



# Resilience in Artzakh: Factors of Resilience From a Conflict Society Perspective in Armenia and Azerbaijan

## Citation

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Resilience in Artzakh: Factors of Resilience From a  
Conflict Society Perspective in Armenia and Azerbaijan

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A Thesis in the Field of International Relations for the Degree of  
Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

March 2023



## Abstract

Armenia and Azerbaijan have been deadlocked in several lengthy and virulent conflicts over a semi-autonomous territory between the two countries called Artzakh (in Armenian) and Nagorno-Karabakh (in Russian and Azerbaijani). The region is populated mostly by Armenians, but since 1924 has been within the borders of Azerbaijan.

The conflict erupted into wars on several occasions (1989, 2016, and 2020), which resulted in large-scale refugee crises, cultural destruction, and many casualties. Caught in this violence are the people who have lived in this area for thousands of years. In this thesis, I identify factors that determine the resilience of individuals during and after the war.

## Frontispiece



Ghazanchetsots Cathedral, 2019.

Source: Photographer: Martin Trabalik (<https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-ghazanchetsots-cathedral-in-shushi-in-nagorno-karabakh-130048978.html>)



Ghazanchetsots Cathedral, 2020.

Source: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/sebastienroblin/2020/10/23/what-open-source-evidence-tells-us-about-the-nagorno-karabakh-war/?sh=6e638c96f4be>

## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my late grandmother, Miriam Anahid Sarkisian, whose resilience and continual *joie de vivre* are a constant inspiration to me.

This thesis is also dedicated to the people of Artzakh, who have survived so much hardship, and to my interviewees who risked everything to contribute to this research.

## Acknowledgments

I want to thank my research director, Theodore MacDonald. From the first time we met, it always amazed me the depth of your knowledge from decades in the field. You continually surprised me with the thoroughness of your tireless and swift feedback. Coupled with your warmth and true devotion to your students, it was a true honor to be mentored by you.

Thank you to my research advisor, Doug Bond. Since my first year at Harvard Extension School, you have been such a source of encouragement and strength. You taught me how to look more deeply into problems, not to be content with the status quo, and to think “bigger” about what I could do.

Thank you to Scott McDow for editing my papers during the first couple of semesters when I was still figuring out how to be a student; for believing in me when I couldn't; and supporting me in finishing this journey.

Thank you to my dear friend, Astighk Kamalayan, a daughter of Artzakh. You helped me so much with your depth of experience in the area, tutoring me in Russian and Armenian, and helping me understand cultural nuances that I otherwise would have missed.

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## Definition of Terms

*Artsakh*: A region in Western Azerbaijan that includes territories controlled by Armenia and others controlled by Azerbaijan (also known as: Nogorno-Karabakh).

*Armenians*: The people of Armenia (also includes people of Armenian descent who are in the diaspora in other countries).

*Armenian* (language): The main language spoken in Armenia (note: this is broken into Eastern and Western Armenian. Western Armenian is primarily only spoken by Armenians in the diaspora. Eastern Armenian is spoken by Armenians in modern-day Armenia. Artsakh Armenian an Armenian dialect. All three dialects are only partially intelligible with one another.

*Azeri*: A person from Azerbaijan (also includes people of Azerbaijani descent who are expats and immigrants in other countries such as the United States) .

*Azerbaijani*: The main language spoken in Azerbaijan (mutually intelligible with modern Turkish, has its roots in ancient Arabic).

*Bot*: short for robot, also called *internet bot*. Bots are computer programs that simulate a human activity. Bots were used by Azerbaijan during the 2020 war to send harassing messages and threaten violence to individuals (usually Armenians).

*Globalization*: The ongoing process of reducing restriction on cross-border trade and movement.

*Information Warfare:* A state-conducted, strategic series of information and psychological operations that influences the target's opinions, attitudes, and actions in order to support the political goals of the state's leaders.

*Nogorno-Karabakh:* A region in Western Azerbaijan that includes territories controlled by Armenia and others controlled by Azerbaijan (also spelled Nogorny-Karabagh)

*Social Media Warfare:* The use of social media as a kind of weapon with the aim of causing lasting damage to certain actors such as governments or companies.

*Turkic:* The ethnicity of people in the Turkic countries of Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan. They come from tribes of equestrian nomads who originated in East Asia.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Martine Robbeets, "Austronesian influence and Transeurasian ancestry in Japanese". *Language Dynamics and Change*, 01Jan2017: 210–251.

## Glossary of Acronyms

ADID	Department of Transcaucasian Women’s Dialogue
ANCA	Armenian National Committee of America
ARS	Armenian Relief Society
CFP	Coalition for Peace
CFR	Council on Foreign Relations
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
EU	European Union
FP	Fund for Peace
ICG	International Crisis Group
IDMC	International Displacement Monitoring Centre
IEP	Institute for Economics and Peace
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NSAG	Non-State Armed Group
SEA	Syrian Electronic Army
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USIP	United States Institute of Peace
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WTO	World Trade Organization

## Maps of the Region



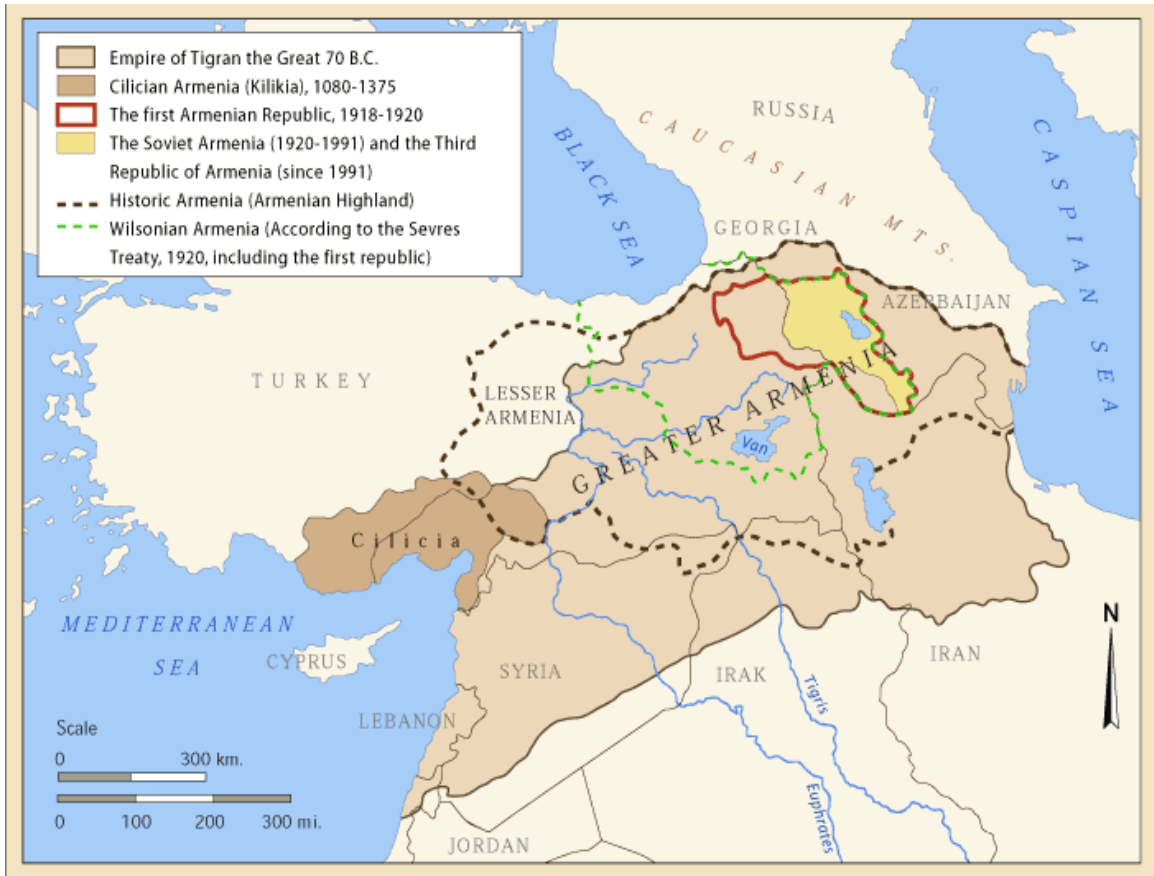
Map 1. Map of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and surrounding countries.

Source: Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) Control Map & Timeline. *Political Geography Now*, October 2, 2020. <https://www.polgeonow.com/2020/10/nagorno-karabakh-artsakh-conflict-map-2020.html>



Map 2. Map of USSR

Source: Detailed administrative divisions map of Soviet Union—1989. Vidiani, 2011.  
<http://www.vidiani.com/large-detailed-administrative-divisions-map-of-soviet-union-1989>



Map 3. Map of Armenia Through the Centuries.

Source: A Map of Armenia's Borders Through History. *Armenica*, November 2007.  
<http://www.armenica.org/history/maps/1-borders.gif>

## Chapter I

### Introduction

The war between Armenia and Azerbaijan for Artzakh has been described as a “frozen conflict” although there has been almost daily violence between the two countries since the 1990s.<sup>2</sup> It seems that the international community would rather pretend that peace agreements and ceasefires are working than admit their perpetual failure. Part of this stems from a lack of will for peace from the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan. I believe this research is a vital tool in the eventual peace process.

Earlier research has shown that if a community is not resilient, it is less likely to uphold peace agreements.<sup>3</sup> If the factors increasing resilience in survivors of war can be identified, then aid groups, NGOs, and governments might be able to target specific community support that would in turn foster greater resilience. Increased resilience not only impacts individuals’ daily lives but also enhances the productivity and efficacy of societies at large, thereby fostering greater economic growth and stability in the Middle East. Stable and prosperous societies are not only less likely to need foreign aid, but also less likely to sponsor terrorist groups and other society-destabilizing effects.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Armstrong, “Flare-up Rages on over Nagorno-Karabakh Despite US-Hosted Peace Talks,” *Euronews*, October 25, 2020. <https://www.euronews.com/2020/10/25/flare-up-rages-on-over-nagorno-karabakh-despite-us-hosted-peace-talks>.

<sup>3</sup> Yohanan Eshel and Shaul Kimhi, “Community Resilience of Civilians at War: A New Perspective,” *Community Mental Health Journal* 52, no. 1 (January 2016): 109–117.

<sup>4</sup> Alan B. Krueger, and Jitka Malečková, “Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 17, no. 4 (2003): 119–144. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3216934>.

Artzakh lies at the heart of a critical region for international security. The Middle East is not only an important region for trade, but it also holds two-thirds of the world's oil resources, with oil pipelines running through the deserts. The Middle East is an essential hub for communications, and also serves to link three continents: Asia, Europe, and Africa. International air traffic from Europe to East Asia crosses the Middle East; worldwide radio communications center in Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, and Cyprus.<sup>5</sup> Artzakh is both on the steps of Europe and the Caspian Sea, which makes it a critical confluence in the region. Therefore, instability in Artzakh has the potential to create a wider conflict between powers in the West and their neighbors in the East: Turkey, Iran, Israel, and Syria.

### Background

Artzakh (Nagorny-Karabakh in Russian and Azerbaijani)<sup>6</sup> is an autonomous region in Azerbaijan which, in a recent census, was 98% ethnic Armenian.<sup>7</sup> It was placed under Azerbaijani<sup>8</sup> rule by Stalin in 1924, when the population was 94% Armenian, as

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<sup>5</sup> Hanson W. Baldwin, "Strategy of the Middle East," October 11, 2011. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-kingdom/1957-07-01/strategy-middle-east>.

<sup>6</sup> I chose to use the Armenian term here rather than *Nagorny-Karabakh* or the Anglicized *Nogorno-Karabakh*, because this research deals with the experiences of Armenian people.

<sup>7</sup> Population census 2015. Table 5.2-1, p. 189. Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, permanent population [Перепись населения 2015. Таблица 5.2-1. Нагорно-Карабахская Республика, постоянное население. (in Russian)]. See also: "Nagorno Karabakh Republic - Country Overview." 2015. [http://www.nkrusa.org/country\\_profile/overview.shtml](http://www.nkrusa.org/country_profile/overview.shtml).

<sup>8</sup> "Azerbaijani" means a citizen of Azerbaijan. "Azeri" means a Turkish Azerbaijani, the largest ethnic group in Azerbaijan. I use the term "Azeri" to distinguish between Turkish Azerbaijanis and smaller ethnic groups such as Armenians, Kurds, Talish, and Yizidis, who may also live in Azerbaijan.



part of his “Divide and Rule” strategy (also called “Wedge Strategy.”)<sup>9</sup> Stalin used this practice throughout the USSR to pit states and/or ethnic minorities within those states against each other, thereby weakening those states and potentially cutting them off from their allies.<sup>10</sup> The states then became weakened from using their resources to fight each other, so they would need the USSR for resources and protection and therefore acquiesce to its demands.<sup>11</sup> Stalin called this tactic “being the laughing third man in a fight.”<sup>12</sup> Wedge strategy was allegedly used between Armenia and Azerbaijan, that is, by taking lands that were almost entirely populated by ethnic Armenians and giving it to Azerbaijan, Stalin set the two states up for ethnic conflict.<sup>13</sup> The results of this strategy can be seen today because Armenia has almost no close allies except Russia.<sup>14</sup> Armenia has weak alliances with Iran, Georgia (with whom it shares borders), the US, and the EU. But none of these nations historically came to Armenia’s aid when it was attacked, and trade agreements remain relatively weak.<sup>15</sup> Russia is the only nation that has protected

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Hager, “The Laughing Third Man in a Fight’: Stalin’s Use of the Wedge Strategy.” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 50, no. 1 (March 1, 2017): 15–27. <https://doi.org/10.1016/postcomstud.2016.11.002>.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Dushnyck, “Stalin’s ‘Divide and Conquer,’” *America*, vol. 79, no.10. (June 12, 1948); 245-246.

<sup>11</sup> Dushnyck, “Stalin’s Divide and Conquer, 245.

<sup>12</sup> Hager, “Laughing Third Man,” 15.

<sup>13</sup> Hager, “Laughing Third Man,” 15–27.

<sup>14</sup> “Armenian Foreign Policy Between Russia, Iran and U.S.” 29 March 2010. <https://web.archive.org/web/20110724192109/http://times.am/2010/03/29/armenian-foreign-policy-between-russia-iran-and-u-s/>

<sup>15</sup> Paul Stronski, “Armenia at Twenty-Five: A Rough Ride,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, accessed October 31, 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/12/07/armenia-at-twenty-five-rough-ride-pub-66351>.

Armenia during times of conflict while also maintaining a strong trade agreement.<sup>16</sup> However, this alliance proceeds largely on Moscow's terms and has remained tenuous at best; Moscow was accused of betraying Armenian positions during the 1990s and the 2020 Artzakh war<sup>17</sup> and also deliberately delaying peacekeeping responses.<sup>18</sup>

Although 98% of Armenians identify as Christian (making Armenia the country with the highest percentage of Christians in the world), and 99% of Azerbaijanis are Muslim, the conflicts do not have their roots in religion, although that is an obvious difference between the two countries.<sup>19</sup> According to scholars, diplomats, and citizens, the roots of the conflict are ethnic and geographical.<sup>20</sup>

Even with these real and manufactured tensions, Armenians and Azerbaijanis continued to live relatively peacefully together in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Artzakh. Several of my interviewees remembered a time when they lived side-by-side with Azerbaijanis with little conflict. Armineh, a woman in her 60s living in New York City, recalls what it was like before the fall of the Soviet Union:

At that time it was like the people were living mixed. There were Azeris living in Yerevan [where she grew up]. There was no real border. It is not like today where to the left there are Armenians and to the right there are

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<sup>16</sup> Richard Giragosian, "Paradox of Power: Russia, Armenia, and Europe after the Velvet Revolution – European Council on Foreign Relations," *ECFR* (blog), August 7, 2019, [https://ecfr.eu/publication/russia\\_armenia\\_and\\_europe\\_after\\_the\\_velvet\\_revolution/](https://ecfr.eu/publication/russia_armenia_and_europe_after_the_velvet_revolution/).

<sup>17</sup> "Armenia's Fruitless Search for Allies on Which It Can Count," *Emerging Europe*, June 1, 2021, <https://emerging-europe.com/news/armenias-fruitless-search-for-allies-on-which-it-can-count/>.

