



The Political Discourse of the Azerbaijani Elite on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict (1991–2009)

Ceylan Tokluoglu

To cite this article: Ceylan Tokluoglu (2011) The Political Discourse of the Azerbaijani Elite on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict (1991–2009), *Europe-Asia Studies*, 63:7, 1223-1252, DOI: [10.1080/09668136.2011.592272](https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2011.592272)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2011.592272>



Published online: 15 Aug 2011.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 941



Citing articles: 8 View citing articles [↗](#)

The Political Discourse of the Azerbaijani Elite on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict (1991–2009)

CEYLAN TOKLUOGLU

Abstract

This article attempts to analyse the political discourse of some of the Azerbaijani elite on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through the lens of the views of leading members of Azerbaijani society. The information is based on personal interviews conducted with some influential members of the Azerbaijani political society in Baku in December 2001 and April 2009. The focus of the study was to analyse how Azerbaijanis (re)construct their ideas about Armenian identity and community. The Azerbaijani narration of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict reveals how they have isolated themselves from their neighbours and from Western powers and how they legitimise their isolation.

THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT BETWEEN Azerbaijan and Armenia is undeniably important. The conflict claimed over 25,000 lives during the fighting, most of which took place between 1990 and 1994. The situation remains unresolved and could potentially lapse back into war. According to Yamskov (1991, p. 632) when ethnic groups do not share a similar ideology or religion, or when they do not oppose the same enemy, mutual relations between them become negative as is the case in the Azerbaijan–Armenia conflict. The political discourse developed by the elites in both societies may itself have become a barrier to reaching a peaceful solution in such a deep-rooted conflict as Nagorno-Karabakh. As Ambrosio (2002, p. 24) has noted, the battle over perceptions is extremely important because they influence the nature of the debate over a conflict which has the power to prompt an international response. In this respect, an understanding of the elite narrative which will be discussed here may be useful in making sense of the Azerbaijani position in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Of course, it is important to note that the historical facts and related elements that are reproduced by the elites may not correspond to reality, as perceived by others.¹

I wish to thank to Sabina Strasser and two anonymous referees for their very useful comments and critical insights.

¹For a schematic overview of the Armenian and Azerbaijani versions of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, see Kurkchian (2005, pp. 150–53).

Nevertheless, the perceptions, opinions, factual statements and assertions of leading members of Azerbaijani society may provide some clues to the deadlocks that have characterised the negotiations over Nagorno-Karabakh.

This is particularly important because, as Tishkov (1999, p. 571) has argued, existing typologies of the conflicts in the former Soviet Union fail to grasp some major factors such as the strategies and behaviour of individuals, social and political disorder, power and status aspirations, elite manipulations, and outside interventions. Thus, it is not possible to place any known conflict in the former Soviet Union into a single cell. Even the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict contains all the elements of existing typologies (Tishkov 1999, p. 574; Yamskov 1991, p. 632). In this context, Tishkov (1999, pp. 573–75) argues, although the ‘mental constructs’ or ‘speech acts’ of those who produce policies may sometimes be contradicted by historical documents, they nevertheless provide evidence that needs to be studied for an understanding of ethnic conflicts. Moreover, mutual perceptions may vary in accordance with changing conditions. In such cases, large scale ethno-psychological investigations and field ethnographic studies can provide significant data about such conflicts (Yamskov 1991, p. 632).

Within this context, this article attempts to make a contribution to the understanding of attitudes and stereotyping among the Azerbaijani elite regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in particular and Armenians in general. Azerbaijani elites’ perceptions of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict have become increasingly sharp and uncompromising as the conflict remains unresolved. This mainly rests on a misconception and demonisation of Armenians as ‘the other’. Topics such as the patterns of Azerbaijani and Armenian settlement in the region, where they came from, when and why, appear to rest on certain misconceptions of history. In other words, there are conflicting theories of Azerbaijani ethnogenesis developed by Azerbaijani historians, as well as conflicting explanations about the history of the Armenian community in the region. What overarches these diverse historical accounts is the belief that Azerbaijanis are the indigenous people living on ancient Azerbaijani lands and that Armenians from Iran and Turkey were deliberately settled in the region by the Russians in the early nineteenth century. With regard to the demonisation of the Armenians, the Azerbaijani elite refer to perceived historical injustices done to them by the Armenians rather than glorifying their past. In arguing against the Armenian victim discourse, the Azerbaijanis have developed their own anti-victim discourse. They claim that they were victimised by the Armenians who were, and still are, in conspiracy with the Russians. Moreover, they perceive the broader Christian world as acting against the Muslim world. In this context, it is claimed that the Christian countries of the West support Armenia only because they are Christians. It is through these perceived intentions that they create their own identity and collective memory, through which they legitimise their claims over Nagorno-Karabakh.

In approaching these questions I follow Smith (2004, p. 74) who argues that the nation is built on shared memories of joy, suffering and collective sacrifices. Thus, battles, either defeats or victories, become important for mobilising and unifying *ethnies* and nations. Memories can be manipulated. In this context, Smith (2004, p. 74) notes that it is important to distinguish between ‘genuine folk memories’ and the more ‘official, documented or excavated records’ of a heroic past. Distinctive myths and memories have subjective properties. This suggests that the perceptions, sentiments

and activities of the members of a nation should be taken into account in the definition of national identity, and the 'cultivation of shared memories' is vital for nation-defining activity (Smith 2004, p. 74). 'Territorialization of memory', or how shared memories become attached to a particular terrain and over time forge delimited homelands (Smith 2004, p. 75), is another dimension of the power of shared remembering. In other words, memory is bound to a place, to a homeland, but it is also crucial for identity. Without memories there is no identity and no nation. In this context, 'remembering the past' is essential for a collective identity to come into being (Smith 2004, p. 75). Another element of collective or shared memories of a past or pasts is a sense of 'collective mission' (some special mission) and 'national destiny' (unique destiny). With regards to a sense of 'collective mission', the nation becomes entrusted with that mission. Similarly, 'national destiny' presupposes a well remembered past, a 'unique trajectory', that the nation is destined to travel (Smith 2004, p. 76). Shared memories of a collective past, whether distorted or dimly remembered, mobilise and unite the members of a nation (Smith 2004, p. 77).

Azerbaijanis (re)construct Armenian identity by defining the Armenians, not themselves, as a 'unique community'. In this context, they stereotype the Armenians. They also attribute a 'special mission' to them, which is to occupy the lands of other nations where they once lived. The Azerbaijanis believe that the Armenians always have made, and are still making, territorial claims. In this context, they refer to the Armenian golden age myth, the myth of Greater Armenia. The perceived Russian support for Armenia is also seen as part of this myth. Another 'special mission' attributed to the Armenians is related to Christian–Muslim division. In their view, the Armenians are defending Christianity against the Muslim threat in the region. Thus, they define themselves as the victims in the Caucasus not only because they are Muslims, but also because they are Turks. In this context, it is believed that there is a worldwide hostility against the Turks and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is seen as proof of this. Azerbaijanis argue that the great powers are trying to weaken Turkey and Azerbaijan through this conflict.

Azerbaijanis also attribute a 'unique destiny' to the Armenians; a destiny to be deported from all countries they once lived in. In this context, remembering the past becomes important for the Azerbaijanis since 'national destiny' presupposes a well remembered past. Collectively remembering the Armenian betrayals and aggressions not only against the Azerbaijanis, but also against the Ottoman government and the Turks of Anatolia, appears to be part of the 'very act of remembering together'. Hence, as Smith (2004, p. 75) notes, the constant need to reawaken public memories and remembrance ceremonies, especially for those who gave their lives for the community, and to tie those memories to the homeland, becomes important for Azerbaijanis, as it is for Armenians. Remembering the past also includes their Russian and Soviet pasts, as well as the perceived Russian–Armenian alliance against the Azerbaijanis. In this context, the Turks of Anatolia are accused for not remembering their past well. It is claimed that if they had remembered the Armenian aggressions against the Anatolian Turks, they would willingly support the Azerbaijanis against the Armenians.

Smith (2004, p. 154) also argues that war is a powerful factor in shaping, not society or ethnicity, but certain crucial aspects of ethnic community and nationhood.

Moreover, the influence of war is uneven and it affects some aspects of ethnic community more than others. This influence can be direct or mediated and indirect where the latter can be more pervasive (Smith 2004, p. 154). In this context, Smith (2004, p. 157) discusses the shortcomings of the concepts of 'group aggression' and 'negative reference groups' (referring to negative mutual images and positive self-images), which are commonly seen as causes of war or violent conflicts. He argues that these concepts fall short in explaining how war can affect ethnic communities. For Smith (2004, p. 155) 'aggression' is a function of in-group solidarity, which naturally favours a hostile attitude to out-groups. The concept of 'negative reference groups' suggests that the 'violence of the conflict is determined by the intensity of their mutual images' (Smith 2004, p. 157), that is, wars are polar conflicts with a traditional enemy. As a product of this polar situation, each develops a (positive) self-image, as well as a stereotype of the enemy, which are products of this polar situation (Smith 2004, p. 157).

This second concept is related to the role attributed to military elites, where the military's self-image and its stereotypes of the enemy become important. However, according to Smith (2004, p. 157) the role of the military elites does not explain how war influences ethnic communities. This is because the nationalist images of the elites and of the military of new states do not always generate conflict or overt war. Smith (2004, p. 157) also claims that stereotypes of reference groups and the role of the military can be better understood in the context of inter-state relations. Following Smith, the Azerbaijani–Armenian conflict can be defined as a polar conflict where both sides develop a positive self-image while stereotyping the enemy, both deriving from the Nagorno-Karabakh war experience itself.

Smith (2004, p. 158) further argues that reference group analysis can be related to his approach. That is, it is external conflict which shapes ethnic community and its images and reference groups, positive or negative, are multiple or serial. Besides creating cohesion, war moulds ethnic communities in two different ways: first, it plays a role in their formation, and second, it plays a role in the growth of their self-images and stereotypes. Following Weber, Smith (2004, p. 159) claims that the formation of ethnic groups and their imagery is related to memories of early mass migration. However, in Smith's (2004, p. 159) view wars also play a role in shaping ethnicity and its attendant imagery, as well as fostering and also undermining ethnic cohesion. In other words, historical consciousness of ethnic community is very often a product of warfare or the recurrent threat of war.

After discussing the impact of different kinds of wars and warfare on the formation, imagery and cohesion of some ethnic communities in a historical context, Smith (2004, pp. 171–72) argues that wars have direct and indirect consequences for ethnicity. One of the direct consequences is propaganda, others being mobilisation and cohesion. Smith's discussion of propaganda is important for the argument developed in this article. Propaganda and psychological warfare are the most known effects of prolonged warfare. The aim is to construct favourable self-images and negative enemy stereotypes. The resource for this is accumulated myths and images common to the community drawn from previous wars and encounters. In other words, ethnocentrism devalues outsiders and their cultures, breeding solipsism or in some cases hostility which conduces isolation or wars (Smith 2004, p. 172).

