them aglow with a prospective of a 'permanent struggle against an 'eternal' enemy'<sup>137</sup>. If we can manage to change the role of education from the latter into the former, it will be a major step towards the achievement of friendly coexistence and development of the region.

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<sup>136</sup> Bush&Saltarelli, p.viii

<sup>137</sup> Abbasov, Ilgam, p.71

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