<sup>18</sup> "Armenia's Old Allies Have Failed It, New Ones Have yet to Appear," *OC Media* (blog), accessed October 31, 2022, <https://oc-media.org/opinions/opinion-armenias-old-allies-have-failed-it-new-ones-have-yet-to-appear/>.

<sup>19</sup> Hratch Tchilingirian, "Religious Discourse on the Conflict in Nagorno Karabakh," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 18, no. 4 (1998).

<sup>20</sup> "How the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Has Been Shaped by Past Empires," accessed October 31, 2022, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/how-nagorno-karabakh-conflict-shaped-by-past-empires>.

Azeris. Even though we lived together, we were cautious with each other. We traded, had relationships, and did business together.<sup>21</sup>

In the 1989, roughly 20% of the population of Artzakh was Azeri,<sup>22</sup> up from 10% in 1926.<sup>23</sup> This was due to a confluence of factors: Baku's policy of resettling Azerbaijanis to Artzakh, a slightly lower birthrate among Armenians, and more Armenians leaving Artzakh for Yerevan in search of better jobs and education.<sup>24</sup>

Most of my interviewees acknowledged there was some animosity between Armenians and Azeris, but they traded, lived in the same villages, Azeri and Armenian children grew up playing together. Some who lived in Baku (the capital and commercial center of Azerbaijan) before the war in the 1990s, or those with family members who did, spoke of the mostly silent tension and segregation they lived with in Azerbaijan. This segregation seemed to be largely self-imposed because of the perception that Azerbaijanis would resort to violence with little provocation:

Forty years ago, I was told by my Azeri classmates in medical school that they can't wait to kill us all; they told me to my face that they want all of us [Armenians] dead, and that's a classmate that I had known for years! They also told me "We will conquer your land, Artzakh, and we'll do it through your traitors."

When I got into the medical university I had professors who would say, "Oh, this is a perfect answer. This is the only student who knows her stuff." But then they would give me lower grades when they learned that I was Armenian.

You need to understand that the society [in Baku] was very segregated. We lived in a neighborhood that was basically populated by Armenians. I never met an Azeri in school; there were just Armenians, Russians, and Jews. I grew up in Baku without ever meeting an Azeri. I

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<sup>21</sup> Armineh Grigorian. Personal interview by Marion McDow. Zoom, September 4, 2022

<sup>22</sup> Thomas de Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (New York ; London: NYU Press, 2013), 19.

<sup>23</sup> All-Union Population Census of 1926. Ethnic composition of the population by regions of the republics of the USSR. [in Russian] [http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng\\_nac\\_26.php?reg=2304](http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_26.php?reg=2304).

<sup>24</sup> de Waal, *Black Garden*, 137–140.

saw an Azeri for the first time in university. So that's where it's very hard to get context on the level of animosity because, for a lot of people, there wasn't a lot of interaction. But I can tell you that Armenians were always scared of Azeris because we knew they hated us. For example, guys would try to touch Armenian girls inappropriately on public transportation—they would always act more inappropriately toward Armenian girls, so we just avoided being targeted. We knew it was dangerous to be around them and it was dangerous in the villages too. The Soviet Union always wanted to pose as a tolerant place when it wasn't.<sup>25</sup>

It is important to note that I was not able to speak to anyone who remembered how they lived pre-genocide, and the genocide changed many Armenians' perceptions of Turks, including Azerbaijanis.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, it is perhaps true that Armenians and Azerbaijanis lived together without tension, but it is difficult to tell how people perceived this as there are few first-hand accounts of this aspect. Most first-hand accounts are of the genocide, and they often talk about the lack of war, and then the beginning of the war. But massacres were happening for at least 100 years before the genocide, so it is also reasonable to assume that there was at least some level of ethnic tension in Ottoman Turkey before 1915.

Since the transfer of Artzakh to Azerbaijan, the region had seen declining investments in infrastructure and education. Even though Artzakh was designated as an autonomous outlier in the USSR, it was presented as ostensibly independent. In reality, all decisions, even routine hirings, had to be cleared with the government in Baku. There was no Armenian-language education or Armenian history taught in schools. Cultural ties

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<sup>25</sup> Arpi Khachatryan, personal interview by Marion McDow. Zoom, September 4, 2022.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas de Waal, *Great Catastrophe: Armenians and Turks in the Shadow of Genocide* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2015), 94.

with Armenia were strangled in red tape in Baku, and plans to make Armenian-language television available stalled.<sup>27</sup>

Partially because of these policies, a movement started in 1987 in Armenia, among the Armenian population of Artzakh, calling for control of Artzakh to be transferred to Armenia. This stoked ethnic tensions, which soon led to a three-day massacre of the Armenian population in Sumgait. The Sumgait massacre began a series of massacres in various places in Artzakh followed by ethnic cleansing of the Armenian population of Baku and surrounding areas.<sup>28</sup> In 1991, in a vote of 99% agreement, chose to secede from Azerbaijan and re-unify with Armenia. However, it should also be noted that most of the Azeri population boycotted the vote.<sup>29</sup> Azerbaijan refused to relinquish Artzakh, attempts by Moscow to resolve the dispute failed, and the resulting tension erupted into violent conflict with full-scale war beginning soon after.<sup>30</sup>

Most scholars cite the apparent peace in Azerbaijan and Armenia until the 1990s as evidence that both sides can live without conflict. But I learned that the reality seemed to be much more nuanced: there was an absence of war, but that did not mean there was peace. The simmering tension that many interviewees spoke about makes clearer the reasons for the later sparking of full-scale war. Gayaneh, a woman in her fifties from Artzakh, spoke of Armenian-Azeri relations before the war in the 1990s:

You know, we were always neighbors with Azeris—in Artzakh, in Baku, in Yerevan—and we were always wary of them because of the genocide and the massacres. We didn't like them or trust them as a whole. I mean, I

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<sup>27</sup> Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds*, 67.

<sup>28</sup> Kushen, "Conflict in the Soviet Union, 7.

<sup>29</sup> de Waal, *Black Garden*, 57-62.

<sup>30</sup> Kushen, "Conflict in the Soviet Union," 7.

had Azeri neighbors and even some friends. But in the back of my mind, I knew something like the genocide could happen at any time. But we still traded with them, my children played with their children, it wasn't a problem, we were just living our lives. I am aware that there were some intermarriages, but I would say that those were a little rare; it wasn't very common.<sup>31</sup>

The war began in 1991 following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, when Armenia and Azerbaijan gained independent status. The newly independent Azerbaijan relinquished Artsakh's independent status, which alarmed Armenians there.<sup>32</sup> The war ended in 1994 with a Russia-brokered peace agreement (the Bishkek Protocol) with Armenia controlling Artsakh and all seven surrounding districts plus a small corridor called the Lachin Corridor, which links Artsakh with mainland Armenia.<sup>33</sup>

These divisions and ongoing daily exchanges of fire turned to a four-day war in 2016,<sup>34</sup> and most recently in 2020.<sup>35</sup> In part, because of Artsakh's tenuous status, both Armenia and Azerbaijan have been reluctant to grant it much influence in National politics,<sup>36</sup> so it has no seat in peace negotiations, neither country recognizes it, though it is still legally Azerbaijani territory according to the United Nations.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Gayaneh Sarkissian, personal interview by Marion McDow. Zoom, June, 27, 2022.

<sup>32</sup> de Waal, *Black Garden*, 137.

<sup>33</sup> Bishkek Protocol document no. 9. “Бишкекский протокол”. [in Russian] <http://vn.kazimirov.ru/doc9.htm>.

<sup>34</sup> “The Four Day War.” Kentron Channel] [Զառոռյա պատերազմ. Ապրիլյան Զառոռյա Պատերազմ.3 Տարի Անց [in Armenian] 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zitCWXuCEsY>. See also: Al Jazeera Arabic [اتهامات أذربية لأرمينيا بقصف مناطق مدنية بالفسفور الأبيض]. (in Arabic). Archived from the original on 4 October 2020. Retrieved 12 June 2016 – via YouTube.

<sup>35</sup> “Armenia-Azerbaijan War: What is Happening in Nagorno-Karabakh?” *Wall Street Journal*. Accessed April 30, 2021. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/armenia-azerbaijan-conflict-11601325097>.

<sup>36</sup> Phil Gamaghelyan, “Rethinking the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Identity, Politics, Scholarship.” *International Negotiation* 15, no. 1 (2010): 33–56. <https://doi.org/10.1163/157180610X488173>.

<sup>37</sup> United Nations, “UN General Assembly Adopts Resolution Reaffirming Territorial Integrity of Azerbaijan, Demanding Withdrawal of All Armenian Forces.” Accessed April 30, 2021. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2008/ga10693.doc.htm>.

September 27, 2020 began a 44-day war between Armenia and Azerbaijan that ended in a Russian-brokered peace agreement.<sup>38</sup> The war erupted in Artsakh (also called Nagorno-Karabakh), which is an autonomous region located within Azerbaijan that is neither recognized by Azerbaijan, Armenia, nor any other country.<sup>39</sup> The 2020 war marked the most severe violence since the war from 1988-1994 when the Artsakh parliament voted to secede from Azerbaijan, which resulted in a decisive victory for Armenia, ethnic cleansing of Armenians in Azerbaijan, and the expulsion of Azeris from Yerevan and mainland Armenia.<sup>40</sup>

It is important to note that the region of Artzakh, although it has been mostly inhabited by Armenians, also holds special symbolism and pride within Azerbaijan. Many famous Azerbaijani poets, musicians, and scholars hail from this region, such as poet, musician, and scientist Mir-Mohsun Navvab,<sup>41</sup> and Uzeyir bey Abdilhuseyn oghlu Hajibeyli, a well-known composer and playwright who is considered the father of Azerbaijani classical music and opera. He composed the Azerbaijani national anthem and the first opera in the Islamic world.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, it can be argued that if any side tried to claim the region, it could result in violence from the opposing side.

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<sup>38</sup> De Waal, “Unfinished Business.”

<sup>39</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, “Nagorno-Karabakh: The Crisis in the Caucasus.” Accessed December 13, 2021. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/nagorno-karabakh-crisis-caucasus>.

<sup>40</sup> Andrew E. Kramer, “Armenia and Azerbaijan: What Sparked War and Will Peace Prevail?” *New York Times*, January 29, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/article/armenian-azerbaijan-conflict.html>.

<sup>41</sup> “Mir Mohsun Navvab--a prominent Azerbaijani poet, artist, calligrapher and musicologist” *Azer Tac*, December 3, 2022. [https://azertag.az/en/xeber/Mir\\_Mohsun\\_Navvab\\_\\_\\_a\\_prominent\\_Azerbaijani\\_poet\\_artist\\_calligrapher\\_and\\_musicologist-2050865](https://azertag.az/en/xeber/Mir_Mohsun_Navvab___a_prominent_Azerbaijani_poet_artist_calligrapher_and_musicologist-2050865).

<sup>42</sup> Matthew O’Brien, *Uzeyir Hajibeyov and His Role in the Development of Musical Life in Azerbaijan* (London: Routledge, 2004), 211.

Because Armenia and Azerbaijan have been in a continuous state of conflict since Stalin created the modern Republic of Azerbaijan,<sup>43</sup> peace has been tenuous. Most Armenians and Azerbaijanis feel as if peace will never be achieved, and most grass-roots efforts to create an international dialogue between the two countries have been dismantled by their governments. While formal peace processes have yielded ceasefire agreements and prisoner exchanges, they are rarely heeded.<sup>44</sup> One barrier to achieving lasting peace and prosperity in Armenia and Azerbaijan is the apathy individuals feel after so many failed agreements and decades of fighting. The community trauma after these events, and the Armenian Genocide in 1915, have created multi-generational melancholic survival. Therefore, markers of community resilience such as innovation, creativity, and civic responsibility are lacking.<sup>45</sup>

In this thesis, I sought to understand the Armenian experience of the 2020 war, with special consideration given to the critical factor of resilience. In my research, I found that resilience is present, but not strongly enough to create community cohesion. Rather, it shows up individually and in small ways. For instance, one of my interviewees found a goldfish in a bowl that had somehow survived after no food and 20 days of bombing. She took the fish back to her bunker, stating that caring for the fish and discovering Pringles chips were the things that got her through the war. For another,

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<sup>43</sup> Timothy Blauvelt, “Abkhazia: Patronage and Power in the Stalin Era,” *Nationalities Papers* 35 no. 2 (May 2007): 203–232. DOI:10.1080/00905990701254318.

<sup>44</sup> Laure Delcour, “The Future of Democracy and State Building in Postconflict Armenia,” *Carnegie Europe*, May 2021. Retrieved October 31, 2021, from <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2021/01/19/future-of-democracy-and-state-building-in-postconflict-armenia-pub-83650>.

<sup>45</sup> Kate Murray, and Alex Zautra, “Community Resilience: Fostering Recovery, Sustainability, and Growth.” In M. Ungar (ed.), *The Social Ecology of Resilience: A Handbook of Theory and Practice* (337–345). New York: Springer, 2012. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-0586-3\\_26](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-0586-3_26).



listening to the Beatles on an old iPod helped her get through. All in all, interviewees reported levels of tension and community hopelessness in higher levels than before the war. Therefore, I posit that individual resilience remains moderate, but community resilience is low. This may be due to lack of support from either government, or fatigue from so many decades of war, or a combination of both. However, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to hypothesize exact reasons.

I interviewed Armenians living in the United States about their experiences during and after the 2020 war. Many had come to the U.S. during that war, while some were already living in the U.S. but waited anxiously for news of family members in conflict zones. All of my interviewees expressed exasperation, sorrow, and sometimes anger that in their view no one seemed to care or know what was happening in their homeland. Many said it was frustrating to see the war continually referred to as a “conflict” or as “violence” instead of “war.” They felt the lesser designations did not do justice to the amount of pain and suffering they were experiencing. All of my interviewees reported that they experienced some level of mental and/or physical health crisis during the war, with the majority suffering from high levels of depression and anxiety. At least 60% of my interviewees reported they had days or weeks when they did not get out of bed due to depression. About 50% canceled or did not show up for a scheduled interview, and about 25% of these did not wish to reschedule. The interviewees reported physical ailments ranging from flu-like symptoms, to high blood pressure, and migraines.

Some interviewees with whom I eventually spoke admitted that they felt their symptoms were due at least in part to the challenges of talking about their experiences of

the war. I was only able to speak with a small percentage of individuals whom I contacted; many, particularly older adults, gave me the feedback that they felt they simply could not talk about what they experienced; it was too horrific and they were worried about having to re-live the experiences again. Further, while I chose not to speak to members of the military, I did speak with many family members who relayed some of their experiences. It seemed that everyone I talked to had at least one family member who had spent time on the front lines. Many interviewees expressed despair that what seemed like a whole generation of young men and a growing number of young women were either veterans or had been killed.

In the midst of this suffering, though, I found moments of hope. Most of my interviewees gave their time and money to charities and organizations helping soldiers with essentials that the government either could not or would not provide, such as boots, food, and ghillie suits (a type of camouflage covering that can either be worn or placed over supplies to evade enemy surveillance). Many refugees arrived in Yerevan penniless, shoeless, and only wearing their pajamas, recounting that they had only minutes to flee the barrage of bombs coming from Baku. Realizing this, many grassroots organizations were set up to house, clothe, and feed the tens of thousands of refugees that flooded mainland Armenia in 2020.

My later interviews were colored by an unwelcome, yet familiar backdrop: beginning on September 13, 2022, Azerbaijan conducted large-scale military attacks with artillery and drones, its forces advancing well beyond the border, into the eastern and

southern regions of mainland Armenia.<sup>46</sup> After September 13, my interviewees spoke of the 2020 war in light of recent events. As of this writing, while the physical violence has lessened, the cyber violence and harassment continues, with Azerbaijanis posting videos of torture and beheadings of civilians including members of the clergy.<sup>47</sup> Many of my interviewees viewed these attacks the start of a new war. There was also a discussion of the difference in public opinion between 2020 and 2022. Some of my interviewees had to cancel our scheduled meeting because the nature of their jobs necessitated their participation in the most recent conflict, or they were preparing to help refugee families or friends who needed to flee occupied areas.