Azerbaijanis do not focus on creating an ethnic imagery with positive self-images, but they do create negative stereotypes of Armenians that lead to isolation. Weak positive self-images and the victim discourse on the one hand and stereotyping the enemy on the other hand appear to be the focal points of the discourse of the Azerbaijani elite. Armenian communal history is rebuilt or reconstructed by the Azerbaijanis to legitimise their claims over Nagorno-Karabakh. The way the past is remembered may not only be bound to a place or a territory. It is also crucial for redefining identity, which appears to be the case in Azerbaijan. Shared memories are the source for the feeling of being part of a nation, which creates cohesion.

For an analysis of the political discourse of the Azerbaijani elite on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, personal interviews were conducted with leading and influential members of the Azerbaijani political elite. As members of the decision-making cadres, their views about Nagorno-Karabakh are effective and binding. Still, the views of these interviewees, who are referred to as the Azerbaijani elite throughout the article, cannot be taken as representing a consensus among the Azerbaijani people. A total of 29 in-depth interviews in 2001 and 25 in-depth interviews in April 2009, each lasting for an average of an hour or more and each recorded on tape, were used as the source material in this article (see the Appendix for an outline of who was interviewed by the author). The interviewees were selected in accordance with their involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, either as academics (experts in international relations or political science), politicians or journalists. The names of highly knowledgeable people about the Nagorno-Karabakh issue were provided by some of the people who were interviewed. In most cases the same names were provided by more than two or three people since they were accepted as experts on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In this respect the interviewees were considered highly representative of the leading members of the Azerbaijani society as being influential in public affairs. Those interviewed in 2001 were asked to comment on the national, regional and international levels of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, to discuss its roots and nature, and to comment on why the conflict has not been settled. Those who were interviewed in 2009 were asked to comment on the causes of the conflict, how they perceived their history and what roles they attributed to themselves, the Armenians and the super powers (the US and the Russian Federation) in the continuation of the conflict.

It is interesting to note that the opinions expressed in the 2001 interviews were presented almost exactly in the same manner in the 2009 interviews. The only differences were emphasis on mistrust for Turkey, the religious dimension of the conflict and the Kurdish–Armenian alliance against Azerbaijan and Turkey. The focus here however, will not be on the different viewpoints among the leading members of the Azerbaijani society. Actually, when the issue is the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, all ethnic and political differences in Azerbaijani society are downplayed. The people interviewed were asked to comment on whether their ethnic origin influenced their attitude towards Nagorno-Karabakh. All replied that Nagorno-Karabakh was their land and every Azerbaijani citizen wanted it back, regardless of their ethnic origin. (The only exception was a claim about the Armenian–Kurdish alliance against Azerbaijan and Turkey, as discussed below.) Taking these points into consideration, similarities and continuities will be examined in the Azerbaijani political discourse rather than differences, which appear to be less important in terms of what this article

aims to achieve. However, some of the noteworthy variations will be highlighted depending on their relevance to the topic. The 2001 interview data are used as background information and the focus is on the 2009 data for two reasons: first, the 2009 interviews illustrated some of the recurring themes which were observed during 2001, for example the stereotyping of Armenians; second, the 2009 interviews were carried out in April when there was a hot debate about Turkey opening its borders with Armenia. This provided grounds for thoroughly discussing matters about Azerbaijan's allies and the roles they attributed to them. In other words, their growing isolation and how they legitimised their isolation was discussed with them at a time when interviewees were being forced to reconsider Azerbaijan's Nagorno-Karabakh policy since 1991.

In the literature, Azerbaijan's position is defined as its right to maintain their territorial integrity which privileges the state, whereas Armenia's position is defined as its right to national self-determination which privileges the nation. This article does not pose territory against history or state against nation. The narrative about Nagorno-Karabakh rests on both historical and territorial developments as perceived and interpreted by Azerbaijanis. There are several hotly debated issues about the historical roots of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. These include issues like borders and territory (including the administrative history of the region), theories of ethnogenesis, homeland, and demography and population movements. Below, I first introduce a brief history of the Azerbaijani–Armenian conflict. Then I sketch the above mentioned issues as they appear in the literature. Further details about the history of the conflict will be provided while discussing these debated issues between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Lastly, I will analyse the Azerbaijani elites' perceptions and evaluations of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict under the separate headings of their historical claims and their territorial claims. These claims form the basis of their rationalisation that Nagorno-Karabakh belongs to Azerbaijan.

History of the Azerbaijani–Armenian conflict

Nagorno-Karabakh has not been the only disputed territory between Azerbaijanis and Armenians; there are also disputes concerning Zangezur (located southwest of Karabakh, now forming a strip of land in Armenia separating Nakhichevan from the rest of Azerbaijan) where a substantial number of Azerbaijanis lived before 1988, and Nakhichevan, an Azerbaijani territory located southwest of Zangezur with an overwhelmingly high Azerbaijani population.² In the formative years of the Soviet Union, the Bolsheviks responded to these border disputes by recognising Nakhichevan as part of Azerbaijan and Zangezur as part of Armenia. Nagorno-Karabakh, on the

²The years 1905, 1918 and 1920 are important for the history of the clashes between the Azerbaijanis and Armenians. Armed clashes between the two sides first took place in Baku and later in other parts of the Caucasus in 1905. This was the first armed clash. Others broke out between the two sides in 1918, again in Baku and in other parts of the Caucasus, and in 1920 (in Shusha). As a result of killings on both sides, hundreds of people from both sides died during these undeclared wars. For additional information about the history of these disputes see Altstadt (1988, p. 66; 1994, pp. 108–10), Cornell (1998, p. 53; 2001, pp. 73–74), Curtis (1995, p. 92), Goldenberg (1994, pp. 27–38), Herzog (1999, pp. 52–53), Hunter (1994, p. 98) and van der Leeuw (2000, p. 155).

other hand, was left inside Azerbaijan and it was given Autonomous *Okrug* (district) status within the Azerbaijani SSR. Although the Bolsheviks promised to unite Armenia with Nagorno-Karabakh in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution, the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous *Oblast'* (a higher level of autonomy than the former one) was created within the Azerbaijani SSR on 7 July 1923. This naturally disappointed the Armenians (Altstadt 1994, p. 109; 1997, p. 119; Tchilingirian 1999, p. 444; de Waal 2003, pp. 126–31).

Based on this former promise and under the influence of the *perestroika* and *glasnost'* era, the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh first wanted to join Armenia, and later campaigned for total independence.³ In response to these demands, the Soviet government insisted that Nagorno-Karabakh remain part of Azerbaijan. Thus, the problem remained unresolved until the late 1980s. In August 1987, signatures were collected demanding the incorporation of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia. This increased the tensions between the two communities, which eventually led to violence. In February 1988, Armenian deputies to the National Council of Nagorno-Karabakh voted for the unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia. The Armenians' demand provoked protests from the Azerbaijanis, which added further to the bloody clashes between the two communities. In 1989, the Armenian Supreme Soviet and the National Council of Nagorno-Karabakh together proclaimed the unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia, which was rejected by the Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet.⁴ These developments led to the Armenian–Azerbaijani clashes in Baku in January 1990. This period, which is known as 'Black January', is accepted as a turning point in the political history of Azerbaijan. As mentioned above, the year 1988 is commonly accepted as the beginning of a new phase in the struggle in and for Nagorno-Karabakh, which eventually led to a war between Azerbaijan and Armenia in 1992.⁵ Towards the end of 1987, all Azerbaijanis were expelled from Armenia and the majority of Armenians were expelled from Azerbaijan. The last Armenians expelled in early 1990 were from the large cities of Azerbaijan (Yamskov 1991, p. 639). Azerbaijan declared its independence from the USSR in September 1991. Four days

³See Yamskov (1991, pp. 639–42) who argues that socioeconomic factors, i.e. Karabakh Armenians' low standard of living and dissatisfaction with their economic situation, played a major role in the development of the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis during the mid-1980s. See also Goldenberg (1994, pp. 160–61) and de Waal (2003, p. 139). Moreover, the Armenians were also complaining about the way Nagorno-Karabakh was being administered from Baku (de Waal 2003, p. 138). Besides, they had some cultural complaints like not having an Armenian-language television station in Nagorno-Karabakh and the history of Armenia not being taught in Armenian-language schools (de Waal 2003, p. 141).

⁴See Cornell (1997, pp. 18–19) for details of the USSR Constitution of 1977 regarding the rights of peoples to self-determination and border changes.

⁵For detailed information about the clashes and armed conflicts between the two communities and the political developments that took place in Azerbaijan after 1988, see Cornell (1998, pp. 54–57; 2001), Croissant (1998), de Waal (2003), Dragadze (1996), Goldenberg (1994, pp. 162–68), Human Rights Watch/Helsinki (1994), van der Leeuw (2000), Saroyan (1990), Vaserman and Ginat (1994) and Zinin and Maleshenko (1994, pp. 105–9). See also Laitin and Suny (1999) who discuss the international dimension of the conflict and the attempts toward a solution with reference to both Armenian and Azerbaijani national politics during the 1990s.

later, the NKAO declared its independence from Azerbaijan, and in January 1992, it declared itself an independent republic. Although there was a cease-fire in May 1994, Azerbaijan lost not only the entire territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, but also its seven *raiony* (districts) surrounding the territory. There are almost one million refugees and internally displaced persons in Azerbaijan.

The Azerbaijanis demand the return of all occupied territories, including Nagorno-Karabakh, which they see as their own land. They base their claims on the sanctity of their borders and on Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians, on the other hand, argue that they cannot negotiate their sovereignty, which they achieved on the principle of self-determination. There are also other unresolved issues about the war. On the status of Nagorno-Karabakh, Baku offers full political autonomy in their internal affairs, but not independence, to the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians, which they reject. Other disputed issues concern the strategic Lachin corridor (the only land corridor which connects Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia proper), the return of refugees and displaced persons to their former homes, and the lifting of economic blockades on both countries (opening of Armenia's borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan and the US sanction on Azerbaijan which bans direct American governmental aid to Azerbaijan). These have remained unresolved ever since the cease-fire.

One major obstacle standing in the way of a political settlement is the disagreement about who the parties of the conflict are. Azerbaijan does not recognise the Nagorno-Karabakh leadership as a party of the conflict and prefers direct negotiations only with Armenia. Armenia, on the other hand, claims that it is not a party to the conflict, and that it should be resolved between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan. Overall, mutual mistrust and suspicions give rise to incompatible demands by both parties. The parties of the conflict are known to have been deliberately delaying its settlement. However, there are different explanations for the lack of any resolution of the disputes. First, each party believes that time is on its side and that they will have the upper hand during the negotiations if they delay an agreement (Kazimirov 2004, p. 148). Second, there is mutual distrust about the 'real intentions' of each side. Third, the opposition political parties and the public in both countries are against any concessions, as mentioned above. Fourth, there is also mistrust of the intentions of international peace-keeping organisations and Western intermediaries. These points, together with additional information about the history of the conflict, will be covered further in discussion of the arguments presented by the interviewees.

Debated dimensions of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

As noted above, Nagorno-Karabakh, whose population is composed of both Azerbaijanis and Armenians, has been claimed by both sides to be part of their historic lands. It is on these grounds that the ethnic origins of Azerbaijanis and Armenians, the historical borders of the region, religion, historic homelands, and population movements in Nagorno-Karabakh appear as the most controversial topics.

The historical roots of the problem can be traced to the region of Caucasian Albania (as distinct from Albania in the Balkans today) which both Azerbaijanis and

Armenians consider to be their homeland.⁶ De Waal (2003, p. 152) writes that Caucasian Albania has been described as the area of what is now Northern Azerbaijan; however, sometimes it has also been used to describe the area in and around Nagorno-Karabakh. The Armenians argue that the historic kingdom of Armenia included Karabakh, Nakhichevan and other lands which are now in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran and Turkey. The Azerbaijanis, on the other hand, drawing on the works of some nineteenth-century Russian scholars, argue that the ancient kingdom of Caucasian Albania was the predecessor to modern Azerbaijan, including Karabakh and Nakhichevan (Altstadt 1994, p. 111). Consequently, both sides have produced 'a large body of academic and literary material, drawing on pre-Islamic, even pre-Christian sources, specifically to bolster these claims and refute those of the other'; these works are accepted mostly as 'polemics' and 'documented arguments' (Altstadt 1994, p. 111).⁷ Cornell (2001, p. 66) also argues that the Azerbaijani claim is not official Azerbaijani policy, but rather an 'academic oddity'. In relation to these arguments, Altstadt (1994, p. 111) notes that while it is difficult to verify any early historical claims, nineteenth century administration and demographic shifts can be substantially clarified.

In this context, the time of arrival of the Turks in Caucasia is the most controversial issue (Altstadt 1992, p. 5), which is also part of the debate on the history of Caucasian Albania. Non-Azerbaijanis claim that Azerbaijanis have no historical links to Albania. However, Azerbaijanis claim a direct ethnic link between the Albanians and Turks, both considered to be ancestors of present-day Azerbaijanis. The Armenians claim that the inhabitants of Nagorno-Karabakh have been ethnically Armenian for over 2,000 years. Contrary to this claim, Azerbaijanis argue that the inhabitants of Nagorno-Karabakh were Albanians and, while some remained Christian and were Armenianised, the rest of Albania was Islamised. Thus, Azerbaijanis argue that the Armenians have no right to make territorial claims over the disputed region (Altstadt 1992, p. 6; Cornell 2001, p. 66). Historians from both sides try to prove a close linguistic connection with their own ethnic group and dissociate the other from the early history of Nagorno-Karabakh. Both sides also debate about the continuity of their cultural traditions. Altstadt (1994, pp. 105–6) writes that, similar to what happened in Europe, Armenian and Azerbaijani national movements began 'in the cultural arena with efforts to discover and write the nation's history, to codify and record grammar, to write down oral literature'.

The administrative history of the Karabakh region is also part of these discussions. An Azerbaijani view is represented, for example, by Alijarly (1996, p. 124) who writes that 'over a period of 1600 years, Karabakh as a whole and its upper section

⁶For detailed information and discussion about the history of Caucasian Albania, the inhabitants of the area, and the historical dimensions of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, see Croissant (1998), de Waal (2003, pp. 152–58), Dragadze (1996), Goldenberg (1994), van der Leeuw (2000), Shnirelman (2001), Tchilingirian (1999) and Walker (1991, 1996). See also Bournoutian (1994, p. ix), who writes that, 'in order to present a fair and balanced view of the history of the region, one must rely not only on Russian, Armenian, and European primary sources but on the work of Iranian and local Turkic chroniclers as well'. See Chorbajian *et al.* (1994) for an Armenian perspective and Alijarly (1996), Yunusov (2005) and Mehdiyev (2010) for an Azerbaijani perspective.

⁷See also de Waal (2003, pp. 152–57).

(Nagorno) in particular formed part of Azerbaijani state formations or represented of themselves [sic.] an administrative unit of the Azerbaijani provinces'. According to Shnirelman, in contrast to this view there are some Azerbaijani researchers who argue that Karabakh had never been part of Armenia, and others who claim that the Armenians resettled in the South Caucasus in the early nineteenth century, in the 1820s and after 1928, and they use this idea for anti-Armenian propaganda (Shnirelman 2001, pp. 182–83).

The history of the medieval Albanian Church is also disputed. It is believed by Armenians that the Azerbaijani historians intentionally try to isolate it from its Armenian roots. In this context, Armenians accuse Azerbaijanis of carving over inscriptions in the local medieval churches, thus turning Armenian churches into Albanian ones. Monasteries and graveyards are part of the same debate. Armenians also claim that original manuscripts were distorted. Azerbaijanis are accused of presenting historical Azerbaijan as a purely Muslim country and of erasing not only the Armenians, but also Christianity from the region. All this scholarly debate became more important toward the end of the 1980s and each side continued to accuse the other of destroying their own historical heritage (Shnirelman 2001, pp. 155–56, 158–59, 160, 163–64, 181).

Long before the Nagorno-Karabakh war started, 'the "authentication" of the history of the region had become a scholarly battleground' among historians, political scientists, archaeologists, researchers and bureaucrats (Tchilingirian 1999, p. 437). Ethnogenetic studies began in both republics in the 1940s, but the Armenian historiographical tradition is rich and much older, whereas the Azerbaijani historiographical tradition was established only in the twentieth century (Smith *et al.* 1998, p. 50).⁸ At that time scholars from both sides began to debate on the history of early Caucasian Albania, its territorial borders, ethnic composition and historical fate. This scholarly dispute laid the grounds for the development of the ideological struggle that preceded and accompanied the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Shnirelman 2001, p. 150).

With the growth of nationalism, territorial issues, linguistic issues and ethnogenetic arguments are continuously being revised and rearranged (Smith *et al.* 1998, p. 51). The most important issue of dispute between Armenian and Azerbaijani scholars is the status of the ancient Albanians. Armenians see them as 'barbarous tribes who were partly Armenianised' due to Armenia's more civilised culture in the region (Smith *et al.* 1998, p. 52). Azerbaijanis, on the other hand, 'have identified the Albanians as the direct ancestors of modern-day Azerbaijanis', rejecting the theories arguing their supposed 'Armenianisation' (Smith *et al.* 1998, p. 52).⁹

There are two clashing theories of Armenian ethnogenesis, namely the classical and revisionist theses (Astourian 1994, pp. 43–52). According to the classical thesis, the

⁸Shnirelman (2001, pp. 149–50) argues that the struggle between Armenians, who discuss the Nagorno-Karabakh issue in terms of a 'liberation movement' or a 'struggle for survival', and Azerbaijanis, who discuss the issue in terms of 'aggression' and 'occupation', had started in the 1950s.

⁹Hunter (1994, p. 62) claims that although Azerbaijani scholars are aware of the 'inconsistencies and the falseness' of Azerbaijani theories of myths of origin (ethnogenesis) and myths of history, 'they argue that they are needed in order to foster a sense of Azerbaijan national identity and a sense of Turkishness in the society'.

supporters of which belonged to the communist academic elite, the Armenians have migratory origins.¹⁰ In contrast, the revisionist thesis, whose supporters side with the Armenian National Movement, puts forward the idea that the Armenians were not migrants to the region, but the aboriginal inhabitants who have lived continuously on the Armenian plateau since the fourth millennium BC. The migratory thesis is criticised by the revisionists since, by presenting the Armenians as immigrants into the Caucasus, it challenges the Armenians' claim for the possession of various territories, in particular Nagorno-Karabakh, as its indigenous population (Astourian 1994, p. 49). While both versions of Armenian ethnogenesis are accepted in the Western, non-Armenian scholarly community, those who side with the revisionist school still constitute the minority (Astourian 1994, p. 68). According to Suny (2001, p. 887), Armenian historians tell the story of their republic as a story of ethnic Armenians, leaving aside the Azerbaijanis and the Kurds.

Azerbaijani historiography, on the other hand, has established an 'Albanian connection' in the ethnogenesis of the Azerbaijani nation although there are no linguistic and cultural similarities between the two nations (Tchilingirian 1999, pp. 436–37). In other words, Albania is accepted as the social, cultural and territorial predecessor of contemporary Azerbaijan. Through this argument the Azerbaijanis leave the Armenians out of the history of Nagorno-Karabakh, and Baku in particular and Azerbaijan in general. Azerbaijani scholars write about histories of pre-Islamic and pre-Christian Caucasia, which forms the basis of refuting the Armenian claims to Nagorno-Karabakh. They argue that contemporary Azerbaijan is the 'heir to the Albanian state and its territory' (Altstadt 1992, pp. 2–3).

In Azerbaijan there are two major schools of thought on the ethnogenesis of the Azerbaijani people, namely the conservative and revisionist schools. The conservative school has two branches. The first claims that the Azerbaijanis are the descendants of Iranians, whereas the second claims that they are the direct descendants of the ancient inhabitants of Caucasian Albania. Both branches of the conservative school, of Iranian and Albanian origin, aim to isolate the Azerbaijanis from the Turkic world. The revisionist school, on the other hand, aims to unite the Azerbaijanis on the basis of Turkic languages. The revisionists associate ethnicity with language affiliation and attempt to strengthen Azerbaijan's relations with the Turkic world, especially with Turkey. The revisionist school began to develop in Azerbaijan in the 1960s, in opposition to the idea promoting Iranian origin, and became popular during the late 1980s and early 1990s (Shnirelman 2001, pp. 127, 144–46).¹¹

The Caucasian Albania thesis (conservative school) promotes the idea of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity which, as claimed by Tchilingirian (1999, p. 438), has become an issue of irredentism. Azerbaijani historians have established a link between present Azerbaijanis and Caucasian Albanians for three reasons: first, to provide a common history; second to sustain the idea of ethnic continuity and

¹⁰Smith *et al.* (1998, pp. 50–51) write that according to the Armenian migration theory, proto-Armenian speakers first arrived in the Tigris valley in the twelfth century BC and shortly afterwards merged with the local inhabitants.

¹¹For a detailed discussion of the two schools, see Shnirelman (2001, chapters 9–12). See also Astourian (1994) and Smith *et al.* (1998, pp. 50–53).

presence in Karabakh; and third, to show that Karabakh Armenians are a 'non-indigenous' people living on ancient Azerbaijani lands since they are relatively recent immigrants to the region (Tchilingirian 1999, p. 438). Armenian historians, on the other hand, refuse Azerbaijani claims by referring to pre-historic periods, primary sources from medieval times, and modern scholarship about the region. Karabakh Armenians living on the land refer not to history books, but to hundreds of ancient monuments, ruins of religious buildings, churches and monasteries as 'living witnesses' to an Armenian presence in Karabakh (Tchilingirian 1999, p. 438).

Nagorno-Karabakh is important for Armenians and Azerbaijanis for different reasons. For the Armenians, after the division of Armenian lands between Russia and Persia in the sixteenth century, Nagorno-Karabakh was the one region which 'preserved an element of autonomy under Armenian princes subordinate to Persia (until 1828)' (Smith *et al.* 1998, p. 53). Moreover, 'during the subsequent period of Russian rule, Nagorno-Karabakh became an area of refuge for many Armenians fleeing from Persia and the Ottoman Empire' (Smith *et al.* 1998, p. 53). Thus, for the Armenians it was perceived as a 'homeland', symbolising Armenian unity and consolidation. This land was where the continuous development of Armenian people took place. It was also a place where, until recent times, there was always some form of political autonomy and many monuments of Armenian art and history. Lastly, it was historically the major centre of the Armenian national liberation movement (Shnirelman 2001, p. 149).