Furthermore, because of the ongoing violence, it was necessary to conceal the identities of my interviewees. Therefore, I have used pseudonyms and changed all identifying details.

### Research Methods

As part of my research for this thesis, I sought to understand the Armenian experience of the recent 2020 war, with special consideration given to how individuals cope with the realities of the war and how they are rebuilding their lives. I investigated the individual factors interviewees told me were most helpful for increasing their resilience during and immediately following the 2020 war in Artsakh. It is important to note that while the formal war ended with an Armenian retreat, there is still violence in Artsakh daily; furthermore, the Armenians continue to give away more and more of the

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<sup>46</sup> “The Horrors of the Other War in Europe Keep Growing,” *Newsweek*, 29 Sep 2022. <https://www.newsweek.com/horrors-other-war-europe-keep-growing-opinion-1747610>.

<sup>47</sup> “The Horrors of the Other War.”

territory they control in Artsakh. This relinquishment of territory has also extended to mainland Armenia at times.<sup>48</sup>

I interviewed Armenians living in the United States about their experiences during and after the 2020 war. I collected data in the form of interviews which were later transcribed (and translated if necessary). Although I studied the interviews individually and as a whole, I looked for common themes in all of them: experiences or feelings that surfaced among the interviewees. Then I reviewed the interviews to determine if the individual spoke about any particularly influential factors such as familial support (either physically or emotionally), spirituality, self awareness, degree of empathy, and charity work—any or all of which might have helped or hindered their feelings of resilience.

I found individuals to interview by contacting friends, friends of friends, community organizations, NGOs, and academics working with Armenians. All interviews were conducted via Zoom.

Because of the animosity between groups, and the ongoing harassment, hatred, and violence, I used several methods to ensure the safety of myself and my interviewees and to protect the identities of all involved. I used pseudonyms for all the individuals with whom I spoke. I also indicated ages in approximate values and changed the names of villages, family members, or friends if referenced by the interviewee. If I spoke with a well-known individual or those with family ties to well-known individuals, I omitted information about the well-known individual, as it could be easily traced back to the interviewee.

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<sup>48</sup> “Latest Cease-Fire In Nagorno-Karabakh Leaves Armenians Feeling Betrayed By Government,” National Public Radio (NPR). <https://www.npr.org/2020/11/10/933371597/latest-cease-fire-in-nagorno-karabakh-leaves-armenians-feeling-betrayed-by-government>.

I sought to create a space for the interview that was as comfortable as possible for the interviewee. This meant I had to be highly flexible with timing, letting the interviewee choose times that were most convenient for them rather than for myself.

Before I began recording the formal interview, I started with questions about the individual and his/her life, seeking to understand who they are as a person, and their unique perspective, all in an effort to create a personal connection. This created a sense of safety among the interviewees and allowed them to freely speak about potentially emotional subjects.

I explained to interviewees that I would keep their identities hidden by using pseudonyms, editing the transcripts to omit identifying information, changing ages and professions slightly where needed, and not disseminating recordings if possible. I also gave them the choice to be on or off video for the recording. The interviews were conducted in English, Armenian, French, or Arabic, depending on the interviewee's native language; I used translators for interviews conducted in Armenian and Arabic.

### Research Limitations

What I found most surprising when I looked into scholarly resources for this thesis was the lack of research that has been conducted on this population in recent years. There are books on Armenian and Azerbaijani history, oral histories of genocide survivors, analyses of the mechanics of battles, and media coverage of the war. But few sources included conversations with actual, everyday Armenians or Azerbaijanis. The only paper I found that cited Armenian and Azerbaijani voices was "Listen to Her: Gendered Effects of the Artsakh Conflict and Women's Priorities For Peace," published

in 2019.<sup>49</sup> However, the interviewees were neither Armenian nor Azeri; they did not speak Armenian or Azerbaijani; and they conducted field research for just a few weeks. Consequently, it was difficult for them to build trust and confidence in communities where they conducted research. This was evidenced by their assertion that Armenian and Azerbaijani women relate to the military only through the males in their family, whereas it is well-known in both communities that women have taken combat roles in the military since at least the 1980s.<sup>50</sup>

It is also crucial to note the amount of biased information found in scholarly works and the media. Often, scholarly works relied on existing media as a source—most of which had been paid to publish false and misleading claims, and histories written from a singular perspective.<sup>51</sup> One of the only books available on the history of Azerbaijan is *A Concise History of Azerbaijan: From Azerbaijani Turkic Dynasties of the Middle Ages to the First Turkic Republic*, by Azeri scholar, Jahangir Zeynaloglu. This book asserts that Azerbaijan as a state is more ancient than any other civilization in the area (i.e., Persian, Armenian, or Arab) and that its lands encompassed northern Iran, Armenia, southern Georgia, and northeastern Syria.<sup>52</sup> Unfortunately, references are sparse in the book, and I

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<sup>49</sup> “Listen to Her – Gendered Effects of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and Women’s Priorities for Peace,” Kvinna till Kvinna. 2019. <https://kvinnatillkvinna.se/publikation/listen-to-her-gendered-effects-of-the-conflict-over-nagorno-karabakh-and-womens-priorities-for-peace/#:~:text=Kvinna%20till%20Kvinnas%20rapport%20Listen,kr%C3%A4ver%20att%20kvinnors%20r%C3%B6ster%20h%C3%B6rs.>

<sup>50</sup> “Armenia’s Womanly Face of War.” Accessed March 31, 2021. <https://oc-media.org/opinions/armenias-womanly-face-of-war/>.

<sup>51</sup> T. Shirvanova, “The Legal Aspects of Nagorno Karabakh Conflict During the Azerbaijan Peoples’ Republic Period.” *European Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 2, no. 4 (2016): 92–96. <https://doi.org/10.26417/ejis.v6i1.p92-96>. See also: A. Eyicil, “Maras Defence” (“Maraş Savunması” in Turkish), *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi* 21 (2020): 47-76. See also; V. Kopeček, “Narrating Karabakh Conflict or Armenian and Azeri Histories Online,” *Contemporary European Studies* 3 (2009): 195-204.

<sup>52</sup> Jahangir Zeynaloglu, *A Concise History of Azerbaijan: From Azerbaijani Turkic Dynasties of the Middle Ages to the First Turkic Republic* (San Francisco: Riverbed Publishers, 2020), 11.

was unable to find any reputable scholars to up these claims. I was also unable to find other Azerbaijani histories whose claims were backed up by regional scholars. This created gaps in my research, and made it difficult to determine the accuracy of claims made by either country that Artsakh was their ancestral homeland. It is, however well beyond the scope of this work to test the validity of any such claims to ancestral territory.

Another problem with the existing literature is an oversimplification of the conflict. A. N. Yamskov, who wrote “Ethnic conflict in the Transcaucasus: The Case of Nagorno-Karabakh,”<sup>53</sup> gives an overly one-dimensional view of the region. He argues that the conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis is rooted in religious differences and began at the time the USSR annexed the two countries.<sup>54</sup> However, literature that cites actual Armenians cites the genocide in 1915 as the turning point for ethnic clashes, and that same literature asserts that the conflict is not a religious conflict, even though this may be an obvious difference between the two countries. Azeris cite their claim to Artsakh as a historical territory, and violence driven by ethnicity in Baku, Azerbaijan as one of the main drivers of the present conflict. Many Armenians lived in Azerbaijan before the ethnic cleansing of 1988, and they speak of a time when Armenians and Azeris lived side by side peacefully. This would seem to refute the claim that the conflict is rooted in religious cleavages, as the religions of both countries have existed for at least a millennia.

Some other scholars seemed to take what the nations of Azerbaijan, Armenia, or the media was saying *prima facie*. Because of the rise in nationalism and the relative ease

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<sup>53</sup> “Ethnic Conflict in the Soviet Union,” *Theory and Society* 20 no. 5 (Oct. 1991): 631-660.

<sup>54</sup> “Ethnic Conflict,” 632-633.

with which information can be disseminated, it is challenging to disentangle fact from politically based fiction. The amount of misinformation and personalized views surrounding the Artsakh wars is so prodigious that throughout this research, I found myself second-guessing facts I knew to be true and wondering if these false reports were in fact, the “real truth.”

Fortunately, there are some scholars who present the facts from both sides and scrutinize information for accuracy. One is Thomas de Waal, author of *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War*<sup>55</sup> who states in the Introduction: “I would make a plea not to selectively quote this book to suit a political agenda; the book stands or falls as an entire whole.” He understands the complexities and cultural and political considerations of the region and presents these complexities throughout his writing. Building his research on interviews of Armenians and Azeris who live in and around Artzakh, he speaks with military commanders, politicians, and civilians. For example, he elucidates the problem of irreconcilable Armenian and Azerbaijani national narratives: “It is common to hear in both Armenia and Azerbaijan that the other nationality is just ‘gypsies,’ roaming people who never enjoyed proper statehood.”<sup>56</sup> He explains some things missing from either narrative:

Yet this story omits telling of the many alliances and friendships that characterized the two communities in the region. In 1724, for example, the Karabakh Armenians and Azerbaijanis of Ganje signed a common treaty to defend themselves against the Ottoman Turks.<sup>57</sup>

He also takes great care to explain the Muslim presence in Artzakh:

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<sup>55</sup> De Waal, *Black Garden*, Introduction.

<sup>56</sup> De Waal, *Black Garden*, 163.

<sup>57</sup> De Waal, *Black Garden*, 163.



When I mentioned the town's neglected mosques, Parkev refused to call them "Azerbaijani" because they dated from the nineteenth century when . . . there were [supposedly] no "Azerbaijanis" in Karabakh, only "Persians" or "Tatars."<sup>58</sup>

He then acknowledges the pain on the other side with a quote from an Archbishop: "My village, Chardakhlu, is in Azerbaijani hands. For a thousand years it's been an Armenian village. . . . It has to be a comprehensive question. All problems are soluble, but we need time for such painful questions."<sup>59</sup>

Ronald Grigor Suny, author of *They Can Live in the Desert But Nowhere Else: A History of the Armenian Genocide*,<sup>60</sup> discusses the Armenian genocide while utilizing source works written in many different languages. He makes a great effort to present the history as it stands in the archival source works, not to skew the benefit to one side or the other.

Like De Waal, I used interviews as primary sources, preserving their experiences and impressions of the most recent war instead of focusing on previous wars. Like Suny, I utilized sources in languages other than English: Armenian, French, Arabic, and Russian. Since I am not a fluent speaker of Armenian, Arabic, or Russian, I consulted experts in these languages to make sure I understood the context and nuances correctly.

Another barrier to unbiased research are the publicly stated intentions of Turkey and Azerbaijan to ethnically cleanse the region of Armenians in order to create a "pan-

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<sup>58</sup> De Waal, *Black Garden*, 205.

<sup>59</sup> De Waal, *Black Garden*, 205.

<sup>60</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny, *They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else": A History of the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017).

Turkish state” and to “finish what we started in 1918”<sup>61</sup> when the Ottoman Empire enacted a genocide that killed two million Armenians and displaced just as many (amounting to 90% of the Armenian population) and the Armenian government’s refusal to fund peace-building initiatives.<sup>62</sup> In the backdrop of this bloodshed are hundreds of thousands of Armenians and Azerbaijanis living in these disputed territories whose lives have been upended by repeated violence and whose voices have been silenced by their governments. I hope to give voice to this population which, until now, has been largely silenced. The process of peace can only begin when both sides have been brought to the table.

Because of these events took place recently, I have encountered several limitations. The most important is that I could not interview any Azeris. I intended to interview Azerbaijanis to understand the war from their perspective, but I received some online threats that made security for all untenable. This was unfortunately an all-too-common experience that my interviewees encountered during the war as well.

Another problem were linguistic barriers to speaking about painful experiences. The Armenian language and culture does not emphasize emotions; there are fewer words in Armenian having to do with emotions, and they are not often used.

Another barrier was the difficulty of speaking with the elderly. Elderly people in Armenia have seen several waves of ethnic cleansing and wars, and some may be children of survivors of the 1918 genocide. Likewise—and as required—children were absent from this research. I let mothers and fathers speak about the war’s effects on their

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<sup>61</sup> “Is Turkey Seeking a New Ottoman Empire?,” *International Policy Digest* (Aug 17, 2020). <https://intpolicydigest.org/is-turkey-seeking-a-new-ottoman-empire/>.

<sup>62</sup> Suny, *They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else*, 21.

children, but I did not speak to any children, in order to protect them from reliving the traumas they have experienced.

There was a dearth of studies using ethnographic methods to study these communities. Therefore it was difficult to learn from others who have done studies similar to what I undertook.

Another obvious limitation is that I do not live in Armenia, which creates a cultural barrier when speaking to individuals. Therefore, I rely heavily on my own experience in the Armenian community in the United States, as well as on information from other scholars, and knowledge gained from participants in the study.

## Chapter II

### The Armenian Genocide: Background to Present Day

Any discussion of relations between Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey would be incomplete without mentioning the Armenian Genocide of 1915 when about one million ethnic Armenians were killed in the Ottoman Empire and many more tortured. This is the reason why today more Armenians live outside of Armenia than within its borders.

The genocide formally began on April 24, 1915, when 250 ethnic Armenian journalists and intellectuals in Istanbul were rounded up and imprisoned.<sup>63</sup> They were later tried for not complying with the Ottoman Empire's increasingly sectarian demands, and were subsequently tortured and killed.<sup>64</sup> After these arrests, the Turkish government ordered Armenians on death marches into remote corners of the Syrian desert.

In fact, however, the genocide really began long before 1915. Many believe it was closer to 1850 at a time when Armenians began to gain notoriety as a result of successful trading with Europe. This resulted in a higher socioeconomic status for Armenians, which enabled greater investment in education for Armenian children, higher quality homes, and less food insecurity. Envy appeared among their Turkish neighbors, which in turn provoked a cycle of violence and retaliation from ethnic Turks (Turk is both a nationality and an ethnicity).<sup>65</sup> Sporadic killings by both Muslims and Armenians impelled Sultan

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<sup>63</sup> Suny, "They can live in the desert," 222.

<sup>64</sup> Suny, "They can live in the desert," 222.

<sup>65</sup> Suny, "They can live in the desert," 269.

Abdulhamid II to espouse nationalistic ideologies, declaring Islam to be the official religion of the Ottoman Empire, taking the title of *Caliph*, a spiritual leader of Islam, and training Kurdish allies to monitor and kill Christians.<sup>66</sup>

For centuries, Muslim Turks viewed the wealth of their Armenian Christian and Jewish neighbors with envy. Especially in cities where trade with Europe was prevalent and lucrative, Armenians discarded their traditional *kaftan* headdress and *taraz* clothing in favor of European suits, dresses, and hats.<sup>67</sup> Thus, because Armenians aligned themselves more with Europe and less with their Middle Eastern neighbors, both in style of dress and in trade, Ottoman Turks began to feel invisible, and the rift between the two ethnicities widened. To aggravate the tension, Europeans began to think of Armenians as “one of us” because of their similar Christian beliefs, new styles of Armenian dress, and because many Armenians were learning European languages such as French, English, and Italian.<sup>68</sup>

It is unclear exactly why Armenians began trading with Europe; perhaps they were simply looking for greater economic opportunity. It is also possible they felt some camaraderie because of their shared Christian faith, or they simply exploited European’s bias toward individuals who shared their faith. It was clear that European merchants felt comfortable doing business with people whom they considered less “foreign.”

Meanwhile, by adopting customs that were equally foreign in the Middle East, their Muslim counterparts became uncomfortable. As one Ottoman Turk wrote at the time: “All Muslims felt inferior in front of the hat.” Some Turks and Arabs grew

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<sup>66</sup> Suny, “They can live in the desert,” 102.

<sup>67</sup> Suny, “They can live in the desert,” 58.

<sup>68</sup> Suny, “They can live in the desert,” 57.

distrustful of their fellow citizens who so readily dropped Middle Eastern customs for the sake of business.<sup>69</sup>

Another contentious matter was the Armenian schools. With the influx of wealth into Armenian hands from Europe, Armenians were able to fund and build better schools and libraries, and support intellectuals in a movement called *Zartonk* or Grand Renaissance. Soon Armenians could be found in the forefront of doctors, lawyers, pharmacists, photographers, and money changers. They held high-level government positions, ran the Imperial Mint, and Foreign Correspondents Office, and an Armenian was chief architect to the Sultan.<sup>70</sup> Seeing this as undeserved privilege, Ottoman Turks perhaps asked, “Why not us?”