For Azerbaijanis, on the other hand, Nagorno-Karabakh is considered to be 'the very place where their modern identity emerged under the Muslim *khans*' (Smith *et al.* 1998, p. 53). It is also considered to be the first centre of Azerbaijani national revival. The struggle over Nagorno-Karabakh was the most important factor for the growth of 'Azerbaijani national consciousness in the twentieth century' (Smith *et al.* 1998, p. 53). In addition, Azerbaijanis perceived Nagorno-Karabakh as their homeland since many important Azerbaijani figures in science, culture and music originated from there (Shnirelman 2001, pp. 149–50). The region has been considered not only as the historic centre of both Armenian and Azerbaijani nationalism (Hunter 1994, p. 97), but also 'as an integral part of their history and culture' (Altstadt 1988, p. 71). Azerbaijanis and Armenians claim Nagorno-Karabakh as the cradle of their cultures. The Azerbaijanis argue that the region has been 'a storehouse for their identity, nurturing their finest musicians and poets and the composer of their national anthem', while the Armenians see Karabakh as 'a symbol of survival despite great suffering' since 'it has remained an area of Armenian settlement despite centuries of destruction and dispersal' (Goldenberg 1994, pp. 156–57).

The composition of Nagorno-Karabakh's population changed several times during history,¹² and this has led to rival claims about the true owners of the present-day

¹²For detailed information about the population distribution in Nagorno-Karabakh in a historical context, see Altstadt (1988, p. 76, endnote 18), Anderson and Silver (1996, pp. 502–5), Bournoutian (1996, pp. 69–70, 77, 79–80), Cornell (1999, p. 190; 2001, p. 68), de Waal (2003, pp. 131, 133, 140, 149), Goldenberg (1994, p. 158), Henze (1991), Herzig (1999, p. 66), Joffé (1996, p. 25), Laitin and Suny (1999, p. 175, endnote 8), White (1993, p. 163), Suny (1996a, p. 386), Tchilingirian (1999, p. 457, endnote 2), Vaserman and Ginat (1994, p. 347), Yamskov (1991, pp. 644–47, 650) and Yunusov (2001, p. 2). For additional information and analysis of the 1989 Soviet census data, see Henze (1991). For additional information about the population change in Nagorno-Karabakh and the population

territories of Nagorno-Karabakh. The discussions between the Armenians and Azerbaijanis became even sharper after 1988 (Smith *et al.* 1998, p. 52). However, Altstadt (1994, p. 112) argues that neither the demographic nor the administrative history in the Caucasus are as simple as claimed by either side, since ‘borders and populations have shifted; independence was won and lost’.

Comparison of historical and territorial claims to Nagorno-Karabakh

As Yamskov (1991, pp. 634–35) notes, there are several factors that have strongly influenced ethnic conflicts in the South Caucasus; they include the historical past, religious–cultural differences, the conditions under which ethnic relations have developed in the region, including territorial, legal, ideological, social and political factors, and the direct causes of the aggravation of ethnic relations, including national–cultural and linguistic, socioeconomic and ethno-demographic factors. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict contains all of the dimensions listed above, which moved from a socioeconomic to a political conflict, as will be seen in the Azerbaijani narratives discussed in this article.

Below, I discuss the historical and territorial claims of the Azerbaijanis under separate headings. However, both sections analyse the continuities in the discourse of the leading members of Azerbaijani society. The focus will be on the construction of ethnic stereotypes and negative images of the enemy, and the construction of Armenian identity and community. These ideas do not lead to a simple ‘us and them’ dichotomy, but to some structural ideas about ‘them’. Accordingly, the Azerbaijanis claim that the Armenians misinterpret history (or do not tell the truth), always depend on super powers and are unreliable due to their cultural traits. Other ideas are related to Russia and Western powers; they show distrust towards these powers’ intentions. These ideas are accepted as tokens when the Azerbaijanis are explaining why the conflict cannot be solved.

Historical claims

First I present the historical claims of leading members of Azerbaijani society. Ethnicity, culture, demography and religion appear to be important sources for the construction of the Azerbaijani position in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Those who were interviewed argued that the Nagorno-Karabakh problem cannot be seen as a problem only of the last decade since it has historical roots dating back to Soviet policies. In this respect, historical facts were presented as very important for understanding the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh.¹³ The Armenians were accused of not accepting historical facts, even those documented by the Russians. They were also accused of distorting historical facts and ‘writing fake histories’.

distribution and movements in Transcaucasia after 1989, see Anderson and Silver (1996, pp. 502–5). For the Armenian claims about the population distribution in Nagorno-Karabakh, see Walker (1991, 1996). See also Walker (2000, pp. 170–71) for more information about the displaced Azerbaijanis and Armenians due to the Karabakh conflict.

¹³Interview with a vice president of the Foreign Affairs Ministry (Interviewee 16). See Appendix for details of interviewees here and in further references below.

According to one interviewee, (52) historian and Member of Parliament: ‘All of these Armenian lies are planned against the Greater Turkish World, against Great Turkey. Today these lies still continue. The Armenians kill each other and say that the Azerbaijanis did the killings. They do this to create conflicts between different nations’.¹⁴

One of the important discussions was related to the ethnic origins of the Armenians. Accordingly, one historian argued:

In 1836, with the help of the Russian Church and through Russian domination, the Albanian Church was abolished altogether and the Albanians were then accepted as Christian Armenians The Albanians in mountainous Karabakh were one hundred per cent Armenianised: language, thought, names, last names, clothing, all became Armenian. And the Armenians who now live in mountainous Karabakh are those Armenians. I mean, they are not ethnic Armenians, but religious Armenians.¹⁵

The other main historical fact according to the Azerbaijanis was their being the first settlers in the region. They argue that the Armenians are non-indigenous people living on ancient Azerbaijani lands. In this context, all of the interviewees claimed that the Armenians from Iran and Turkey were deliberately settled to the Caucasus by the Russians during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁶ As part of this process, in

¹⁴Interview with a historian and Member of Parliament (52). Another historian (49) also made the same claim.

¹⁵Interview with a historian (10).

¹⁶As discussed in the previous section, the Azerbaijanis and Armenians refute each other’s claims about where they came from, and why, and in which part of the Caucasus they were settled. It appears to be difficult to verify any historical claims made by both sides. Azerbaijanis believe that the Azerbaijani historian Feride Mamedova, who studied the historical Armenian documents written in the Armenian language, proved that the Armenians had never lived in the Caucasus. Thus, it was argued that Nakhichevan and Karabakh are not the historical Armenian lands, as claimed by Armenians. It was also argued that in the above mentioned historical Armenian documents it was written that the Armenians migrated to the area from Asia Minor (interview with (1), academician. For a discussion of Mamedova’s works, including her Doctor of History thesis defended in 1986, see Shnirelman (2001, pp. 164–74, 177–78). Shnirelman (2001, p. 165) argues that Mamedova’s thesis was about the political borders of the Albanian state and this work was a ‘landmark in the long project of revising Albanian history and culture’. Mamedova developed the idea that there had been a distinct ‘Albanian ethnos’ in the medieval period and that the Armenians ‘arrived in the territory of Azerbaijan only in the very late 18th–very early 19th centuries’ (Shnirelman 2001, p. 165). Overall, Mamedova’s work found much support among the Azerbaijani scholars and added further to the intense ideological struggle between the Azerbaijanis and Armenians. Mamedova was the Azerbaijani historian Bunyatov’s student and Bunyatov was among the first historians who studied the history of Caucasian Albania. Bunyatov argues that Karabakh (Artsakh) has never been the centre of Armenian culture. For a brief summary of his ideas, see de Waal (2003, pp. 151–53). See also de Waal (2003, pp. 153–55) for more information about Mamedova’s works and for the author’s personal communication with Mamedova herself. For the Armenian response to the above mentioned claims, which is beyond the scope of this study, see Shnirelman (2001, pp. 173–80). Another claim about former Armenian homelands was provided by one of the interviewees, a historian (10). According to this view, the first homeland of the Armenians was the Balkan Peninsula (i.e. Thrace). Their second homeland was the area around the Van Lake (in Eastern Anatolia). In their second homeland they developed as an ethnic group. Their third homeland was the South Caucasus, the present-day Armenia. According to this

1948 and 1953, during the Stalin years, 100,000 Azerbaijanis were forced by the Soviet government to migrate from today's Armenia to Azerbaijan.¹⁷ The quotation below from the interview with an academician summarises these arguments:

This (the Nagorno-Karabakh problem) is a very old problem At the end of the nineteenth century, the *Dashnaksutiun* Party emerged and then it moved this Armenian problem to the Caucasus. The Armenians were settled in Azerbaijan territories (by Russia) within the Russian Empire. They (Armenians) say that Nakhichevan, Zangezur, Karabakh and Eastern Anatolia are their historic lands I have many books on these topics. In these books we wrote that the Armenians have never established a majority in Nakhichevan, Zangezur and Karabakh. These claims are based on the idea of establishing Greater Armenia; a state imagined to exist a long time ago.¹⁸

Another example of distortion of historical facts was the claim by some respondents that the monument symbolising the arrival of the Armenians to the region (Nagorno-Karabakh) in the late nineteenth century was torn down by the Armenians after the 1988 events since it invalidated their first settler claims. According to these respondents the remnants of this monument were still there and they were photographed by the Azerbaijanis.¹⁹

Azerbaijanis see the Armenians as always in conspiracy with Russia and argue that they were always supported by the Russians. According to some interviewees, not only Nagorno-Karabakh, but also the present-day Armenian territories, which historically belonged to the Azerbaijanis, were given to the Armenians as a result of the pressure from the Bolsheviks in 1920, when the Soviet state was established. This was done because they aimed to separate not only Azerbaijan from Turkey but also the Azerbaijanis from the Turks.²⁰ This is because Russia always wanted, and still wants, to keep the region, the Caucasus, under its influence by dividing the Turkish world. Thus, Armenia was not seen as an independent state since it was controlled by Russia.²¹ Azerbaijanis believe that the Russians did not, and still do not, want to settle the conflict and since the Armenians are under the control of the Russians, they approved of whatever the Russians said or did.²²

respondent, 'This is why the Armenians do not write about the history of Armenia; they write about the history of Armenian people since their real homeland is in the Balkans'.

¹⁷Interviews with Samil Mehdiyev, vice chair, Organisation for the Liberation of Karabakh (5); and a historian (49).

¹⁸Interview with an academician (3).

¹⁹Interviews with an academician (46), and two historians (48, 49). Almost all interviewees referred to these monuments when the topic of discussion was their arrival to the region.

²⁰Interviews with Akif Nagi, chair, Organisation for the Liberation of Karabakh (47); Samil Mehdiyev, vice chair, Organisation for the Liberation of Karabakh (5); and one of Heydar Aliyev's former senior advisers (15).

²¹Interview with one of Heydar Aliyev's former senior advisers (41). This view is shared by all of the interviewees. However, there were various discussions about how to minimise Russia's power and influence in the region. This topic is beyond the scope of this article.

²²Interview with one of the leaders of the Musavat Party (30). This view, too, is shared by all of the interviewees. They believe that the key to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is in the hands of the Russians. There were again different views about which countries can exert pressure on Russia and how they can do this so that Russia resolves the conflict. This issue is also beyond the scope of this article.