A new movement espoused by Prince Sabahaddin and Ahmet Rıza called *Jön Türkler* thought it had the answer to the empire’s Armenian problem.<sup>71</sup> Ismail Enver Paşa was one of the masterminds behind the marches and subsequent slaughter. Enver Paşa became the *de facto* ruler of the Ottoman Empire after a successful *coup d’etat*, deposing Sultan Abdulhamid II in 1908.<sup>72</sup> Enver Paşa and Talat Paşa (the principal architect of the genocide) and Cemal Paşa adopted the nationalist and isolationist principles of the *Jön Türklers*, which had gained popularity near the end of the 19th century because there was

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<sup>69</sup> Suny, “They can live in the desert,” 57.

<sup>70</sup> Suny, “They can live in the desert,” 56.

<sup>71</sup> Ezel Kural, Shaw, and Stanford J. Shaw, (eds.), *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, Volume 2. In: *Reform, Revolution, and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey 1808-1975* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 273.

<sup>72</sup> Shaw & Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 141.

widespread anxiety among Muslim Turks that the Ottoman Empire was straying toward a devastating fall.<sup>73</sup>

This plan may have seemed more salient to the Ottoman Empire at the time because of a propensity among Armenians to separate themselves from Turkish Ottomans. Whether this was because of real or perceived danger, or because of Armenian feelings of xenophobia, it is hard to say. All we know for sure is Armenians had a language, religion, customs, some foods, and dress, different than their Turkish neighbors. This may have made it easier for the Ottoman Empire to separate Armenians and instigate propaganda against them culminating in their extermination during the genocide.

Thus began the campaign known as *Turkey for the Turks*. Under Enver Paşa's guidance, segregationist policies became even more pronounced. He came to power because of his extreme stance on the suppression of non-Muslims, and his intention was to return power back to the Turkish elite. The *Jön Türklers* began speaking of the Armenians as "a threat" to Turkey and Turkishness, which could be eliminated by removing them from Anatolia.<sup>74</sup>

Dawn MacKeen, an award-winning journalist for the *New York Times*, spent nearly a decade researching and writing her grandfather's genocide story.<sup>75</sup> MacKeen says in her book, *The Hundred-Year Walk*, that the impetus behind the *Jön Türkler* claim of a threat from the Armenians was the Russo-Turkish war (1877–1878) when the

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<sup>73</sup> Shaw & Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 148.

<sup>74</sup> Shaw & Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire*, 149.

<sup>75</sup> Dawn Anahid MacKeen, *The Hundred-Year Walk: An Armenian Odyssey* (NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), 56.

Ottoman Empire suffered devastating troop losses. The Ottomans were ill-prepared for winter in the Caucasus Mountains; they had little food or tents or winter clothing for their 120,000 troops; and by the end of the war, only 12,000 men returned alive. Not wanting to admit failure to their Muslim citizenry (since only Muslims were allowed to serve in the army), the *Jön Turklers* blamed the Armenians for helping the Russians.<sup>76</sup> Historians have tried to determine whether large numbers of Armenians were helping the Russians, or were planning to take over the Ottoman Empire, but to date there has been no evidence to support this claim.<sup>77</sup> It seems more likely that this was used as an excuse to turn public opinion against Armenians. Nevertheless, the narrative stuck and was used by the Ottomans with increasing frequency through the first part of the 20th century to justify the genocide.<sup>78</sup>

Armed with this potent propaganda, Enver Paşa began ordering the deportation of Armenians with near impunity. He justified the need for these deportations by claiming that Armenians were plotting to join with Russia to take over the crumbling Ottoman state.<sup>79</sup> By the time Europe and the U.S. realized what was happening, it was too late, and a million Armenians were already dead.<sup>80</sup>

The 1915 deportations and killings began in secret before the public even knew to protest. Meanwhile, propaganda saying that Armenians were a danger to Ottoman

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<sup>76</sup> Suny, "They can live in the desert," 93.

<sup>77</sup> MacKeen, "The Hundred-Year Walk," 56.

<sup>78</sup> Suny, "They can live in the desert," 220.

<sup>79</sup> MacKeen, "The Hundred-Year Walk," 256

<sup>80</sup> Suny, "They can live in the desert," 347.



sovereignty was cemented.<sup>81</sup> Propaganda pamphlets were disseminated saying: “Non-Muslims are sucking out the blood of Muslims,” and “Christians are taking our place and taking our rights,” and “They are parasitical worms whom we must destroy.”<sup>82</sup>

Several laws were passed. For example, Armenians would not own any weapons, or Armenians could comprise no more than 10% of the local population.<sup>83</sup> The Ottoman government needed incredible logistical and personnel power in order to implement these new laws, so they recruited thousands of criminals, murderers, and former military personnel who had originally been fired for being “too cruel.”<sup>84</sup> The new recruits began carrying out their orders by torturing villagers in their churches to find out if they were hiding any weapons.<sup>85</sup>

After the Armenians were disarmed, death marches began. Using erratic and winding routes, they began marching Armenians, village by village, through the desert. Some of these marches went on for years, and during the journey they were given little food and water and often told to strip naked.<sup>86</sup> The marches were designed to kill as many Armenians as possible, in the shortest amount of time, with minimum effort. Semi-automatic weapons were not in wide use at the time, and gas chambers like those used by the Nazis had not been invented, so other means were needed to conduct mass slaughter.

It could be said that the Ottomans used another kind of death chamber readily available to them: the desert. They used techniques designed to instill fear, which served

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<sup>81</sup> MacKeen, “The Hundred-Year Walk,” 58.

<sup>82</sup> Suny, “They can live in the desert,” 180.

<sup>83</sup> MacKeen, “The Hundred-Year Walk,” 67.

<sup>84</sup> Suny, “They can live in the desert,” 257.

<sup>85</sup> MacKeen, “The Hundred-Year Walk,” 66.

<sup>86</sup> MacKeen, “The Hundred-Year Walk,” 168.

to break the spirit of many, causing them to give up and succumb to disease or starvation.<sup>87</sup> One technique was to set up heavily guarded camps and require Armenians to stay there for periods ranging from three days to six months. Then without warning, they would be told to pack up and march again. Sometimes the guards would burn a camp to the ground including the sick, and survivors would continue to march.<sup>88</sup> Another technique was to sell Armenian girls as young as 10 to Arab husbands,<sup>89</sup> or drown young children in the river. There are eye-witness accounts of mothers being forced to dig holes where their babies would be placed upright with only their heads exposed and the gendarmes would then trample them with their horses.<sup>90</sup> By the time most deportees got to Deir ez Zor in Syria, the bodies along the road had become like stepping stones.<sup>91</sup> The numbers of the dead are staggering. In 1914, there were approximately two million Armenians in the Ottoman Empire; by 1920, there were 300,000.<sup>92</sup>

The Ottomans went to great lengths to conceal as much as possible their intent to completely eliminate the Armenians, and to this day Turkey still denies that it ever happened.<sup>93</sup> This denial sets the stage for perpetual liminality, where some Armenians feel they cannot move on and heal until Turkey admits what it did. However, any denials by Turkey become highly improbable when one takes into account historical evidence

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<sup>87</sup> MacKeen, "The Hundred-Year Walk," 179.

<sup>88</sup> MacKeen, "The Hundred-Year Walk," 124.

<sup>89</sup> MacKeen, "The Hundred-Year Walk," 153.

<sup>90</sup> MacKeen, "The Hundred-Year Walk," 149.

<sup>91</sup> MacKeen, "The Hundred-Year Walk," 177.

<sup>92</sup> Suny, "They can live in the desert," 19.

<sup>93</sup> T. Arango, *A Century After Armenian Genocide, Turkey's Denial Only Deepens*, April 16, 2015. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/17/world/en-rome/turkeys-century-of-denial-about-an-armenian-genocide.html>.

and eyewitness accounts from diplomats, aid workers, and missionaries who spoke about seeing mass killings. In 2017, Taner Akcam, a Turkish historian who has been called the “Sherlock Holmes of the Armenian Genocide” found an original telegram from the genocide trials in which a high-level Ottoman officer asks his commander how the elimination of Armenians from Anatolia was going.<sup>94</sup> In 1967, Halil Bey, a divisional commander of the Ottoman Third Army and uncle of Enver Paşa, revealed the intentions of the Ottoman Empire when he wrote in his memoirs: “The Armenian nation, which I had tried to annihilate to the last member . . . I won’t leave even a single breathing Armenian all over the earth.”<sup>95</sup> Cevdet Bey, Enver’s brother-in-law and a chief commander of the Ottoman army who nicknamed his guard the *Kasab Taburu* or “butcher battalion,” wrote how proud he was of the “clean sweep” he was making of the Armenians: “I won’t leave one, not one so high as the height of my knee.”<sup>96</sup>

Diplomats from several countries observed the unfolding genocide. United States Ambassador, Henry Morgenthau wrote in a cable to Washington DC in July 1915:

A campaign of race extermination is in progress. . . . The large-scale detentions and deportations of Armenians are accompanied by frequent instances of rape, pillage, and murder, turning into a massacre.

In another cable he wrote:

Nearly all of the bodies were naked. . . . Few persons had been shot, as bullets were too precious. . . . The women lay flat on their backs and showed signs of barbarous mutilation by the bayonets of the gendarmes.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> T. Arango, *Sherlock Holmes of Armenian Genocide Uncovers Lost Evidence*. April 22, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/22/world/europe/armenian-genocide-turkey.html>

<sup>95</sup> Suny, “They can live in the desert,” 288.

<sup>96</sup> Suny, “They can live in the desert,” 257.

<sup>97</sup> J. Kifner, “Armenian Genocide of 1915: An Overview,” 07 December 2007. [https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/ref/timestopics/topics\\_armeniangenocide.html?mcubz=0](https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/ref/timestopics/topics_armeniangenocide.html?mcubz=0) .

A foreign service officer in the U.S. consul in Aleppo sent subsequent cables to Washington describing mass graves holding nearly 60,000 people each.<sup>98</sup> These cables were often met with silence from Washington, especially since President Woodrow Wilson had just been re-elected on a campaign to not enter World War I no matter what atrocities were taking place.<sup>99</sup>

To this day, it is a crime in Turkey to mention what happened to the Armenians.<sup>100</sup> The official stance of the Turkish government is it was a necessary “relocation” to prevent Armenians from taking over the Ottoman Empire during a vulnerable time.<sup>101</sup> The U.S. is one of only a handful of nations that choose to side with Turkey on this issue. Until 2019, when the U.S. Congress formally acknowledged the Armenian genocide, U.S. politicians and diplomats were barred from using the word “genocide” to describe the ethnic cleansing of Armenians.<sup>102</sup> Tens of thousands of firsthand accounts from survivors, foreign diplomats, missionaries, and expats in the region described in detail what they witnessed, which makes Turkey’s claims of “not genocide” extremely improbable.<sup>103</sup>

As mentioned earlier, such efforts to conceal and deny create a state called “perpetual liminality,” because denying the genocide ever took place circumvents healing

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<sup>98</sup> A. Vartanian, “The World Can See Proof of Armenian Genocide,” 13 Oct. 1988 <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/10/29/opinion/l-the-world-can-see-proof-of-armenian-genocide-509088.html>

<sup>99</sup> MacKeen, *The Hundred-Year Walk*, 218.

<sup>100</sup> Arango, “A Century After Armenian Genocide.”

<sup>101</sup> Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, “Views Against Genocide Allegations,” 2005. Retrieved May 5, 2020 from [web.archive.org/web/20070929121820/www.kultur.gov.tr/ENBelgeGoster.apx17A16AE30572D313AAF6AA849816B2EF11C077A9979C33C4](http://web.archive.org/web/20070929121820/www.kultur.gov.tr/ENBelgeGoster.apx17A16AE30572D313AAF6AA849816B2EF11C077A9979C33C4).

<sup>102</sup> C. Edmondson, “Senate Passes Resolution Recognizing Armenian Genocide, in Defiance of Trump,” 12 Dec 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/12/us/politics/senate-armenian-genocide.html>.

<sup>103</sup> Arango, “Sherlock Holmes of Armenian Genocide.”

for many Armenians. Dr. Aida Alayarian, a clinical psychologist specializing in treating refugees and genocide survivors, has worked extensively with survivors of the Armenian genocide and their families who find themselves in this state of perpetual liminality. In her book, *Consequences of Denial*, she writes that when atrocities are not acknowledged, or when survivors are not allowed to talk about their experiences, one is much more likely to become stuck in trauma, unable to heal and move on:

The trauma endured by victims of mass violence is often exacerbated when the atrocity that befell them is denied. . . . This has been and still is, the case for the Armenian people. . . . Some atrocities are too horrific to articulate and are therefore forced from the conscious mind—they become “unspeakable.” Psychological wounding and trauma are, in essence, the conflict between denying the atrocity and needing to articulate it.<sup>104</sup>

If survivors are able to talk about their experiences in a safe place, they are much more likely to heal. Dr. Kirsten Kuzirian, another clinical psychologist, stated: “Secondary Trauma Effects of the Armenian Genocide on Subsequent Generations,” some of the same traits of actual survivors “seem to be left as a residue on the following generations, as though they too had experienced a human atrocity.”<sup>105</sup>

### Present Day

I have already established that the violence between Armenians and Azerbaijanis is not due to religious differences, but rather manifests along ethnic cleavages. According to anthropologist Clifford Geertz, ethnicity is more of a social identity than something inherent. Ethnicity is learned through socialization and derives through “kinship, locality,

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<sup>104</sup> Aida Alayarian, *Consequences of Denial: The Armenian Genocide* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2019), 27.

<sup>105</sup> Alayarian, *Consequences of Denial*, 19.

and culture.”<sup>106</sup> These variables come by way of what Geertz refers to as the “givens of social existence,” i.e., heritage, language, custom, religion, place, and appearance.<sup>107</sup> As can be seen in the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan, cleavages can form along one or more of these “givens of social existence,” that is, people may share a common appearance but violence can still erupt along geopolitical lines. Therefore, even though Armenians and Azerbaijanis have different religions, languages, and customs, the violence is largely precipitated because of geographical disputes, with both sides accusing the other of stealing ancestral lands at various times.

Geertz also spoke of ethnic groups creating their own “major values” that are unique to that group and seen as absent in other groups.<sup>108</sup> These unique values become a politically ethno-cultural way to initiate and maintain cleavages, whether real or imagined; it does not seem to matter if the two groups look similar or have similar cultures.

Stephen Hlophe explores why certain ethnicities that share many similarities in “major values” are still prone to as much violence as peoples who have many differences.<sup>109</sup> The answer, he believes, is in the perception of differences individually and collectively, that is, differences between the groups may be over-emphasized and

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<sup>106</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 268, 309.

<sup>107</sup> Clifford Geertz, “The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Politics in the New States.” Pp. 105-157. In: Clifford Geertz (ed.): *Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa* (New York: Free Press, 1963), 5.

<sup>108</sup> Clifford Geertz, “Ideology as a Cultural System,” *Ideology and Discontent*, David Apter, ed. (New York, Routledge, 1964), pg. 47-76.

<sup>109</sup> Stephen Hlophe, “The Significance of Barth and Geertz’ Model of Ethnicity in the Analysis of Nationalism in Liberia,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 7, no. 2 (1973): 237-256.

similarities de-emphasized.<sup>110</sup> This may be why scholars who are not Armenian or Azeri often emphasize the similarities between the ethnicities. But to many of my interviewees and scholars inside these two groups, the differences are more often emphasized than are the similarities.

For Geertz, ethnicity had an emotional quality that explains its persistence and power and represents a bond that was at once “civil, kinship, sacred, and primordial.”<sup>111</sup> Therefore it may be that ethical attachment could largely be a function of where one grows up and with whom one socializes during our formative years. The more homogenous a society becomes, such as in the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan, the less chance for generations to purposely expand their concept of ethnicity, often for social or political purposes, beyond a small group of isolated people.

There is a further “othering” that I discovered in interviews: Artzakhies (people from the Artzakh region) are now seen as their own entity. They are rejected as being truly Armenian by people from the western regions, including the capital city of Yerevan. Differences emerge, even though they speak Armenian (although in their own dialect), celebrate Armenian holidays, and unabashedly identify themselves as Armenian.