According to two respondents, a historian and a journalist, the Armenian Church protected the Armenian people and their language, culture and literature for 1,500 years. Thus, it was the Armenian Church which played a major role in the emergence of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.²³ Religion also appears to have played an important role in international circles since, as one respondent argued, Westerners side with the Armenians just because they are Christians.²⁴ During the field research in 2001, the Muslim-Christian division was not perceived as playing a role in the conflict, but in 2009 there was more emphasis on the religious dimension of the conflict, and this was specifically referred to by several of the interviewees. Moreover, while religious animosity between Muslims and Christians was presented as one of the obstacles to reaching a political settlement, it was also argued that Armenian aggressions could be explained through religion.²⁵ In this context, a few respondents claimed that Armenians argue that there is a difference between Christian and Muslim civilisations and these two can never exist side by side.²⁶ Although the conflict was described as a territorial conflict, the Armenians were said to be presenting it as a religious conflict.²⁷ It was also claimed by one academician that the Armenians considered themselves to be the last bastion of Christianity in the region, surrounded by Muslims. Thus, they performed the mission of protecting Christianity.²⁸ This was labelled as a superiority complex which characterises the Armenian mentality. The Armenians were described by one respondent as aggressive, not only against the Azerbaijanis, Turks and Georgians, but also against the Muslim and Christian Kurds,²⁹ while another also argued that the Armenians justified their aggression as fighting against the 'brutal Muslims and Turks'.³⁰

However, at this point an interesting claim about the Armenians should be mentioned. Ten of those who were interviewed in 2009 argued that the Armenians in Armenia do not consider the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh to be ethnic Armenians. This was because some of the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh were Albans: they were Christians who were Armenianised.³¹ Consequently, according to one respondent, Armenians in Armenia were perceived as real Armenians, whereas the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh were not.³² When asked how they knew this, the

²³Interviews with a historian (10) and a journalist (33).

²⁴Interview with Akif Nagi, chair, Organisation for the Liberation of Karabakh (47).

²⁵Interviews with a historian (10); a journalist (33); a leader of the Musavat Party (30); a policy analyst, Caucasus University-Caucasus Research Centre (34); a policy analyst, Center for Political Innovation and Technology (35); Akif Nagi, chair of the Organisation for the Liberation of Karabakh (47); two historians (48, 49); two academicians (32, 46); a Musavat Party leader (51); and a historian and Member of Parliament (52).

²⁶Interviews with a Musavat Party leader (30); an academician (46); a historian and Member of Parliament (52); and two academicians (32, 37).

²⁷Interview with a historian (48).

²⁸Interview with an academician (32).

²⁹Interview with a Musavat Party leader (51).

³⁰Interview with a journalist (33).

³¹Interview with an academician (32). Also interviews with a policy analyst, Center for National and International Studies (38); a historian (49); an academician (46); a policy analyst, Center for Political Innovation and Technology (35); a Musavat Party leader (51); two academicians (54, 37); and a historian and Member of Parliament (52).

³²Interview with a Musavat Party leader (51).

respondent stated that it was because they were from the region or had been to the region or had friends from the region who informed them. It was also noted that there were noticeable differences in the dialects of Armenians in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians who have not liked each other since Soviet times. According to one academician, the relations between these two groups were not warm; they come together only to act on global and general issues which interest them all.³³ It was claimed that this was a secret which only Armenians share among themselves and do not let the outside world know about.

What lies behind these arguments is the Azerbaijani belief that the Armenian Church, the Armenian diaspora, Russians and Christians in general work for the same aim, which is the Armenian desire to take over Azerbaijani historical lands. These arguments are supported by claims that Armenians are a ‘very dangerous’ ethnic group whose historical mission is to occupy the lands of other nations. Thus, the Armenians always have to be controlled to prevent them from reaching their aims. In this context, Armenians were described as always allying with powerful states. Nine of the interviewees described them in this way. The following respondent’s comments were typical of this attitude:

Armenians polish the shoes of those who are powerful. However, if the powerful ones grow weak, they stab them from behind and then ally with other powerful states. This is what they have always done. In the Ottoman society they were once known as *millet-i sadika*, meaning the most loyal nation to the Ottoman state. What did they do? They joined hands with Russians and stabbed the Ottomans from behind.³⁴

The other argument presented by the respondents was that Armenians were always being trampled by others since historically they have been a small nation. This, it was said, served to create a certain Armenian psychology and a need for creating mythical ideals. This opinion was shared by all interviewees. It was argued that the myth of Greater Armenia was accepted by Armenians as reality, and this gave rise to separatist movements. Based on this, it was argued, because Armenians cannot be aggressive against a very powerful Turkish state to recover their mythical lands, they have chosen the Azerbaijanis as a target to take their revenge on the Turks (both in Turkey and Azerbaijan) for the loss of their perceived historical homeland in Eastern Anatolia due to their deportation in 1915.³⁵ They chose Azerbaijan since it was a newly established state which was not yet prepared to defend itself against aggression.³⁶ Furthermore,

³³Interview with an academician (37).

³⁴Interview with an academician (46). Also interviews with a policy analyst, Center for Political Innovation and Technology (35); a policy analyst, Center for National and International Studies (38); a policy analyst, Peace and Conflict Resolution Center (39); one of Heydar Aliyev’s former senior advisers (41); an academician (46); Akif Nagi, chair, Organisation for the Liberation of Karabakh (47); an academician (37); and with a historian and Member of Parliament (52). This is also a widely shared opinion of the general population. Any personal conversation with people other than the interviewees ended with an emphasis on the disloyalty of the Armenians.

³⁵The Armenians were relocated to the Ottoman province of Damascus, what is now Syria, by the Ottoman government in 1915. This was accompanied by the loss of many lives.

³⁶Interviews with a journalist (33); an academician (46); a policy analyst, Center for National and International Studies (38); a historian and Member of Parliament (52); Akif Nagi, chair,

according to one of the interviewees, a policy analyst, 'Turkey tries to avoid her responsibility because she has a big army and a big state. This is why Azerbaijan now has to take the responsibility for the 1915 events. For the Armenians, Azerbaijan became a vulnerable target for the Armenian losses in 1915'.³⁷ According to one academician, another Armenian myth was described as the desire to cleanse the region of all 'Azerbaijani Turks'. This was explained as resulting from the age-old religious divide between the two communities.³⁸

Presenting the Armenians as liars and unreliable people appears to be an important instrument of stereotyping for the Azerbaijanis. However, according to one interviewee, although the Azerbaijanis try to make the world believe that Armenians are bad people, it was also agreed that there were many good Armenians in Europe and therefore Europeans would not believe what the Azerbaijanis say about Armenians.³⁹ Another interviewee recognised the process of stereotyping that Azerbaijanis were engaged in: 'We say they are brutal, we say Armenians are like this and that. The Azerbaijanis talk about the Armenians night and day. Is this the way to solve a conflict? ... There is stereotyping of Armenians in Azerbaijan; deep-rooted stereotyping which is difficult to change'.⁴⁰

To summarise, the above views presented by the leading members of Azerbaijani society reflected how historical factors were important for legitimising Azerbaijan's territorial claims to Nagorno-Karabakh. These factors were important not only for the members of the opposition, but also for the members of the government and for the non-politicians who were interviewed. The Armenian Church and diaspora appeared as the key actors who played a major role in the development of Armenian nationalism. Moreover, the interviewees described the Armenian demands over Nagorno-Karabakh as secessionist and diasporan in nature. When they defined their own position they argued that Muslims, or Azerbaijanis, had constituted the majority in the region until the Russians intervened in the Caucasus and changed the composition of the population in the area. Consequently, Russia was seen as the major regional actor who had laid the grounds for the emergence and continuation of the Nagorno-Karabakh war. Religion appeared to be gaining importance not only at the international context, but also in the discourse of the Azerbaijani elite. The Armenian claims to Nagorno-Karabakh were refuted on the basis of the idea that the Armenians were the latecomers to the region.

The Azerbaijani rhetoric on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict suggests that there is growing cohesion in Azerbaijani society as the conflict remains unresolved. This fosters a sense of the Azerbaijani ethnic community and nationhood. Growing oil revenues and military investments, which were mentioned by all of those whom were interviewed, also appear to contribute to the creation of positive self-images in Azerbaijan which is yet to be developed. However, parallel to this development,

Organisation for the Liberation of Karabakh (47); policy analyst, Center for Political Innovation and Technology (35); Ali Kerimli, leader of the Popular Front Party of Azerbaijan (53) and a Musavat Party leader (51).

³⁷Interview with policy analyst, Center for National and International Studies (38).

³⁸Interview with an academician (46).

³⁹Interview with an academician (32).

⁴⁰Interview with an academician and opposition Member of Parliament (50).

stereotyping the Armenians also appears to be gaining a new momentum. When creating enemy stereotypes, the Azerbaijani elite refer not only to the Nagorno-Karabakh war, but also to their former encounters with the Armenians during the Soviet times. Based on their remembered encounters with Armenians, they accumulate myths and negative images about them. There are two important dimensions of the Azerbaijani collective memory. The first is the sense of 'special mission' (an Armenian project of creating a Greater Armenia) and the other is a 'national destiny' (the idea that the Armenians will always be manipulated by powerful states and that they are destined to move from one place to another). It is through these ideas that the Azerbaijanis devalue Armenians, which gives rise to growing solipsism and hostility against them. This, in turn, contributes to ethnic enmity commanding large majorities in both countries. As long as there is mutual distrust and hatred between the Azerbaijanis and Armenians, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict will continue to remain as a clash not only between two states, but also between two nations.

Within this context, the national identity-building mechanisms in Azerbaijan have crucial implications for the diplomatic relations between the governments of the countries involved in the conflict. The way the Azerbaijanis (re)construct Armenian and Azerbaijani identities sustains mutual mistrust not only between Azerbaijan and Armenia, but also between Azerbaijan and Western political leaders. Thus, sensitive identity issues appear to be a very important obstacle for the peace process, which it seems the outsiders cannot reverse as the conflict remains unresolved. In general, it can be argued that miscommunication and misperceptions of the Azerbaijani foreign-policy makers fosters Azerbaijan's isolation from the international community. All this contributes to the protraction of the current *status quo* in Nagorno-Karabakh, which is inadmissible for the international community.

Territorial claims

From the Azerbaijani point of view, the process of state-building in Azerbaijan is an unfinished or interrupted project. The Nagorno-Karabakh problem emerged during the period between 1918 and 1920, when the independent states were established in the Caucasus. The independent Azerbaijan state, which was established at that time, managed to keep Nakhichevan, Nagorno-Karabakh and Zangezur (the land between Nakhichevan and Azerbaijan) as part of the homeland. Later, during the Soviet period, Armenians managed to take some parts of Zangezur.⁴¹ Zangezur, where the Azerbaijanis then constituted the majority, was given to Armenia by the Soviet government to separate Azerbaijan from Turkey. Azerbaijan managed to keep only Nakhichevan with Turkey's help. During *perestroika*, Armenians became more active and they continued to make land claims. At the time of *perestroika*, the Soviet leaders were on the side of the Armenians and this made the Armenians even more active.⁴² On the other hand, since those who ruled Azerbaijan during the Soviet period were 'Soviet-minded' and 'communist-minded' people siding with the Russians, they could not take any serious measures against Armenian land claims. Consequently, the

⁴¹Interview with an academician (3).