Armineh Grigorian, one of my interviewees, spoke about her experience of being viewed as “other” when she moved to Yerevan during the war:

I never had a distinct distinction between Armenia and Artzakh growing up. But when I moved to Yerevan during the war, I understood that not all Armenians think the same way. I think it’s because of Turkish propaganda. Some people think we are different. Some people say bad things about me and other Artzakhies. They think there would be no war if we weren’t there. The propaganda says “Why should the Armenian Army

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<sup>110</sup> Hlophe, “The Significance of Barth,” 242.

<sup>111</sup> Geertz, “Interpretation of Cultures,” 259.

be located there? Why should Armenian soldiers protect this land?” But for me, it [Artzakh] is part of my country. Artzakh is like one state in the nation of Armenia.<sup>112</sup>

Many of my interviewees spoke of a growing sentiment among mainland Armenians that view Artzakhies as a “pain in the side” or “an onion in your eye.” They believe that if Armenia were to stop fighting for Artzakh, the Azerbaijanis would leave them alone.

It was especially interesting to note the change in some individuals since the most recent violence that began on September 14, 2022, with Azerbaijan moving into mainland Armenia and bombing the Gegharkunik, Vayots Dzor, and Syunik regions, about 50 miles from the capital.<sup>113</sup> Levon Avoyan explains the change in public opinion that he has witnessed over the last couple of years

I started to notice a year ago that people who used to hate the Prime Minister [Nikol Pashinyan, Prime Minister of Armenia], now love him. This is the Prime Minister who said that Artzakh is like a headache and we must get rid of it. Now, there are all of these people who think that people from Artzakh are like a headache and they hate them. It makes no sense, aren't we all Armenians? But you see, it was the propaganda that swayed the people's opinion. If your leader says Artzakhies are a headache, there are a lot of people who would believe him.<sup>114</sup>

In their essay, “Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity,” James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin argue that ethnic violence is often instigated by leaders seeking to gain, maintain, or increase political power in their society. Violence strengthens group identities, albeit in hostile ways. The authors say these ethnic identities “increase support for the elites who provoked the violence while favoring the

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<sup>112</sup> Armineh Grigorian, interview.

<sup>113</sup> “Azerbaijan Attacks Armenia—First 24 Hours,” *301 News* (blog), September 16, 2022. <https://301.am/azerbaijan-attacks-armenia-first-24-hours/>. See also: “More than 200 Killed in Armenia-Azerbaijan Border Clashes.” <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/armenia-says-135-soldiers-killed-clashes-with-azerbaijan-this-week-2022-09-16/>.

<sup>114</sup> Levon Avoyan, personal interview by Marion McDow. Zoom, September 2022.



continuation or escalation of violence.”<sup>115</sup> This is especially important in the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan, as diplomats, politicians, and scholars have struggled to explain why there are so many years of peace and camaraderie punctuated by periods of extreme violence. I believe many of the conflicts from the last 200 years were designed and instigated. Why else would neighbors and friends suddenly want to kill each other?

Henri Tajfel recognized that “all men can and do display hostility towards groups other than their own.”<sup>116</sup> This begs the question: what is the difference between prejudice, bigotry, and hatred, and what escalates small outbursts of ethnic violence into the dehumanizing “other” that comes with large-scale war? I posit that prejudice, bigotry, and hatred are different levels of the same emotion. Many of my interviewees described deep-rooted dislike and distrust of Azerbaijanis going back to the Genocide. But for some, distrust escalated into hatred after the most recent violence in September, 2022. These interviewees characterized the violence that spilled over into mainland Armenia as a “red line.” It was as if there was some understanding that Artsakh is a disputed territory and therefore the violence there, while horrible, is understandable. But my interviewees spoke of their utter disbelief that Azerbaijan would attack mainland Armenia, likening that action to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. To explain why wars occur at one time and not another, Michael Billig argues “one must go beyond the hypothesis of an

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<sup>115</sup> James D. Fearon, and David D. Laitin, “Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity.” Published online by Cambridge University Press, 09 July 2003. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-organization/article/abs/violence-and-the-social-construction-of-ethnic-identity/884C74018BDA5D729D5DCAEAF8F12E4F> 846.

<sup>116</sup> Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), 130.

aggressive instinct and look at social and historical conditions. This involves examining the beliefs and ideologies that groups hold about each other.”<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Michael Billig, “Henri Tajfel’s ‘Cognitive aspects of prejudice’ and the psychology of bigotry” *British Journal of Social Psychology* 41 (2002): 171–188.

## Chapter III

### The Inception of Armenia and Azerbaijan

Armenians have inhabited lands known as the Kingdom of Armenia since at least 1500 BCE (see Map 3).<sup>118</sup> During this time, Eastern Armenia was ruled by the Persian Empire, but in 451 BCE, the Zoroastrian Armenians rebelled against the Persian Empire's policy of forbidding Armenians to freely practice their religion.<sup>119</sup> The lands were taken over at various times by the Byzantine Empire, the Persian Empire, the Islamic Caliphate, the Ottoman Empire, and Russia (before the USSR).<sup>120</sup> Despite such takeovers, the Kingdom of Armenia remained largely autonomous throughout that time, paying taxes to various empires but always negotiating to govern themselves, whether by diplomacy or force.<sup>121</sup>

The state now known as Azerbaijan was originally part of the Persian Empire, and it maintained its Persian identity even after the Arab conquest of Iran and the adoption of

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<sup>118</sup> M. Haber, M. Mezzavilla, Y. Xue, et al., "Genetic evidence for an origin of the Armenians from Bronze Age mixing of multiple populations," *European Journal of Human Genetics* 24 (2016): 931–936. <https://doi.org/10.1038/ejhg.2015.206>.

<sup>119</sup> Hayk Hakobyan, "The Avarayr Battle: A Historical-Critical Review," *Patma-Banasirakan Handes [in Armenian]*: 40–67. See also: <http://arar.sci.am/Content/9267/7-27.pdf>.

<sup>120</sup> Payaslian, *History of Armenia*.

<sup>121</sup> Payaslian, *History of Armenia*.

Islam.<sup>122</sup> The Kingdom of Azerbaijan first appeared in 979 CE<sup>123</sup> when a group of Turkic tribes traveled to present-day Azerbaijan and begin to rule the aboriginal Persian, Kurdish, Yizidi, and other tribes living there.<sup>124</sup> These tribes constituted a sizable minority in the northern Persian Empire, thus it was not until the takeover of Persian lands by the Russians in the 19th century that the term “Azerbaijan” emerged when the Persian Empire was forced to surrender its Caucasian territories to the Russian Empire.<sup>125</sup> It was in this period that Azerbaijani national identity was created and the name “Azerbaijan SSR” was adopted by the ruling Musavat Party.<sup>126</sup>

Azerbaijani is a Turkic language closely related to and mutually intelligible with the modern Turkish language, and Azerbaijanis and Turks still consider themselves to be one people. Turkish people are descendants of Mongolians who came to Turkey in the 13th century during the conquests of Genghis Khan.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Zaur Gasimov, “Observing Iran from Baku: Iranian Studies in Soviet and Post-Soviet Azerbaijan,” *Iranian Studies* (2002): 55. Doi:10.1080/00210862.2020.1865136.

<sup>123</sup> TimeMaps, “Map of the Middle East in 979 CE: The Caliphate Fragmenting” (interactive). <https://www.timemaps.com/history/middle-east-979ad/>.

<sup>124</sup> Kate Fleet, Reḍsat Kasaba, and Suraiya Faroqhi, *The Cambridge History of Turkey. Volume 1, Byzantium to Turkey: 1071–1453*. Cambridge University Press, 2009.

<sup>125</sup> Timothy Dowling, *Russia at War: From the Mongol Conquest to Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Beyond* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, 2014), 728–729. See also: Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905–1920: The Shaping of a National Identity in a Muslim Community* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1. See also: Touraj Atabaki, *Azerbaijan: Ethnicity and the Struggle for Power in Iran* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing, 2000), 25.

<sup>126</sup> Gasimov, “Observing Iran, 37.

<sup>127</sup> Captivating History, *Armenian History: A Captivating Guide to the History of Armenia and the Armenian Genocide* (W. Mifflin, PA: Captivating History Publishing, 2019), 64-65.

Modern Azerbaijan and Armenia are both homogeneous states due to ethnic cleansing. Many Armenians living in Azerbaijan fled to the Armenian heartlands while most Azerbaijanis in Armenia fled back to Azerbaijan.<sup>128</sup>

In 1922 the expansionist direction of the USSR brought changes to the Middle East, and Armenia became part of the USSR.<sup>129</sup> Stalin wanted to establish rule in far-flung territories isolated from Moscow, so he devised a strategy to establish an “international city” in Baku. Outwardly, he espoused ideals of friendship and cooperation both locally and internationally.<sup>130</sup> However, his strategy was much more sinister: stoke the tensions of ethnic divide given his belief that a divided people are much easier to manipulate from afar.<sup>131</sup> This set the stage for a series of ethnic clashes throughout the 1920s, 1930s, and into the 1990s.<sup>132</sup>

Azeris and Armenians rotated in the role of the aggressor, each wanting to avenge the deaths of their forefathers.<sup>133</sup> As a result, modern-day Azerbaijan and Armenia are both homogeneous states due to ethnic cleansing. There are no Armenians living overtly in Azerbaijan; likewise no Azeris living in Armenia who claim their heritage. Many of my interviewees, however, reported having knowledge of Armenians living covertly in

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<sup>128</sup>“ Nagorno-Karabakh: A Conflict Entrenched in Nationalistic Propaganda - FPRI.” <https://www.fpri.org/2016/05/nagorno-karabakh-conflict-entrenched-nationalistic-propaganda/>.

<sup>129</sup> Blauvelt, “Abkhazia: Patronage and Power,” 203–232.

<sup>130</sup> Igor Nolyain, “Moscow's secret initiation of the Azeri–Armenian conflict: A Study of Divide-and-Rule Policy in Modern History,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 12 no. 3, (1999): 38-100. DOI: 10.1080/13518049908430403.

<sup>131</sup> Hager, “Laughing Third Man in a Fight,” 15-27.

<sup>132</sup> Cornell E. Svante, “The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict,” Report no. 46, Department of East European Studies, Uppsala University, 1999.

<sup>133</sup> A. N. Yamskov, “Ethnic Conflict in the Transcaucasus,” *Theory and Society* 20, no. 5 (October 1, 1991): 631–60. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00232663>.

either Baku or Turkey. These Armenians chose to conceal their heritage, convert to Islam, and mask their accents to pass themselves off as Turkic. They did this not by choice, but by necessity, and it is very likely they would have been killed had they claimed to be Armenian.<sup>134</sup> One of my interviewees, Gayaneh, met one of these hidden Armenian Turks when she was visiting the UK last year:

I was at a conference and I met this woman who was from Ankara and I was nervous—should I mention to her that I’m Armenian? I might be killed. But I didn’t feel any kind of animosity because she was to blame for anything that happened. I decided to tell her that I was coming from Yerevan and she asked “Are you Armenian?” I say yes, and she was looking at me like I was some kind of extraordinary being, something unspeakable; she was really shocked. She says, “I’m also Armenian.”

She told me the story of how her parents were survivors of the genocide and she married a Turkish man and changed her names to Turkish ones. No one knows that she’s Armenian originally; she’s afraid to tell anyone because they hate Armenians and they might kill her. Only her husband and his parents know, but they are forbidden to speak about it.

I want to contact her, and I have her email and managed to find her Facebook, but I need to find a way to not to harm her if I contact her. She promised that she would come to Armenia the next year, but I never heard from her so I have no idea what happened.<sup>135</sup>

Many Armenians living in Azerbaijan fled to mainland Armenia after the ethnic cleansings in Baku in the 1990s, while most Azerbaijanis in Armenia fled back to Azerbaijan.<sup>136</sup> Today, it is illegal for those of Armenian descent (whether they are citizens of Armenia or another country) to live, work, or travel in Azerbaijan.<sup>137</sup> Azerbaijanis and other Turkic people are able to visit Armenia but may face persecution

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<sup>134</sup> Avedis Hadjian, *Secret Nation: The Hidden Armenians of Turkey* (UK: I. B. Tauris, 2018).

<sup>135</sup> Gayaneh Hovhannisyan, personal interview by Marion McDow, Zoom, June 6, 2022.

<sup>136</sup> “Nagorno-Karabakh: A Conflict Entrenched in Nationalistic Propaganda.” Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI). Accessed April 30, 2021. <https://www.fpri.org/2016/05/nagorno-karabakh-conflict-entrenched-nationalistic-propaganda/>.

<sup>137</sup> “Azerbaijan Entry Restrictions and Travel Alerts,” Visasazerbaijan.com (blog), September 2, 2020. <https://www.visasazerbaijan.com/travel-restrictions/>.

by Armenians or by their own governments when they return.<sup>138</sup> There are several hundred Azeris living in Armenia, but most changed their names to avoid persecution. In most cases, if Azerbaijanis or Armenians live in each other's countries, they did so because of mixed marriages and family ties, because moving to the country of their heritage would necessitate the breakup of their families.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> US Department of State, Armenia Discrimination Report. <https://2001-2009.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27823.htm>.

<sup>139</sup> UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). <https://web.archive.org/web/20140416210350>, and [http://www.ecoi.net/file\\_upload/470\\_1162983398\\_3f5f27d14.pdf](http://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/470_1162983398_3f5f27d14.pdf).

## Chapter IV

### Deconstructing Resilience

While I could not find any studies that examined the resilience of Armenian populations, there are several studies on resilience in other post-conflict societies. One study was conducted by Yohanan Eshel and Shaul Kimhi of Tel Hai College in Israel, who sought to deconstruct resilience into three categories: individual resilience, community resilience, and national resilience. They explained that the strengths of these three modes of resilience are associated with five determinants: individual resilience, national resilience, well-being, community size, and sense of coherence.<sup>140</sup>

The authors define *community resilience* as the ability to care for basic physical needs and the ability of the community to provide protection to its citizens.<sup>141</sup> They define *individual resilience* as the proportion of individual strength to vulnerability, i.e., how fast and to what degree individuals recover from traumatic events.<sup>142</sup> Theologian Tod Bolsinger, in his book *Tempered Resilience*, offers an additional definition of individual resilience: “Resilience is about the capacity to remain steadfastly committed to wisely discerned goals and values when the outside forces challenge them.”<sup>143</sup> He argues

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<sup>140</sup> Eshel and Kimhi, “Community Resilience of Civilians at War,” 109.

<sup>141</sup> Eshel and Kimhi, “Community Resilience of Civilians at War,” 109.

<sup>142</sup> Eshel and Kimhi, “Community Resilience of Civilians at War,” 110.

<sup>143</sup> Tod E. Bolsinger, *Tempered Resilience: How Leaders Are Formed in the Crucible of Change* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 39.



that resilience takes shape with both “grit and flexibility” and offers a more nuanced understanding of what it means to be resilient and how resilience takes shape.

In her work *Ghosts of Revolution*, about political prisoners in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution, Shahla Talebi argues there is a stark contrast between survival and resilience. She speaks of meeting her young male cousins who, when released from prison, remained lost and unable to speak<sup>144</sup>; also a woman she met who had been subjected to so-called “soft torture” methods, who could apparently carry on with life but was unable to form bonds or have a sustained conversation.<sup>145</sup> Talebi also argues that although many lost their lives to the trauma inflicted by the regime, those who were able to recover from this violence and experience life after imprisonment are not rarities.<sup>146</sup>

In his book, *Born from Lament: The Theology and Politics of Hope in Africa* Emmanuel Katongole argues that there is a deep connection between the practice of “lament” and hope. He looked at grass-roots peace activists in the Great Lakes region in Eastern Africa and found that the first step to their recovery from trauma, and the eventual inauguration of their community leadership, was the practice of lament. These leaders began community centers and practices that addressed issues of violence they and their communities were facing, creating a safe space to air grief. Then, out of this truth they began to sow seeds of peace-building and inter-community dialogue.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Shahla Talebi, *Ghosts of Revolution: Rekindled Memories of Imprisonment in Iran* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 6.

<sup>145</sup> Talebi, *Ghosts of Revolution*, 5.

<sup>146</sup> Talebi, *Ghosts of Revolution*, 42.

<sup>147</sup> Katongole, Emmanuel. *Born from Lament: The Theology and Politics of Hope in Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2017).

Although the research is not clear about why some individuals experience greater resilience than others, it is clear that recovery from even unspeakable trauma is possible. There may be many competing factors at play, and because of the nature of complex human experiences, trauma, and the human brain, no one can predict if someone will recover completely or not.

I believe we should at least seek to understand which factors play a significant role and which do not. For instance, in my research I found that individuals who had something greater than themselves to focus on generally recovered better than those who did not. This focus could be as simple as a song, or as complex as starting an international NGO or serving as a clergy person during wartime. One thing all of these individuals had in common was a willingness to look beyond their present circumstances and ask “What *can* be done?,” rather than focusing on what had happened or was happening. It may be that sometimes, in our human experience, events and circumstances are simply too harsh, too overwhelming, to contend with; they defy all reason or logic. Therefore, having something to focus on outside of oneself allows the mind to rest; it helps one to forget the horror that does not make sense, and focus—at least for a little while—on something the mind can make sense of, such as growing a flower, caring for a child, or making shoes.

## Chapter V

“My Family History is Shaped by Ethnic Cleansing”:

### How History is Remembered

The above quote in this chapter title came from Anahid Sarkisian, 30, the mother of two young children from a village in Artzakh, She spoke of her mother’s stories of ethnic cleansing in Baku and Shushi (also spelled Shusha in Azerbaijani) beginning in 1988 (see Map 1). Anahid and I talked one evening while her mother watched the children:

My family witnessed several waves of ethnic cleansing. First in Baku in the 1920s then in Shushi. Armenians were killed so they had to flee, and Azeris were being settled in their homes. So they left Shushi and fled back to Baku and in 1988, there was an ethnic cleansing of Armenians in Baku. So, again, they had to flee. Now they had to flee from Baku to Yerevan. Our family’s histories are shaped based on this ethnic cleansing. . . .

My mom was actually pregnant with me when the ethnic cleansing happened in Baku [in 1988]. She was visiting family at the time, and she got a strange call from my dad who said, “Come home right now!” There was fear in his voice and she didn’t know why. When she went to board the airplane, they asked all the Armenians to go to a separate area. She had a bad feeling so she didn’t do it. Later she found out they were separating the Armenians to kill them.<sup>148</sup>

Many Armenians spoke of horrific events like these in a no-nonsense way, the same manner as one would state the fact that they are going grocery shopping later. Waves of ethnic cleansing have been happening for hundreds of years in Azerbaijan and they have shaped the lives of all of my interviewees in different ways.

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<sup>148</sup> Anahid Sarkisian, interview.

Anahid went on to speak about the war in Artzakh in the 1990s:

The way the war started was when the Soviet Union disintegrated Artzakh, which had its autonomy during Soviet Union under Azerbaijan, which was also an artificially created situation. That war was for our self-determination, basically, because that's where we have always lived, that's our land, and it never had anything to do with Azerbaijan historically. We were fighting to unite with Armenia because we're Armenians. You know, Russia did everything to make sure we don't get united so that Artzakh always stays as a conflict zone so that Azerbaijan has a way to attack us again which would give power to Russia. So no Azeris ever lived there in the land that I'm from, particularly [speaking of her village]; it was always an autonomous republic.<sup>149</sup>

Another time, I spoke with Gagik, an international lawyer in her late thirties who grew up in Artzakh. Her family moved to Yerevan when she was in high school so she could acquire a better education. She shared her perspective on the motives behind the war:

It's not about just the territory when you look at it from my perspective—from the Armenian perspective. It's about human dignity; it's about human identity; it's about history. It's about never letting what happened to our nation happen again [speaking about the genocide].

The other option is to just pack our suitcases and leave the region for good and not have a country at all. Because that's the plan for our neighbors—to erase the Armenian nation and Armenian statehood from the map of the world. And that has always been their mission. If you look at history, if you look back at what happened with the genocide, the other Artzakh wars, and what's going on now, you'll see the similarities. So many of my friends and neighbors had to leave their homes in the middle of the night when they [Azerbaijan] started bombing. They left everything and now Azeris are living in their homes. I really don't find the right words to describe what I see on the ground right now.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Anahid Sarkisian, interview.

<sup>150</sup> Gagik Hovsepyan, personal interview by Marion McDow, Zoom, April 3, 2021.

Many of the Armenians from Artzakh with whom I spoke had their homes taken over by Azeri families when they fled waves of ethnic cleansing.<sup>151</sup> The pain of losing multiple family homes in multiple locations in a relatively short time is evident in the pervasive sense of exhaustion that many Armenians express with the status quo. Lilit, a housewife from Artzakh now living in Boston, describes her experience of losing her home and village:

The war started when we were preparing for winter. It was starting to get cold at night so we knew winter was close. But that night, when the bombing started, people left their homes in pajamas and slippers; we just had the clothes on our backs. Mothers barely had time to grab their children and run. Now we are homeless. Not only because we no longer have homes to return to, but because our land, our sacred land that we have lived on and taken care of for thousands of years, is being destroyed. You can't imagine what it is like to have thousands of years of history destroyed like that. Now we [Armenians from Artzakh] are living in friends' basements, their spare rooms, and in tents. But for how long? I don't want to cause you any sorrow by telling you all this, but this is the reality for many, many people. I can't close my eyes without thinking about it.<sup>152</sup>

There were more than 90,000 Armenians refugees from Artzakh, forced to flee their homes in 2020—an enormous number for a region with only 145,000 inhabitants. Most found refuge in surrounding villages and in Yerevan. But often there were no services or government support, so grassroots efforts by local citizens were set up,

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<sup>151</sup> Serge @Zinfor, “Azerbaijani soldiers going through the personal belongings of the ransacked home of Armenians from Azokh who had to hastily abandon everything and flee for their lives. He’s insulting Armenians as he describes the items.” *Twitter*. November 17, 2020. <https://twitter.com/Zinfor/status/1328854378275598337>.

<sup>152</sup> Lilit Sukiasyan, personal interview by Marion McDow, Zoom, May 14, 2021.

partially funded by the Armenian diaspora abroad.<sup>153</sup> Anahid describes her efforts organizing aid for refugees:

I worked on two different projects. One was helping with basic supplies because people didn't have anything, just the clothes on their backs; no money, no job, not even soap or shoes in many cases. Because when the war started, everything was like a front line; everything was under attack. A lot of kids didn't have trousers or they were basically naked because if they were sleeping or if they were taking a bath, whatever they were doing, they just ran out of the house.

The other project was a network that provided mental health, especially for kids and soldiers. The kids were in a really bad state; no child should know how different kinds of missiles sound. And our soldiers, our soldiers went through literal hell. As soon as there was a ceasefire agreement, the Azeris would just break it, so they were constantly being shot at.

We were so outnumbered, it's hard to explain; there were 1,000 Azeris to 500 of us. So essentially, they could not sleep because if they did they would be at risk of being bombed. So they started cutting themselves with razors so they would not fall asleep because of the pain. They knew if they sleep, they die. These are the things that no one thinks about when they hear about war.

We did this because the government wasn't going to help. I mean, they seriously did nothing for us. Refugees didn't even see a dime from any government entity or NGO. None of the international NGOs cared about us, so we had to do it ourselves. It was basically just me and a bunch of other women. My friend, who is one of the only men who helped us, said: "What I'm getting from this whole operation is that Armenian women are going to be the ones who will save this country." And I think that is true.<sup>154</sup>

During the wars, but particularly since 2020, homes, churches, and other culturally and historically significant monuments are being destroyed; some of which are as old as the 7th century CE.<sup>155</sup> Anna, a housewife in her early forties and living in

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<sup>153</sup> Lika Zakaryan, and Anush Ter-Khachatryan. *44 Days: Diary from an Invisible War* (Creative Armenia, 2021), 132.

<sup>154</sup> Anahid Sarkisian, interview.

<sup>155</sup> "Azerbaijanis Disrespecting an Armenian Church in Occupied Artsakh, Standing on the Cross They Broke, Praising Allah." Zartonk Media, November 14, 2020. <https://zartonkmedia.com/2020/11/14/azerbaijanis-disrespecting-an-armenian-church-in-occupied-artsakh-standing-on-the-cross-they-broke-praising-allah/>.

Boston, comes from a small village outside of Shushi. She spoke of seeing the church her ancestors built destroyed:

That morning, I got my phone and saw all of these messages that the church my great-great-great grandfather had built had been bombed. I mean, they just destroyed it! It was a sacred place, a gift. It reminded me—do you remember when the Taliban destroyed the big Buddha statues in Afghanistan? It felt like that. I remember when Notre Dame in Paris was burning, the whole world was crying. Right? Because everyone knows Notre Dame. But when a cathedral in Artzakh was bombed—as beautiful and old as Notre Dame [long pause and heavy sigh] every single one of us felt the pain. I remember that day when I learned the news. I felt like we, the human race, were losing something huge. When the cathedral in Armenia [Artzakh] was bombed, my American friends said, “Oh, that’s a pity, that’s a beautiful building.” So I understood it had no value for them. And that’s why we’re scared because they’re going to clear out our history. It’s one thing to occupy a land, but it’s another to completely destroy whatever was there. I think it’s a kind of crime, not just against our nation, but against the whole of humanity.<sup>156</sup>

In her book *44 Days: Diary from an Invisible War*, journalist Lika Zarkaryan details what the destruction of cathedrals means to her:

It seems to me that we don’t know what’s actually happening, and if we did, we would go crazy. Stepanakert is being bombed by airplanes and by drones. . . . Stepanakert has been always my final destination. It’s where I could always run and hide from everything that is unkind, a small paradise. So clean, so honest, and so safe. Shushi’s cathedral fell under fire today. The Ghazanchetsots Cathedral is very important for us Armenians. It is one of the great symbols of Shushi, and Shushi is a symbol of Artzakh, and Artzakh is the symbol of Armenia. It’s very unfortunate. An international audience continues to make statements that are of no use to anybody. The cathedral is very significant for the Armenians and it is the most famous church of Shushi.<sup>157</sup>

The destruction of cultural sites was a common theme mentioned by almost everyone I spoke with. For my interviewees, these were not just old buildings, they were

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<sup>156</sup> Anna Hovsepien, personal interview by Marion McDow, Zoom, April 1, 2021.

<sup>157</sup> Zakaryan, *44 Days*.

part of their identity; when cultural sites were bombed, many said it was as if their identity was destroyed simultaneously. Many also felt like they were lost and struggled to create new identities for themselves. In addition to being emotionally devastating, intentional destruction of non-military targets, including cultural sites, is illegal by International Humanitarian Law (also known as the laws of war).<sup>158</sup> The Ghazanchetsots Cathedral was targeted on October 8, 2020, twice, a few hours apart in Armenian-controlled Shushi. There were about a dozen civilians taking shelter inside the church at the time of the two bombings. During the second bombing, journalists and other villagers were injured, and two Russian journalists were killed. Journalists and NGO staff were able to recover pieces of guided munitions at the site which, coupled with the second attack, suggested an intentional strike, although Azerbaijan claimed they did not target the cathedral, and the destruction was an accident.

Many of my interviewees spoke of other instances where they felt Azerbaijan was deliberately dismantling Armenian cultural sites in an attempt to eradicate Armenian presence and history in Artzakh. Gayaneh related her perception of the erasure of her culture from Artzakh:

Not only are they still destroying churches and ancient monasteries—I'm talking about sites that are thousands and thousands of years old—but they are destroying our graves. They post on social media and laugh and piss on our dead as they smash the headstones. Not even our ancestors can be left in peace. The other day I saw one of these videos, and I saw my great-uncle's name on the headstone. I cannot tell you the pain and agony I felt seeing his memory desecrated like that.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> "Azerbaijan: Attack on Church Possible War Crime," Human Rights Watch, December 16, 2020. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/16/azerbaijan-attack-church-possible-war-crime>.

<sup>159</sup> Gayaneh Sarkissian, interview.



Areg Avetisyan, a lawyer living in Chicago talks about the destruction of other cultural monuments:

I know the Azeris like to destroy our crosses marking holy places. Our ancestors made these beautiful, intricately carved crosses and put them in special places in the land to honor and respect the place. I have read many postings on social media and in the news where Azeris say they must destroy every piece of evidence that Armenians ever walked this land, even though we've been here for tens of thousand of years. They have to work this hard just to re-write history so they can claim they own this land. Can you imagine someone doing that who actually did have ancient history in a place? No! they wouldn't need to do it. We used to let them live nearby us in the villages, but then they started killing us, so we had to separate ourselves, not because we wanted to, but just out of self-preservation.<sup>160</sup>

This destruction of Armenian cultural sites and symbols started long before the war in 2020. In fact, satellite imagery, photography and film from journalists, and numerous personal accounts showed that 89 churches, 5,840 khachkars (intricately carved, standing stone crosses) and 22,000 graves were destroyed between 1997 and 2017, including the ancient necropolis of Djulfa dating to 510 CE. In response to criticism, Azerbaijan denied that Armenians had ever lived in the region, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary.<sup>161</sup>

There is also a sense of erasure. Many interviewees were fearful that their people will completely disappear. This fear is heightened by the destruction of churches, grave sites, and other monuments. They said it is easier to claim Armenians never lived in Artzakh if all traces of their culture and existence have been erased. This fear is

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<sup>160</sup> Areg Avetisyan, personal interview by Marion McDow, Zoom, September 15, 2022.

<sup>161</sup> Dale Berning Sawa, "Monumental Loss: Azerbaijan and 'the Worst Cultural Genocide of the 21st Century,'" *Guardian*, March 1, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/mar/01/monumental-loss-azerbaijan-cultural-genocide-khachkars>.

compounded by public admonitions from Turkey and Azerbaijan to erase Armenia and Armenian people. In 2005, Hajibala Abutalybov, Mayor of Baku, said to a German delegation visiting Baku: “Our goal is the complete elimination of Armenians. You, Nazis, already eliminated the Jews in the 1930s and 1940s, right? You should be able to understand us.”<sup>162</sup> Likewise, Safar Abiyev, Azerbaijan’s Defense Minister, said “Within the next 25 years, there will be no state of Armenia in the south Caucasus. These people. . . have no right to live in this region.”<sup>163</sup> The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention has released a Red Flag Alert against Azerbaijan, for its actions in ethnic cleansing and destruction of cultural sites, referring to their actions as “a genocide through a thousand strikes. . . with the full support of Turkey.”<sup>164</sup> Indeed, Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said in a July 2020 speech that he pledged his country’s full support for Azerbaijan and that they would “finish what they started in 1915,” which for many, was an obvious reference to the 1915 genocide.<sup>165</sup>

Many of my interviewees referred to the 2020 speech by Erdogan when speaking about their fears of a new genocide. Tatev, an investment banker living in the greater Los Angeles area speaks of her family’s experience of the genocide and her fears of another one.

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<sup>162</sup> U.S. Committee on Foreign Affairs, “The Caucasus: Frozen Conflicts and Closed Borders,” Serial No. 110–200. Washington: U.S. GPO, 18 Jun 2008, 55. <http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov/>

<sup>163</sup> U.S. Committee on Foreign Affairs, “The Caucasus,” 82.

<sup>164</sup> “Red Flag Alert for Genocide—Azerbaijan—Update 3,” Lemkin Institute. Accessed November 16, 2022. <https://www.lemkininstitute.com/red-flag-alerts-1/red-flag-alert-for-genocide---azerbaijan---update-3>.

<sup>165</sup> Zartonk Media [@ZartonkMedia], “BREAKING NEWS: Turkey’s Erdogan Threatens to Finish the Armenian Genocide.” <https://t.co/BvjVS3CkeE>, Tweet, *Twitter*, July 24, 2020. <https://twitter.com/ZartonkMedia/status/1286735357539622917>.