⁴²Interview with an editor of *Musavat* Newspaper (8).

Armenians became more active in Nagorno-Karabakh during the Soviet rule. Furthermore, towards the end of the 1980s, Armenian claims that the Azerbaijanis did not recognise the rights of the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh and oppressed them were rejected by Azerbaijanis.⁴³ Based on these ideas, the Nagorno-Karabakh problem was defined as Azerbaijan's internal problem rising from the Armenian separatist movement. This was a view shared by all of the people who were interviewed.

From Azerbaijan's perspective, the conflict is not between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan, but between Azerbaijan and Armenia since it stems from the territorial claims of Armenians. The Azerbaijanis do not accept the idea of national self-determination, which is seen as a principle of the past. From this point of view, some interviewees argued that national minorities do not have the right to national self-determination and this principle can be applied by peaceful means only, without threatening the territorial integrity of a given state.⁴⁴ Armenians have already used this right by creating an Armenian state. Thus, according to Ali Kerimli, for Azerbaijanis, the Armenians can live in their own independent country, in Armenia, but if they want to live in Azerbaijan, including Nagorno-Karabakh, they have to accept the status of a national minority.⁴⁵

About half of the interviewees were asked to compare the Nagorno-Karabakh case with other similar conflicts in post-Soviet societies. All agreed that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is between two states, whereas other conflicts in the post-Soviet region are internal problems of individual states.⁴⁶ Accordingly, they claimed that Armenia openly interferes with the problems related to Nagorno-Karabakh.⁴⁷ Also, as discussed in the previous section, it was noted that both Azerbaijan and Georgia are fighting not only against the Armenians and Abkhazians, respectively, but also against Russia.⁴⁸ This was explained as follows by one respondent: 'To be honest, from a historical perspective, the Armenians were always in a conspiracy with Russia since the time of their settlement in the Caucasus . . . the purpose of all these doings and operations was to continue to keep the region, the Caucasus, under the influence of Russia'.⁴⁹

The war between Russia and Georgia in the summer of 2008 is seen as proof of Russia's power and intentions in the region.⁵⁰ Thus, all interviewees saw the war between Azerbaijan and Armenia as a war between Azerbaijan and Russia. They

⁴³Interview with an academician (3).

⁴⁴Interviews with a vice president of the Foreign Affairs ministry (16) and a member of the General Executive Board of the Musavat Party (28).

⁴⁵Interview with Ali Kerimli, party leader, chair, Popular Front Party of Azerbaijan, the reformist wing (29).

⁴⁶For example, an interview with an academician in International Relations (32).

⁴⁷For example, an interview with one of Heydar Aliyev's former senior advisers (9).

⁴⁸For example, an interview with a board member of the Musavat Party (28).

⁴⁹Interview with a vice president of the Foreign Affairs Ministry (16). These opinions were shared by almost all of the 2001 and 2009 interviewees, as discussed in the previous section.

⁵⁰Interviews with a policy analyst, Center for National and International Studies (38); Musavat Party leaders (30, 51); a journalist (33); a policy analyst, Caucasus University-Caucasus Research Centre (34); a journalist (31); and with an academician and opposition Member of Parliament (50). This view was shared by almost all interviewees. A few argued that Russia would not want to create more conflict in its periphery after the 2008 Georgian events.

noted that the Azerbaijanis did not have the power to challenge Russia's influence throughout the Caucasus,⁵¹ and that the key to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was in the hands of the Russians who did not want to settle the conflict.⁵²

In 2009 the interviewees were asked to comment on the differences between the Armenians in Armenia, Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh and diaspora Armenians. About 70% claimed that there were no differences between them, while one interviewee declared that Armenians were 'different kinds of snakes, white, black, yellow, but their poisons are the same'.⁵³ Some others argued that what united all Armenians was their history, since they were only interested in history; otherwise they were not united.⁵⁴ The remaining 30% provided detailed discussions of the differences between them, some claiming that the differences were minor, others arguing that there were major differences. The Armenians in Armenia were seen as interested in taking back their historical lands, unlike the diaspora Armenians, even at the price of giving up their genocide claims. The Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh were seen as the weakest group since they had no power to negotiate. However, this group was also seen as the most powerful since Russia stood behind them. Moreover, it was claimed that Russia controls Armenia through the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians. Diaspora Armenians were seen as the group most interested in the 1915 events. In this respect, Nagorno-Karabakh was considered as totally under the control of Russians, Armenia was considered as being less controlled and diaspora Armenians were considered as independent. All groups were said to have different interests. The Armenian diaspora appeared to be seen as a mighty force since it was thought of as the group who could influence the policies of Western powers. It was also noted that it was difficult to guess how Armenians in Armenia were able to influence their own government.⁵⁵

Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians, and their administration, were not taken seriously by any of the interviewees. However, 80% of the interviewees agreed that Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians were ruling the Armenian state and held key positions in Armenia, which they did not want to share with others. This was because, as was the case in Azerbaijani politics, Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians were able to manipulate Armenian politics through local favouritism or clientelism. Thus, according to one respondent, Armenia was controlled by Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians who were protecting their own interests and defending their power over the Armenian state.⁵⁶ In this context, it was argued that while the Armenians in Armenia wanted the conflict to come to an end and to normalise their relations with Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians regarded this as conflicting with their interests. Again about 80% of the

⁵¹Interviews with a journalist (31); an academician (32); a Musavat Party leader (51); and with an academician (36). This opinion, too, was shared by all of the interviewees.

⁵²Interviews with one of Heydar Aliyev's former senior advisers (41); an academician (36); Akif Nagi, chair, Organisation for the Liberation of Karabakh (47); and with a journalist (31).

⁵³Interview with one of Heydar Aliyev's former senior advisers (41).

⁵⁴Interview with a journalist (33).

⁵⁵For example, interviews with a journalist (31); a policy analyst, Center for Political Innovation and Technology (35); a vice president of the Foreign Affairs ministry (42); a Musavat Party leader (30); and with an academician (36).

⁵⁶Interview with an academician (32). In this context, the interviewees referred to Robert Kocharyan, Serj Sarkisyan and to many ministers in Armenia who were and are from Nagorno-Karabakh.

interviewees agreed that the Nagorno-Karabakh clan was under the full control of Russia. The remaining portion argued to the contrary and said that Nagorno-Karabakh was under the full control of Armenia which, in turn, was under the full control of Russia.⁵⁷ Two of the interviewees claimed that it was the Armenian diaspora who controlled both Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh and the latter controlled Russia.⁵⁸ Although the majority believed that Armenia is controlled by Nagorno-Karabakh, while Nagorno-Karabakh is controlled by Russia, diverse opinions suggest that there is no common ground to explain the dynamics of the relationship between the three Armenian communities on the one hand and Russia on the other. However, all of the interviewees share the idea that Russians have always supported the Armenians and they continue to do so. They argue that this is the reason they lost Nagorno-Karabakh. They also claim that Russia uses the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict for its own advantage in order to remain in the region as the only powerful actor. Perceiving Russia as a country which Azerbaijan can never confront or influence appears to be the central theme of the elite narrative on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

All of the people who were interviewed in 2001 and 2009 believed that neither the OSCE nor the Minsk group⁵⁹ would be able to find a solution for a political settlement. Turkey was and still is the only country which the Azerbaijanis view as their ally. However, frustration about Turkey's attempts to normalise her relations with Armenia was expressed in several ways. Turkey's recent attempt to open her border with Armenia was perceived as a trick played against Turkey by Armenia and the great powers supporting Armenia. It was argued that the Turks were not aware of the dangers awaiting them in the future. This was based on the assumption that the Armenians would show aggression first against Georgians and then against the Turks. In this context, a few interviewees said that there are territorial claims written in the Armenian Constitution and the Turks should be aware of this.⁶⁰

To explain the Armenian claims over the contested territories, several arguments were developed by the Azerbaijanis. First, it was claimed that the Armenians blamed the Turks and Azerbaijanis for all the historical injustices they had experienced.⁶¹ Second, Armenian territorial claims were attributed to their 'victim' and 'revenge' psychology. As one historian argued:

⁵⁷For example, interview with a journalist (31).

⁵⁸Interviews with a historian (49) and with a policy analyst, Center for National and International Studies (38).

⁵⁹The OSCE–Minsk group was formed in January 1992 as the main international vehicle for the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Russia acquired permanent co-chairmanship of the group in December 1994. The United States and France joined Russia as co-chairs in 1997. The Minsk Group also includes Belarus, Germany, Italy, Portugal, the Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan. For more information about the international efforts to solve the conflict, see Matveeva (2002, pp. 450–51).

⁶⁰Interviews with one of Heydar Aliyev's former senior advisers (41); an academician (37); a historian (49); and a policy analyst, Center for National and International Studies (38).

⁶¹For example, interviews with a Musavat Party leader (30), and a policy analyst, Center for National and International Studies (38).

The Armenians first occupy lands and then leave these lands and go somewhere else. This is because there is an Armenian sickness arising from animosity and hatred. This is because of the so called Armenian genocide (referring to the 1915 events), which is a lie. They can't integrate with the communities where they live. They created this genocide story, this fake story. They are united through this genocide idea. What else can unite the Armenians? There is nothing that unites the Armenians . . . They make propaganda by saying they lost their lands in Anatolia, that they were expelled from Turkey.⁶²

Third, Russia's hidden intentions were presented as the reason for Armenia's alliance with Russia. As claimed by one interviewee, 'the Armenians and Russians hate you [Turkey] since they see you as brutal Muslims. This should not be forgotten. Russians will never give up of their dream to take Istanbul and the straits'.⁶³

It is interesting to note that four of the interviewees called attention to a strategic alliance between 'Kurdish separatists' (who have money) and Armenians (who are intellectuals) against Turkey. This alliance was seen as part of a bigger plan aiming to separate Azerbaijan from Turkey geographically.⁶⁴ As a consequence, some other respondents claimed, after Turkey opened her borders with Armenia, the Armenians would manage to take some of Turkey's lands.⁶⁵ Another claim about Armenia's hidden intentions was related to the Armenians who live or work in Turkey. It was noted that there are about 60,000 (unofficially 90,000) Armenians living in Turkey, mostly in Istanbul. Some of these are Turkish citizens and the rest are the Armenians who work in Turkey and send money back to their country. These Armenians in Turkey were said to have hidden aims, which was to stir up trouble in Turkey. Thus, they were perceived as a strategic danger for the future of Turkey.⁶⁶ Mixed marriages between Azerbaijanis, Russians and Armenians were seen as another obstacle for reaching a political settlement. It was also suggested that there were between 30,000 and 40,000 Armenians living in Baku and that 10,000 of them were married to top

⁶²Interviews with a historian (48); similar points were made by an academician (11); a Musavat Party leader (51); a policy analyst (40); and a Musavat Party leader (30). Respondent (9), who was a former senior adviser of Heydar Aliyev, also said: 'Armenians are dispersed all over the world. If they were a nation who loves the land, they would live on those lands . . . They always live together, gregariously . . . This is how their nature is. Where ever there is a good, profitable place, they go and live there. They present themselves as a suffering and modest nation so that people accept them, pity them and respect them. This way, they can live anywhere. Still, they have another very strange character; these people do not have an understanding, belief and sense of justice. It's as if they are serving the ideas formulated by the devil. They talk about these ideas everywhere. Their propaganda rests on lies and fake ideas. All experts can prove that these are all lies. Everything they say, including the Armenian genocide or the things they say about their own past or history, is all based on lies. Their ideologues create these lies and after a months time, they make these appear as real . . . They are masters of hypocrisy'.

⁶³Interview with one of Heydar Aliyev's former senior advisers (41).

⁶⁴Interviews with a Musavat Party leader (51); a policy analyst, Center for National and International Studies (38); an academician (54); and a policy analyst, Center for Political Innovation and Technology (35).

⁶⁵Interviews with an academician (46); a policy analyst, Center for Political Innovation and Technology (35); and with a policy analyst Center for National and International Studies (38).

⁶⁶Interviews with a policy analyst, Center for Political Innovation and Technology (35); a policy analyst, Center for National and International Studies (38); and with an academician (46).

level Azerbaijani government officials.⁶⁷ Lastly, it was argued that Armenians have a fear of extinction since they have only two children on average while the Azerbaijanis have three or four. It was believed that this fear moved them to fight against the Azerbaijanis. It was also claimed that the Muslims could never understand this fear of extinction since the Turks do not have a fear that their nation could die out.⁶⁸

The views presented above are the justifications used by leading members of Azerbaijani society when arguing against the Armenian territorial claims. These justifications provide a cover for their mistrust of the Armenians, Russians, international peace-keeping organisations and Western intermediaries, including the UN and the OSCE. There was also mistrust of Turkey as a consequence of Turkey's attempts to open her borders with Armenia. The Azerbaijanis failed to distinguish between the Armenians of Armenia, Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh and diaspora Armenians. Although each Armenian community was perceived as having different aims, they were seen as united through the myth of Greater Armenia. Moreover, the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh were not accepted as ethnic Armenians. This was also used as a justification for their claims over Nagorno-Karabakh. The Armenians in Armenia and the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh were perceived as very powerful since the Russians and the Armenian diaspora (supported by Western powers) were considered as controlling both communities. By homogenising these three groups, the leading members of Azerbaijani society tended to downplay the regional complexities of the conflict. Thus, they presented the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict simply as a struggle between ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis. It was also believed that the Armenians, Russians and Western powers were acting against the Azerbaijanis since they were afraid of the power of a Greater Turkish World. The Armenians in Turkey, whether Turkish citizens or not, were also perceived as acting in unity with the broader Armenian community. Lastly, it was argued that there was an alliance between the Armenians and Kurds, which was perceived as part of a game played against Turkey. All these claims rested on three justifications. First, it was believed that the Armenians had a hidden agenda to retake their historical lands from Georgia, Azerbaijan and Turkey. Second, the Armenians' hatred of the Turks and Muslims was accepted as a given and was perceived as a source of motivation for their territorial claims. Lastly, Western powers were perceived as supporting the Armenians to protect their own interests in the region.

The Azerbaijani propaganda and psychological warfare against the Armenians is vital, not only for the nation-defining activity of the Azerbaijanis, but also for their power to negotiate during the peace process. There were several sources of propaganda. The first was the perceived historical injustices done to them by the Armenians and the Russians. The second was the shared memories of suffering from the Nagorno-Karabakh war (loss of Azerbaijani lives, as well as the loss of nearly 20% of Azerbaijan's territories). The third was the fear of renewed warfare. They believed that Russia would initiate a new war in the region if Azerbaijan confronted Russia;

⁶⁷Interview with a policy analyst (40). This idea was expressed by all interviewees except by those in the government.

⁶⁸Interviews with Musavat Party leader (30) and with a journalist (33). The demographic factor was referred to in different contexts by more than half of the interviewees. These ranged from the fear of extinction to Azerbaijan's advantageous position in case of renewed warfare.

thus, they would lose more land. The fourth was collective sacrifices made by them (the almost one million Azerbaijani refugees who were considered as a strain on the economy), which are preventing their economic development. These were related to the argument that Russia did not want the conflict to come to an end since Russia could maintain its influence in the region through the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Russia is perceived as a very powerful country which the Azerbaijanis could never confront. When Russia's perceived power was combined with the mistrust for Western international peace-keeping organisations and intermediaries, it was believed that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict would never end.

These views suggest that the Azerbaijanis failed to distinguish between the national, regional and international levels of the conflict since they appeared to perceive all three levels as intertwined. What follows is that the Azerbaijanis demand, and expect, that the international community recognises the injustices done to them by the Armenians and Russians. However, they also believe that religion and ethnicity prevent Westerners from seeing the conflict through the eyes of the Azerbaijanis. This forms the basis of their mistrust about the real intentions of not only Armenians, but also of Western leaders and intermediary peace-keeping organisations.

Conclusion

There are serious obstacles to a political settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict which is mainly caused by a lack of mutual trust between the Azerbaijanis and Armenians. Although this article covers only one party to the dispute, its aim is to contribute to an understanding of the conflict through the Azerbaijani discourse on Nagorno-Karabakh. The mainstream argument pursued by policy makers, historians, social scientists and leaders of think tank organisations provides information as to how the Azerbaijanis legitimise their own position in the conflict. The narration discussed here, which the respondents claimed was shared by their public, forms the basis of the Azerbaijani claims over the contested territory. The Azerbaijani discourse on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has three dimensions: first, group stereotyping and negative perceptions of Armenians; second, mistrust of all countries involved in the conflict, including Turkey; and third, an expectation that Western powers will recognise the injustices done to the Azerbaijanis and act accordingly during the peace process. All three dimensions indicate a non-negotiable stance among the leading members of Azerbaijani society.

The Azerbaijani rhetoric on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict appears to have crucial implications for the peace process. First, it implies any compromise at the negotiation table will require a concession, both by policy makers and the public, which should be rejected. This appears to prevent proper communication within the international community. Second, this non-negotiable stance appears to block any possibility of establishing social and cultural ties between the Azerbaijani and Armenian communities to help restore mutual trust. Third, the rhetoric of the Azerbaijani elite breeds mistrust in their own public towards Armenia (and Armenians), as well as towards Russia, Western powers and Turkey. These can be major barriers for any serious progress in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, let alone settling the conflict. Consequently, outsiders may not be able to have a positive impact during the peace

process. Thus, the protraction of the *status quo* may help Russia to preserve or even strengthen its power in the Caucasus, while the West becomes marginalised. This, in turn, would not only delay a political settlement to the conflict, but also block the regions integration to the West, which the international community is trying to achieve.

Middle East Technical University, Department of Sociology

References

- Alijarly, S. (1996) 'The Republic of Azerbaijan: Notes on the State Borders in the Past and the Present', in Wright, J. F. R. *et al.* (eds) (1996).
- Altstadt, A. L. (1988) 'Nagorno-Karabagh, "Apple of Discord" in the Azerbaijan SSR', *Central Asian Survey*, 7, 4.
- Altstadt, A. L. (1992) *The Azerbaijani Turks: Power and Identity Under Russian Rule* (Stanford, CA, Hoover Institution Press).
- Altstadt, A. L. (1994) 'O Patria Mia: National Conflict in Mountainous Karabagh', in Duncan, W. R. & Holman, G. P. (eds) (1994) *Ethnic Nationalism and Regional Conflict: The Former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia* (Boulder, CO, Westview Press).
- Altstadt, A. L. (1997) 'Azerbaijan's Struggle Toward Democracy', in Dawisha, K. & Parrott, B. (eds) (1997) *Conflict, Cleavage and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).
- Ambrosio, T. (2002) 'Congressional Perceptions of Ethnic Cleansing: Reactions to the Nagorno-Karabagh War and the Influence of Ethnic Interest Groups', *The Review of International Affairs*, 2, 1.
- Anderson, B. A. & Silver, B. D. (1996) 'Population Redistribution and the Ethnic Balance in Transcaucasia', in Suny, R. G. (ed.) (1996b).
- Astourian, S. H. (1994) 'In Search of their Forefathers: National Identity and the Historiography and Politics of Armenian and Azerbaijani Ethnogeneses', in Schwartz, D. V. & Panossian, R. (eds) (1994) *Nationalism and History: The Politics of Nation-Building in Post-Soviet Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia* (Toronto, University of Toronto, Center for Russian and East European Studies).
- Bournoutian, G. A. (1994) *A History of Qarabagh: An Annotated Translation of Mirza Jamal Javanshir Qarabaghi's Tarikh-e Qarabagh* (Costa Mesa, CA, Mazda Publishers).
- Bournoutian, G. A. (1996) 'The Ethnic Composition and the Social-Economic Condition of Eastern Armenia in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century', in Suny, R. G. (ed.) (1996b).
- Chorbajian, L., Donabedian, P. & Mustafian, C. (1994) *The Caucasian Knot: The History and Geopolitics of Nagorno-Karabagh* (London, Zed Books).
- Cornell, S. (1997) 'Undeclared War: The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Reconsidered', *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, 20, 4, available at: http://www.pcr.uu.se/publications/cornell_pub/main_doc.pdf, accessed 14 December 2007.
- Cornell, S. E. (1998) 'Turkey and the Conflict in Nagorno Karabakh: A Delicate Balance', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 34, 1, available at: http://www.pcr.uu.se/publications/cornell_pub/ftopol.pddf#search=%22azerbaijan%20state%20leadership%20filetype%3Apdf%22, accessed 7 September 2006.
- Cornell, S. E. (1999) 'The Devaluation of the Concept of Autonomy: National Minorities in the Former Soviet Union', *Central Asian Survey*, 18, 2.
- Cornell, S. E. (2001) *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus* (Richmond, VA, Curzon Press).
- Croissant, M. (1998) *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict: Causes and Implications* (Westport, CT, Praeger).
- Curtis, G. E. (1995) *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia: Country Studies* (Washington, DC, Library of Congress, Federal Research Division).
- De Waal, T. (2003) *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War* (New York, New York University Press).
- Dragadze, T. (1996) 'Azerbaijan and the Azerbaijanis', in Smith, G. (ed.) (1996) *The Nationalities Question in the Post Soviet States* (London, Longman).
- Goldenberg, S. (1994) *Pride of Small Nations: The Caucasus and Post-Soviet Disorder* (London, Zed Books Ltd).