When the leader of a country says right before a war, [speaking of Erdogan’s July 2020 speech, a few months before the beginning of the 2020 war] that they want to literally erase your people off the face of the Earth, it’s terribly frightening. My grandparents are genocide survivors, and my parents are survivors of the ethnic cleansings in Baku. I look at my children and think, how could anyone hate them so much just because they are Armenian? I just don’t understand how another human being could hate them so much. I mean, I am scared of Azeris, but I don’t hate them like that. I hate what they did; I hate that I can never trust my children around them; I hate that I can never go back to where my grandparents are from or where my parents grew up. I hate the Azeri government that propagates this kind of hatred, but I don’t hate them like they hate us.<sup>166</sup>

Anti-Armenian sentiment in Azerbaijan (also called “Armeniphobia”) is a well-documented and widespread phenomenon with no counter-equivalent in Armenia. Azerbaijan’s wholesale promotion of hatred against those of Armenian descent has existed for hundreds of years, but state-sponsored contempt began during the Soviet Union and the creation of Azerbaijan SSR. As discussed earlier, Azerbaijan was incensed that Artzakh voted to secede from Azerbaijan, which reacted to the referendum by disseminating anti-Armenian propaganda and encouraging ethnic cleansing.<sup>167</sup>

In 2011, a European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) report on Azerbaijan stated: “The constant negative official and media discourse [against Armenia] “fosters a negative climate of opinion regarding people of Armenian origin, who remain vulnerable to discrimination.”<sup>168</sup> Fyodor Lukyanov, editor of *Russia in Global Affairs*, stated: “Armenophobia is an institutional part of modern Azerbaijani

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<sup>166</sup> Tatev Khachatryan, personal interview by Marion McDow, Zoom, June 4, 2022.

<sup>167</sup> Armenophobia. “Interim public report on “armenophobia” in Azerbaijan: Organized hate speech animosity toward Armenians.” 2022. <https://artsakhombuds.am/en/document/570>.

<sup>168</sup> “ECRI report on Azerbaijan (4th),” Strasbourg, France: European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, 31 May 2011.

statehood, and Karabakh is in the center of it.”<sup>169</sup> According Jeremy Smith, a Russian historian from the University of Finland: “National identity in post-Soviet Azerbaijan rests in large part, then, on the cult of the Alievs, alongside a sense of embattlement and victimization and a virulent hatred of Armenia and Armenians”<sup>170</sup>

Artzakh became an intense subject for both Armenia and Azerbaijan as soon as Artzakh was transferred to Azerbaijan. Therefore, even though Artzakh is internationally recognized as belonging to Azerbaijan, it is not surprising that the territory has long operated and governed itself autonomously due to its large majority-Armenian population, the history of anti-Armenian prejudice in Azerbaijan, and its long history as being part of Armenia. Arpi, a marketer from Yerevan who now lives in Boston, unequivocally shares her views on prejudice:

I think this narrative of “Well, we have to look at both sides” coming from academia and the media is bul\* shi\*. Because in the United States, we wouldn’t say you have to look at the reasoning of slaveowners in pre-Civil War times. We wouldn’t say that you need to consider their opinions and why they felt like they needed to own, torture, and exploit fellow human beings. In the same way, we can’t say that that “reverse racism” exists because how can an oppressed people oppress the more powerful ones, right? They’re not the ones who have the power. So this idea that Azeris have a point, and we somehow deserved to be ethnically cleansed from our lands, is complete bul\* shi\*.<sup>171</sup>

The issue of ethnic cleansing, coupled with the history of the 1915 genocide, was at the forefront of most of my interviewees’ minds; it seemed that any related current events were viewed through this lens. The state of perpetual liminality created by Turkey and Azerbaijan each denying anything ever happened and bragging they would do it

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<sup>169</sup> Fyodor Lukyanov, *Russia in Global Affairs* “Первый и неразрешимый” (in Russian). Vzglyad. 2 August 2011.”Армянофобия – институциональная часть современной азербайджанской”

<sup>170</sup> Jeremy Smith, *Red Nations* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>171</sup> Arpi Khachatryan, personal interview by Marion McDow, Zoom, September 4, 2022.

again, puts Armenians in a defensive stance. This also creates situations where the likelihood of escalation of conflict is higher, with tensions high on both sides. There seemed to be complete mistrust of Azeris from Armenians and vice-versa. Although tensions have been high for at least a few hundred years, it seemed the turning point came when what used to be part of eastern Armenia was given to Azerbaijan at the time the USSR divided Armenia. It seemed armed conflict was almost inevitable unless there were serious and ongoing international negotiations. As it stands right now, both Armenians and Azerbaijanis have suffered huge losses of lives, both civilian and soldiers; people have been forced out of their homes; culture has been destroyed and several generations of children have grown up in refugee camps.

## Chapter VI

“You Shout So Loud But the Algorithms Shout Louder”<sup>172</sup>:

### Cyberwarfare

Every single Armenian I spoke with had stories of actual or threatened violence from Azeris, usually in the form of online harassment. But sometimes Armenians are attacked where they reside abroad.<sup>173</sup> Anna spoke to me about the harassment she experienced during the war:

There were videos of crowds of Turkish people in France, the UK, and Germany, spreading hate speech against us. I can't imagine Armenians spreading hate speech against anyone. We can only demand justice for ourselves. But being the aggressor is the part that I can't understand; it's dark for me. During the war I didn't feel safe because Azeris were calling, threatening. But I decided I'm not going to stay silent because that's exactly what they [Azeris] want. I can't imagine any Armenian picking up the phone and targeting a random Azeri. I don't understand that state of mind; it's a completely different way to exist. That's what also made us [Armenians] so vulnerable against them [Azeris]; we didn't imagine that level of hate.

There's an Azeri family living near me and I have a mutual friend with my Azeri neighbor. When she introduced us a couple of years ago, the Azeri said that she doesn't want to be friends with me because I'm Armenian. Then during the war, our mutual friend said the Azeri was saying such terrible things against Armenians she had to stop talking to her [the Azeri]. Then she saw me one day and she yelled at me and said that we Armenians deserve to be destroyed. I mean, I understand if she doesn't want to talk to me, but I don't understand how she can want me to be destroyed. That was really scary. There was a day when I cried because I was scared. But I think that was about it, like I let myself cry and be

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<sup>172</sup> Artyom Markosyan, personal interview by Marion McDow, Zoom, April 1, 2021.

<sup>173</sup> “Armenian Protesters in France Attacked with Weapons-Wielding Turks.” Asbarez.com (blog), October 28, 2020. <https://asbarez.com/198035/armenian-protesters-in-france-attacked-with-weapons-wielding-turks/>.

super scared for a day, but the next day I woke up and said to hell with this. I'm just doing it. I don't care because I have to just live my life and do whatever I can to help the people who have lost relatives and homes from this war. I also have to speak about what happened to me because people need to know what we are going through and the level of hatred we're being subjected to everyday.<sup>174</sup>

What is striking about this violence is it did not seem to matter if the person was in Armenia, the United States, or France; it only mattered that they were Armenian.

It is too early to analyze the numbers of harassers, internet bots (computer programs that generate and send harassing messages), and victims. But anecdotal evidence suggests this is a widespread campaign with the aim of silencing Armenians through fear. Many Armenians I spoke to had closed their social media accounts entirely because they were overrun with hateful messages and harassing comments. Tamar, a Lebanese-Armenian student in her mid-twenties, living in Boston, shared her experiences of getting hate mail from Azeris and Turks via social media:

You know, you get these messages in your inbox saying the most horrible things like, "Right now, we're doing to your women what we did to them in 1915" [referring to the widespread sexual assault, slavery, and torture during the Genocide]. "We're going to rape you and your mother," and "We're going to behead your children." I mean, things that you look at and think, "What human being in their right mind would say this?" Imagine the hatred that would have to be within them to say these horrible things. Then in the news and within academia, there are intellectuals saying the genocide never happened. So which one is it?<sup>175</sup>

The cyber component of this war is a departure from previous wars (1920s, 1990s, and 2016). By using the many forms of social media, online hate has affected Armenians in the diaspora personally. In previous wars, Armenians in the diaspora and in non-conflict zones in Armenia itself only worried about their family and friends in the

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<sup>174</sup> Anna Hovsepian, interview.

<sup>175</sup> Tamar Kocharyan, personal interview by Marion McDow, Zoom, April 14, 2021.

war zones and random attacks by Azeris on the street.<sup>176</sup> But today's attacks are different because they affect every Armenian in their own homes, no matter where they reside, threats at a level of violence that affected all of my interviewees mentally and physically. This cyber harassment, which the European Parliament characterizes as state-sponsored and state-run, is insidious for its inclusion of historical revisionism, glorification of violence, de-humanisation of, and hatred toward, Armenians.<sup>177</sup> The effects of this strategy was apparent in the interviews, with many interviewees describing this as a method of mental terrorism. Most of my interviewees were afraid to speak about the war, either in-person or online, for fear online threats would turn into physical violence.

In cyber war, civilians are the most likely targets<sup>178</sup> and the relative effortlessness with which millions of individual targets can be hit anywhere via an internet connection, means that cyber war is highly unpredictable and perilous. But it not only citizens who spread false and misleading information. Social media is assuming a growing and unique role in politics and war.

During the Syrian Civil war, the Syrian regime influenced, harassed, and undermined the Syrian Free Army (SFA) through the use of social media via its Syrian Electronic Army (SEA).<sup>179</sup> This use of social media as a tool of war constituted the first

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<sup>176</sup> "Another Armenian Institution Vandalized in France," Asbarez.com, October 23, 2019. <https://asbarez.com/187390/another-armenian-institution-vandalized-in-france/>.

<sup>177</sup> "The Horrors of the Other War in Europe Keep Growing," *Newsweek*, 29 Sep 2022. <https://www.newsweek.com/horrors-other-war-europe-keep-growing-opinion-1747610>.

<sup>178</sup> Shehabat, A., The social media cyber-war: The unfolding events in the Syrian revolution 2011. *Global Media Journal: Australian Edition* 6, no. 2 (2012): 6. [http://www.hca.westernsydney.edu.au/gmjau/archive/v6\\_2012\\_2/ahmad\\_shehabat%20\\_RA.html](http://www.hca.westernsydney.edu.au/gmjau/archive/v6_2012_2/ahmad_shehabat%20_RA.html).

<sup>179</sup> Shehabat, "Social media cyber-war."



time any power had used social media as a weapon.<sup>180</sup> Like Syria, Russia has been experimenting with the use of social media propaganda and harassment, particularly in Finland, Ukraine, and the U.S. The U.S. government now knows that several other countries, including China, Iran, Lebanese Hizballah, Cuba, and Venezuela, sought to influence U.S. elections in recent years.<sup>181</sup> Finnish investigative journalist Jessikka Aro, writes: “Finns had started to spread aggressive pro-Kremlin disinformation without checking their facts after being exposed to the propaganda.”<sup>182</sup> Aric Toler, a researcher who tracks Russian disinformation operations points out, “Mainstream media coverage of Russian fake news operations has the effect of magnifying their reach beyond anything Moscow could achieve by itself.”<sup>183</sup>

Using tactics defined by Syria, Russia, and others, Azerbaijan launched campaigns on two fronts: on the ground and through smartphones. And in both, the Armenians were wholly unprepared. Many of my interviewees expressed bewilderment that they had been so blindsided, insisting that nothing exists from the Armenian side in the realm of social media harassment or war. I tried to find instances of cyber harassment against Azeris, but I could not find any verifiable accounts. There may have been some isolated incidents, but nothing to indicate a state-sponsored program.

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<sup>180</sup> Shehabat, “Social media cyber-war.”

<sup>181</sup> National Intelligence Council, Intelligence Community Assessment, “Foreign Threats to the 2020 US Federal Elections,” 10 Mar 2021. Accessed 10 Dec 2022. <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/reports-publications/reports-publications-2021/item/2192-intelligence-community-assessment-on-foreign-threats-to-the-2020-u-s-federal-elections>

<sup>182</sup> J. Aro, *The Cyberspace War: Propaganda and Trolling as Warfare Tools* (Brussels: Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, 2016), 124.

<sup>183</sup> Toler, quoted in: John Zada, *Veils of Distortion: How the News Media Warps Our Minds* (UK: Terra Incognita Publishing, 2021), 5.

I believe this cyber war is a major factor in the breakdown of community resilience in Armenia. Based on my interviews, it seems to play a large role in the level of hopelessness Armenians felt during and after the war. This being so, it may have contributed to a growing apathy that many of my interviewees related. Tamar described what she sees as a discrepancy over how the war was portrayed in the media and online compared with what she heard from her friends on the ground.

What was so frustrating was their monopoly over the information, their fluid and changing narratives both in online conversations and overall in the media. Armenians were just drowned out through every single step of that process. We didn't have the money, we didn't have the foresight, and frankly, we didn't have the conniving that they did.<sup>184</sup>

Most of my interviewees spoke of the differences between what politicians were saying, what the media was printing, and what Armenians were witnessing. They spoke of the unscrupulous effects of the widespread use of misinformation. My interviewees asserted that Azerbaijan used money from its vast oil reserves<sup>185</sup> to buy public relations firms,<sup>186</sup> media outlets,<sup>187</sup> bribing journalists and politicians,<sup>188</sup> non-governmental

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<sup>184</sup> Tamar Kocharyan, interview.

<sup>185</sup> "Azerbaijan Operated \$3bn Secret Slush Fund," BBC News, September 5, 2017. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-41156933>.

<sup>186</sup> "A Journalist Exposed Corruption in Azerbaijan. The Country Continues to Persecute Her," *Washington Post*, 20 Aug 2019. Accessed April 30, 2021. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/a-journalist-exposed-corruption-in-azerbaijan-the-country-continues-to-persecute-her/2019/08/20/81cca074-c2ad-11e9-b5e4-54aa56d5b7ce\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/a-journalist-exposed-corruption-in-azerbaijan-the-country-continues-to-persecute-her/2019/08/20/81cca074-c2ad-11e9-b5e4-54aa56d5b7ce_story.html).

<sup>187</sup> Casey Kelso, "Why Does the Big Azerbaijan Corruption Scandal Still Matter in 2019?" *Medium*, January 10, 2019. <https://voices.transparency.org/why-does-the-big-azerbaijan-corruption-scandal-still-matter-in-2019-55b04a15a0f9>.

<sup>188</sup> "How Azerbaijan Buys Western Sympathies" (video). March 26, 2020. <https://belsat.eu/en/programs/how-azerbaijan-buys-western-sympathies-eng-video/>. See also: "Germany's CDU 'received Money from Azerbaijan,'" 26 Oct 2017. *dw.com*. Accessed November 15, 2022. <https://www.dw.com/en/angela-merkels-cdu-party-received-donations-from-azerbaijan/a-41117176>. See also: Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), "The Azerbaijani Laundromat." Accessed November 15, 2022. <https://www.occrp.org/en/azerbaijanilaundromat/>.

organizations (NGOs),<sup>189</sup> and international organizations,<sup>190</sup> such as UNESCO.<sup>191</sup> They also frequently claimed Azerbaijan was backed by Turkey throughout the war, which they posit, created a situation of complete control over the narrative during and after the war. It is unclear at present how these contacts were established, but I suggest that Azerbaijan used its newfound oil wealth to give clout to its aims.

Artyom, a lawyer in his early forties living in San Jose, California, shared his perspective of misinformation during the war:

Azerbaijan and Turkey had many bots that flooded the Internet with information. So aside from my own struggles with getting anyone to care about what was happening, they were seeing on the news or Twitter these reports that were completely false. There were videos constructed of a fake missile strike and saying, “Look, the Armenians are attacking civilians” or narratives that were so out of context that anyone in their right mind wouldn’t believe them. I mean, at the beginning of the war Turkey and Azerbaijan were adamant, saying Armenia bombed them first. And finally after some weeks, they admitted and even boasted, “You know, this was the right time. We’re glad we launched this offensive. We had to get our lands back.”<sup>192</sup>

These were among numerous reports of Azerbaijan staging pictures and videos to make it look like Armenians were attacking when they were not, or committing war crimes they never committed. Some of the pictures and videos appear to be made in Azerbaijan but

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<sup>189</sup> “PACE and Azerbaijan: 56 NGOs Appeal to Investigate Corruption Allegations against MPs. EaP CSF. Accessed April 21, 2017. <https://eap-csf.eu/56-ngos-appealed-to-pace-to-investigate-corruption-allegations-in-azerbaijan/>.

<sup>190</sup> “Council of Europe Urged to Investigate Azerbaijan Bribery Allegations,” *Guardian*, 1 Feb 2017. <http://www.theguardian.com/law/2017/feb/01/council-of-europe-urged-investigate-azerbaijan-bribery-allegations>.