- Henze, P. B. (1991) 'The Demography of the Caucasus According to the 1989 Soviet Census Data', *Central Asian Survey*, 10, 1, available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02634939108400741>, accessed 14 January 2007.
- Herzig, E. (1999) *The New Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia* (London, RIIA).
- Human Rights Watch/Helsinki (1994) *Azerbaijan: Seven Years of Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh* (New York, Human Rights Watch).
- Hunter, S. T. (1994) *The Transcaucasus in Transition: Nation-Building and Conflict* (Washington, DC, The Center for Strategic and International Studies).
- Joffé, G. (1996) 'Nationalities and Borders in Transcaucasia and the North Caucasus', in Wright, J. F. R. *et al.* (eds) (1996).
- Kazimirov, V. (2004) 'Looking for a Way Out of the Karabakh Impasse', *Russia in Global Affairs*, 2, 4.
- Kurkchian, M. (2005) 'The Karabagh Conflict: From Soviet Past to Post-Soviet Uncertainty', in Herzig, E. & Kurkchian, M. (eds) (2005) *The Armenians: Past and Present in the Making of National Identity* (London, RoutledgeCurzon).
- Laitin, D. D. & Suny, R. G. (1999) 'Armenia and Azerbaijan: Thinking a Way Out of Karabakh', *Middle East Policy*, 7, 1.
- Matveeva, A. (2002) 'Nagorno-Karabakh: A Straightforward Territorial Conflict', in van Tongeren P., van de Veen, H. & Verhoeven, J. (eds) (2002) *Searching for Peace in Europe and Eurasia: An Overview of Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Activities* (London, Lynne Rienner Publishers).
- Mehdiyev, R. (2010) GORIS-2010 Season of Theatre of the Absurd: The History of Occupied Nagorno-Karabakh and the Battle for Justice (Tbilisi, Universal Printing House).
- Saroyan, M. (1990) 'The "Karabakh Syndrome" and Azerbaijani Politics', *Problems of Communism*, September–October, 39, 5.
- Shnirelman, V. A. (2001) *The Value of the Past: Myths, Identity and Politics in Transcaucasia*, *Senri Ethnological Studies*, No. 57 (Osaka, National Museum of Ethnology).
- Smith, A. D. (2004) *The Antiquity of Nations* (Cambridge, Polity Press).
- Smith, G., Law, V., Wilson, A., Bohr, A. & Allworth, E. (1998) *Nation-Building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands: The Politics of National Identities* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).
- Suny, R. G. (1996a) 'On the Road to Independence: Cultural Cohesion and Ethnic Revival in a Multinational Society', in Suny, R. G. (ed.) (1996b).
- Suny, R. G. (ed.) (1996b) *Transcaucasia, Nationalism, and Social Change: Essays in the History of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia* (Ann Arbor, MI, The University of Michigan Press).
- Suny, R. G. (2001) 'Constructing Primordialism: Old Histories for New Nations', *The Journal of Modern History*, 73, 4.
- Tchilingirian, H. (1999) 'Nagorno Karabagh: Transition and the Elite', *Central Asian Survey*, 18, 4.
- Tishkov, V. (1999) 'Ethnic Conflicts in the Former USSR: The Use and Misuse of Typologies and Data', *Journal of Peace Research*, 36, 5.
- Van Der Leeuw, C. (2000) *Azerbaijan: A Quest for Identity—A Short History* (New York, St. Martin's Press).
- Vaserman, A. & Ginat, R. (1994) 'National, Religious or Territorial Conflict? The Case of Nagorno-Karabakh', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 17, 4.
- Walker, C. J. (ed.) (1991) *Armenia and Karabagh: The Struggle for Unity* (London, Minority Rights Publications).
- Walker, C. J. (1996) 'The Armenian Presence in Mountainous Karabakh', in Wright, J. F. R. *et al.* (eds) (1996).
- Walker, E. (2000) 'No War, No Peace in the Caucasus: Contested Sovereignty in Chechnya, Abkhazia, and Karabakh', in Bertsch, G. K., Craft, C., Jones, S. A. & Beck, M. (eds) (2000) *Crossroads and Conflict: Security and Foreign Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia* (New York, Routledge).
- White, S. (1993) *After Gorbachev* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).
- Wright, J. F. R., Goldenberg, S. & Schofield, R. (eds) (1996) *Transcaucasian Boundaries* (London, UCL Press).
- Yamskov, A. N. (1991) 'Ethnic Conflict in the Transcaucasus: The Case of Nagorno-Karabakh', *Theory and Society*, 20, 5.
- Yunusov, A. (2001) 'Etnicheskiy sostav Azerbajijana (po perepisi 1999 goda)' ['The Ethnic Structure of Azerbaijan (Based on the Census of 1999)'], paragraph nos 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 20 and 23, available at: http://www.iea.ras.ru/topic/census/mon/yunus_mon2001.htm, accessed 13 February 2004.
- Yunusov, A. (2005) *Karabakh: Past and Present* (Baku, Turan Information Agency).
- Zinin, Y. N. & Maleshenko, A. V. (1994) 'Azerbaijan', in Meshabi, M. (ed.) (1994) *Central Asia and the Caucasus after the Soviet Union: Domestic and International Dynamics* (Gainesville, FL, University Press of Florida).

Appendix

The 2001 interviews were conducted with some influential members of the government (*Yeni Azərbaycan Partisi*) (New Azerbaijan Party) such as Araz Azimov (the president's special representative for Nagorno-Karabakh) and major opposition parties, including members of the *Musavat Partisi* (Musavat Party); Ali Kerimli, who was the leader of the reformist wing of the *Azərbaycan Halk Cəphəsi Partisi* (Popular Front Party of Azerbaijan, PFPA) in 2001 and at the time of writing, the leader of the same party; Mirmahmut Miralioğlu, who was at that time the leader of the traditional wing of the PFPA; members of the *Azərbaycan Demokrat Partisi* (Democratic Party of Azerbaijan); Etibar Mammadov, who was the leader of the *Azərbaycan Milli İstiklal Partisi* (Azerbaijan National Independence Party), as well as (former) senior advisers of Heydar Aliyev; (former) deputies; Akif Nəgı, who was and still (at the time of writing) is the leader of the *Karabag Azatlik Teskilati* (Organisation for the Liberation of Karabakh); and former ambassadors to Iran (Nesib Nesibli) and Russia (Hikmet Hacizade), politicians, members of civil society organisations (Arif Yunusov), academicians and newspaper editors (Kamil Hamzaoglu, Sahin Caferli, Elcin Alioglu, Kamran Hasanlı, Gazanfer Hamidoglu). Seven of the interviews conducted in April 2009 were conducted with people previously interviewed in 2001 and who are still in power in the same positions. These were specifically chosen since their voices are taken seriously with regard to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Among these were Araz Azimov, Akif Nəgı and Ali Kerimli (PFPA), and a leader of the Musavat Party who wished to remain anonymous as well as one of Heydar Aliyev's senior advisers. The other interviewees were the leaders of various think tank organisations (Rasim Musabayov, Mubariz Ahmadoglu, Leila Alieva), historians, international relations specialists and journalists (Rauf Mirkadirov and Nurani). Some of the 2009 interviewees were formerly Nagorno-Karabakh inhabitants who were forced to migrate to Baku after clashes between the two communities. One of these was historian Havva Memedova, who was a member of the parliament representing Nagorno-Karabakh, elected by the votes of the people forced to migrate from Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan.

All of the interviewees were over 50 years old except (31), (32), (38), (39), (43), (44), (45), (49) and (52) who were either in their late thirties or forties.

Some respondents indicated their identity may be revealed while others requested anonymity.

List of interviewees

December 2001 interviews:

1. Professor of Historical Science, Baku State University, Faculty of International Relations and Law, 14 December 2001.
2. Professor, Institute of Peace and Democracy, Chief Department of Conflictology Studies, 14 December 2001.
3. Professor, Baku State University, Department of International Relations, 14 December 2001.

4. Akif Nagi, chair, Organisation for the Liberation of Karabakh, 14 December 2001.
5. Samil Mehdiyev, vice chair, Organisation for the Liberation of Karabakh, 14 December 2001.
6. Professor, Baku State University, Department of Political Science, 15 December 2001.
7. Professor, Baku State University, Department of Political Science, 15 December 2001.
8. One of the editors of *Musavat* Newspaper, 15 December 2001.
9. One of Heydar Aliyev's former senior advisers, 18 December 2001.
10. Professor of History, Baku State University, 18 December 2001.
11. Professor of International Law, Baku State University, Department of International and Constitutional Law, 19 December 2001.
12. Professor, Hazar University, International Relations Department, 19 December 2001.
13. Mirvari Kahramanli, Democratic Party vice chair and a member of the Organisation for the Liberation of Karabakh, 19 December 2001.
14. Member of the General Executive Board of the Musavat Party, 20 December 2001.
15. One of Heydar Aliyev's former senior advisers, 20 December 2001.
16. One of the vice-presidents of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, 20 December 2001.
17. Journalist, 21 December 2001.
18. Journalist, 21 December 2001.
19. Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, 21 December 2001.
20. Member of the General Executive Board of the Popular Front Party of Azerbaijan, the traditional wing, and Professor, 21 December 2001.
21. One of the leaders of the Popular Front Party of Azerbaijan, the traditional wing, 21 December 2001.
22. Journalist, 22 December 2001.
23. Journalist, 22 December 2001.
24. One of the leaders of the Musavat Party, 22 December 2001.
25. Etibar Mamedov, chair, Azerbaijan National Independence Party, 24 December 2001.
26. One of the leaders of the Azerbaijan National Independence Party, 24 December 2001.
27. Mirmahmut Miralioglu, chair, Popular Front Party of Azerbaijan, the traditional wing, 24 December 2001.
28. Member of the General Executive Board of the Musavat Party, 24 December 2001.
29. Ali Kerimli, chair and party leader, Popular Front Party of Azerbaijan, the reformist wing, 25 December 2001.

December 2009 interviews:

30. One of the leaders of the Musavat Party, 20 April 2009 (same person as (24) in 2001 interviews).

31. Journalist, 21 April 2009.
32. Professor, Caucasus University, Department of International Relations, 21 April 2009.
33. Journalist, 21 April 2009.
34. Policy analyst, Caucasus University, Caucasus Research Centre, 22 April 2009.
35. Policy analyst, Center for Political Innovation and Technology, 22 April 2009.
36. Professor of History, Baku State University, Department of International Relations, 23 April 2009.
37. Professor of History, Baku State University, 23 April 2009.
38. Policy analyst, Center for National and International Studies, 23 April 2009.
39. Policy analyst, Peace and Conflict Resolution Center, 23 April 2009.
40. Policy analyst, 24 April 2009 (same person as (14) in 2001 interviews).
41. One of Heydar Aliyev's former senior advisers, 24 April 2009, Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy (same person as (15) in 2001 interviews).
42. One of the vice-presidents of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, 24 April 2009 (same person as (16) in 2001 interviews).
43. Policy analyst, Caucasus International Strategic Studies Center, 25 April 2009.
44. Milli Mejlis, policy analyst, Azerbaijan Republic, Analytical Information Department, 25 April 2009.
45. Lecturer, Azerbaijan State Economic University, 25 April 2009.
46. Professor, Popular Front Party of Azerbaijan, 25 April 2009, office (same person as (20) in 2001 interviews).
47. Akif Nagi, chair, Organisation for the Liberation of Karabakh, 27 April 2009, office (same person as (4) in 2001 interviews).
48. Professor, Baku State University, Department of History, 28 April 2009.
49. Professor of History, State Administrative Academy, 28 April 2009.
50. Member of Parliament, Musavat Party and Professor, 28 April 2009 (same person as (12) in 2001 interviews).
51. One of the party leaders, Musavat Party, 29 April 2009.
52. Member of Parliament and Professor of History, 29 April 2009.
53. Ali Kerimli, chair, Popular Front Party of Azerbaijan, 29 April 2009 (same person as (29) in 2001 interviews).
54. An academic who wished to remain completely anonymous, 30 April 2009.