<sup>191</sup> Kate Fitzgibbon, “UNESCO Exposed”. <https://culturalpropertynews.org/unesco-exposed/>. 19 Mar, 2019.

<sup>192</sup> Artyom Markosyan, interview.

others use distant conflicts in Russia and Georgia to make their claims.<sup>193</sup> Meanwhile, Azerbaijan stifled reports of its own human rights violations, war crimes, and capture of civilians.<sup>194</sup> This created a public perception of Armenians as “trouble makers” illegally occupying Azeri lands.<sup>195</sup> It also created a lot of pushback in academic circles as to what is considered war when both sides commit apparently equal atrocities.

Even more alarming is the lack of action by governments and human rights organizations to investigate and curb possible ethnic cleansing efforts, war crimes such as the torture of civilians, the use of phosphorus bombs, and the destruction of cultural sites. Many Armenians I spoke with shared their anger and disbelief at the lack of international response. Vatanoush, a marketing manager in her mid-thirties, living in Los Angeles said:

The reason that ethnic cleansings happen is exactly because when it does happen, nobody cares and nobody listens. Nobody is there to hear the side of the oppressed. It’s easy to hear the side of the oppressor because what allows the oppressor to be an oppressor is extra political power, money, and organizational resources.<sup>196</sup>

This was a common refrain among the participants: many said it felt as if they were screaming but no one was listening. They shared their belief that Azerbaijan wants to annihilate all Armenians, but other countries, human rights organizations, and the media either will not or do not listen. There was exhaustion and fear among many interviewees that they are witnessing the beginning of another genocide. Many Armenian

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<sup>193</sup> “Azerbaijani Media and Government Repeatedly Caught Making Fake News about War Against Armenia.” *Greek City Times*, 8 Oct 2020. Accessed April 30, 2021. <https://greekcitytimes.com/2020/10/08/azerbaijan-fake-news/>.

<sup>194</sup> US Department of State, “Azerbaijan 2020 Human Rights Report,” 2020. <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Azerbaijan-2020-Human-Rights-Report.pdf>

<sup>195</sup> Yeni Şafak, “Let the Armenian, Israeli troublemakers complain all they want,” *Yenisafak.com*, October 8, 2020. <https://www.yenisafak.com/en/columns/yasinaktay/let-the-armenian-israeli-troublemakers-complain-all-they-want-2047619>.

<sup>196</sup> Vatanoush Khachatryan, personal interview by Marion McDow, Zoom, April 14, 2021.

organizations, such as the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), the Armenian Fund, and the Armenian Relief Society (ARS), actively lobby politicians and news media to report what is happening in Artzakh. Many fund grants for scholarly studies.

However, I believe this issue is not seen as sufficiently politically important to gain much attention. The U.S. has little stake in Armenia and is actively aiming to have less overt influence in the Middle East in general. Therefore it is likely that humanitarian concerns will be put on the back burner until the war spills over the borders of Armenia and Azerbaijan, or Western countries find themselves facing critical reasons to become involved.

## Chapter VII

“All Our Nightmares Have Become True”<sup>197</sup>:

### Mental and Physical Health

The Armenian language does not have many nuanced words for emotions. When I speak with Armenians about the trauma they have experienced, often they have trouble articulating what they are feeling. Some change the subject or begin speaking of political facts rather than how they feel about those facts; others resort to another language to express their emotional turmoil. Miriam, a woman in her mid-twenties, living in Los Angeles, whose family fled Artzakh during the 1990s, related the physical effects of the current war while living in the diaspora. During her story, she switched languages several times:

[Speaking in Armenian] I was 19 weeks pregnant with my first baby when the war started. I woke up one morning and I saw the news. I was just in shock. I couldn't stop shaking. I didn't know what they were going to do. I still have family in Artzakh, my aunts and uncles and cousins [heavy sigh]. My husband didn't think it was going to last that long but they just kept bombing and bombing. Then when they bombed the cathedral in Shushi. [long pause, switch to French] I just, I just couldn't cope, I felt like I was dying. Like they bombed out part of my heart. [long pause, switch back to Armenian] I felt contractions in the morning, and my mom said it was okay. But then I started bleeding. [switch to French] I went to the hospital and they really, they really tried [there are tears in her eyes] they gave me this medicine but it wasn't God's plan [heavy sigh, long pause.] We lost him, [switch to Armenian] my son; and we had to say goodbye. My mom helped me to bury him [pause], my son.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Houri Najaryan, personal interview by Marion McDow, Zoom, April 5, 2021.

<sup>198</sup> Miriam Ohanyan, personal interview by Marion McDow, Zoom, April 12, 2021.

The interviewees I spoke with all had different physical and/or mental health issues related to the stress of the war. In eight out of nine cases, the participant notified me of a physical complaint when we had scheduled an interview. The most common complaints were migraine, fever, vomiting, and exhaustion. About 50% of the time the person decided they no longer wanted to do the interview; 50% of the remaining participants had physical symptoms on two or three scheduled interview times before we actually met. Some participants who decided they did not want to interview shared with me that talking about anything related to the war evokes such painful emotional or physical symptoms that they simply could not participate. Houri, a banker in her late twenties from Shushi, living in Boston, related her trouble sleeping during the war:

I just don't want to get emotional so just I'll just list what I remember. My brothers were soldiers so I couldn't sleep; I only slept four hours per night for the whole 44 days of the war. Whenever I did sleep, I would have nightmares where they [Azeris] would enter our homes and hurt us and destroy our home. Unfortunately, these nightmares have become true. I have heard that they have destroyed the graveyard where, you know, all of our ancestors are buried. A lot of us [Armenians] were suicidal. I have never had thoughts like that, but every single night before going to bed, I prayed that I wouldn't wake up in the morning.<sup>199</sup>

Very few of the participants spoke as freely of their emotional state during and after the war. I saw hints of logical mental health effects in the physical symptoms they related, and certain times when their eyes glazed over or they changed the subject when asked how they coped with the war. I always respected this and did not pursue this line of questioning further.

Houri went on, speaking of the numbness she still feels:

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<sup>199</sup> Houri Najaryan, interview.

Nothing makes us [her and her family] happy, life is meaningless. I'm expecting a baby, my book is about to be published, I'm getting my citizenship [United States] soon, and we're buying our first house. So you would think these are all exciting events. But all are perceived as information, not emotion. [switching to second person] You are very numb. You understand with your brain that this is a happy event, but you don't feel any emotions. Our park is in bloom and the trees are beautiful, but I just don't feel anything. There is no difference between winter and spring. When you lose the most precious things: ancestral graves, cathedrals—your cultural heritage, your family history, then thinking of having a house isn't exciting.<sup>200</sup>

Houri's illuminating statement that everything is "perceived as information" without any emotion attached to it is compelling. It reminds me of what other participants said about feeling like life has no meaning, or like they are a ghost. Yet some others were aghast that some of their friends thought this way. They believed such thinking gives Azeris power if they allow themselves to feel any kind of apathy.

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<sup>200</sup> Houri Najaryan, interview.



## Chapter VIII

### Modes of Resilience: Hope in Hopeless Times

When I asked my interviewees how they coped during and after the war, many were confused—why would I even ask such a question? Many responded by saying they are just trying to survive day to day, and the concept of resilience or coping was completely foreign to them. I tried rephrasing the question, but I still was told that I was asking the wrong question. For them, a better question seemed to be: “How are you surviving moment to moment?” Or perhaps, “What has made you keep going and not give up?”

A common theme among interviewees was a sense of working for something greater than themselves, whether that was focusing on their families, a charity, church, or advocacy work. Tigran, an investor who moved to Boston during the war, explained:

As far as coping, I think coping implies that you are able to deal with something, that you have found a way to. . . I don't mean 100% manage the stress, but deal with it. In that sense we're not coping, or we're not coping well. The second I wake up, it's a hell, and I think “Oh thank God, the morning is over, now we have to survive through the daytime.” Then “oh, the daytime is over, now we have to survive through the evening.” Then “oh thank God the evening is over.” I just wish I could sleep and wake up months and years later when this hell is done. So I don't think that's coping. And you know, I'm not a very weak person in many ways, so it's not just me being weak.<sup>201</sup>

Even though Tigran said he's not coping well, he still has the drive to wake up every day. He explained that it is his three small children who give him the energy to keep going. He

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<sup>201</sup> Tigran Abrahamian, personal interview by Marion McDow, Zoom, July 13, 2022.

feels like if the war is ever going to end, it will be the younger generation that ultimately can secure lasting peace, and they who will reap the benefits. The importance of children and family was a common theme among my interviewees. Many said their family was the only thing they could focus on as long as the rest of their society was in such turmoil.

Several interviewees mentioned women having babies as a way to cope with the war:

We have a military cemetery in Yerevan and whenever I go, there are so many new mothers of all types sitting there with their newborn babies. I have seen mothers as young as 18 and as old as 45 sitting there. Sometimes I think she is the grandma, but when I talk with her I find out that her husband came back from the war and she decided to have this baby. They found their only solution was to have another baby. Even if they had lots of previous babies, they want to have another one. They want this new one to live. It's like because we saw so much death, so much violence, we need these babies to remind us that not everything is dead, not everything is hopeless.

Anoush related how many mothers she knows are focusing on their family instead of politics:

When evil reigns on Earth, we can only protect ourselves. This is the reason I think mothers are turning to their families. I think a lot of people have realized the only way to fight evil is with love. You don't attack them, but you create a shield from the evil with your love. I think if all of us that do that in our family, it will create a general field of protection for everyone. Even those who don't realize what's going on, they will be protected by our common love. That's why I think mothers are focusing on their families and their community.<sup>202</sup>

In her book *44 Days*, Lika Zakaryan, writes about her experiences living in a bomb shelter for much of the war in her hometown of Stepanakert. What is interesting about her account is the seemingly small things that anchored hope within her, like her story of the goldfish she found in her bombed-out office building:

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<sup>202</sup> Anoush Abrahamian. Interview by: Marion McDow. Personal interview. Zoom, July 13, 2022

I asked my dad to give me a ride to my office at Civil Net. I was thinking back to September 22nd when it was our cameraman's birthday. He is my cameraman and my best friend and my boyfriend. I had not gotten a present for him. Oh, I had gotten a present for him, fish. I wanted these fish to share our space. Even when the war broke out, we were still going to the office to feed them under the shelling.

After he got drafted, I couldn't go any more. Since the city was being bombed heavily and I was alone, I thought our fish were gone. That thought hurt a lot. So I went into the office and straight to the aquarium. The fish were there, but they didn't move. I kept saying in my mind, Please be alive, please, please be alive. They did not move. And I thought, Well, that's it. So many days without food. How will I live with such a sin in my heart? I mean, they only recently became members of our office, our second home. I sat next to them, almost crying, and suddenly one fish moved and then the other. I jumped up. I hugged the aquarium and I started crying. I had to give them food and I was begging them to see the food and eat it. They saw. They eat. I decided not to leave them alone any more, and I took them with me. They will be in my shelter now until the owner returns. I changed the water, added more food, and have been checking on them every 5 minutes.

This fish story is a true sign for me today that we should not lose hope, even when it seems there is none. Life can reward us and give us strength to live.<sup>203</sup>

It was often these mundane life treasures that were just as important to my interviewees during the war. It was almost as if they were looking for something, anything, to allow their mind to rest for a bit and not have to think about what was going on around them.

Nora tells of how an old iPod and an American rock song changed how she was coping with the war:

One day I went out of the basement for a little bit. I knew it was dangerous, but I had to, just to not feel like a prisoner for 15 blessed minutes. Our neighbor's house had been bombed during the night, and I was looking through the rubble to see if I could find anything to save for them. I found this old iPod—it must have been over 10 years old. It was still connected to the headphones but the screen was blank. I just pushed

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<sup>203</sup> Lika Zakaryan, *44 Days: Diary From an Invisible War* (Yerevan: Creative Armenia, 2021), 78. <https://www.44daysbook.com>.

play and the first song that played was Bob Dylan, “Don’t Think Twice It’s Alright.” I had only heard the song a couple of times but something about it really hit me that day. I listened to it on repeat for the next three weeks. I still have that iPod. I hope it never breaks. That music just gave me a little bit of hope.<sup>204</sup>

Houri, a journalist and lawyer, recently returned to the U.S. from Armenia, has had different coping strategies:

In the last two years, it’s been very hard to do anything. But recently I realized that when I’m faced with injustice, the anger and frustration to fight against it gives me energy when I have none. When I was living in Armenia, we were all out in peaceful protests. . . . My husband thinks the same way as I do about this. This is a common goal. It weirdly united us against this evil that we’re facing together. We’re protesting because Armenia is not the same country that I grew up in. It is now a country where Artsakhies are hated in a way I’ve never experienced before. It’s like their [Azerbaijani and Turkish] propaganda has won and it’s up to us to fight against this.<sup>205</sup>

Protests broke out on September 14, 2022 in Yerevan. Demonstrators, angry with Prime Minister Pashinyan, demanded his resignation for his willingness to offer territorial concessions to Azerbaijan, particularly in mainland Armenia, as part of a potential peace treaty.<sup>206</sup> Several of my interviewees spoke of their shock as Pashinyan began offering small territorial gains for Azerbaijan starting in 2020. The latest territorial surrenders angered many Armenians who saw their government giving much more than they needed to for a fair peace treaty.

Although most of my interviewees agreed that these current peace agreements were unfair, it was interesting to note the breadth of opinions they held. For instance,

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<sup>204</sup> Nora Hakobyan, personal interview by Marion McDow, Zoom, June 4, 2022.

<sup>205</sup> Houri Baghdasaryan, personal interview by Marion McDow, Zoom, June 4, 2022.

<sup>206</sup> “Armenia: Anti-government protests likely to continue in Yerevan through mid-September.” Crisis 24. <https://crisis24.garda.com/alerts/2022/09/armenia-anti-government-protests-likely-to-continue-in-yerevan-through-mid-september-update-1>.

some believed the only way to achieve lasting peace is through acquiescence to Azerbaijan and Turkey, thereby normalizing diplomatic relations and trade. These interviewees stressed that they thought Armenia had been too isolated for too long, and it cannot survive in the global age as such. Many others expressed anger that Pashinyan's government was negotiating with Azerbaijan at all when there is such widespread government propaganda that dehumanizes Armenians. These interviewees believe that any concessions under these conditions will set up the conditions for a second genocide and possibly the end of Armenia as a sovereign nation. Many expressed the desire for a cessation of state-sponsored hatred, also the end of stated intentions to take over Armenia to create a pan-Turkish state, as essential starting points for any peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Still others believed that no peace agreement or concessions should ever be made to Turkey or Azerbaijan. Although in a minority, these Armenians believe it is possible for Armenia to expand its borders "from sea to sea," that is, from the Caspian Sea to the east and the Mediterranean Sea to the west (representing the borders of "Greater Armenia").<sup>207</sup>

Among the Armenians who demonstrated in the protests, many may be using the war as fodder for a fire to change what they see as the status quo. The Armenians I spoke with seemed to be united in their belief that something needs to change, but they were divided in how that should be done. At this time, the protests have died down, although

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<sup>207</sup> P. L. Kessler, "Kingdoms of Europe - Armenia," The History Files. <https://www.historyfiles.co.uk/KingListsMiddEast/AnatoliaArmenia.htm>.

they were unsuccessful in ousting the Pashinyan government or making any demonstrable changes to the peace agreement.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Knar Khudoyan, “The ‘Revolution of Millionaires’ in Armenia is Turning Increasingly Tense.” OpenDemocracy, 01 Jun 2022. Accessed 11 Dec 2022. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/revolution-of-millionaires-armenia-protests-nagorno-karabakh/>.

## Chapter IX

### Possibilities for Peace

I asked all of the participants whether they thought there was hope for a peaceful resolution with Azerbaijan in the future. Every single one of them said no. Some participants qualified their “no” by saying that they do not believe peace is possible with the current regimes in Turkey and Azerbaijan (i.e., political). When I asked Tamar if she thought there was any hope for peace, her response was initially “absolutely not.” But then she continued, and I discovered her perspective was much more nuanced:

My first inclination is, nope, it’s impossible. Look at the atrocities they’ve committed. But a few days ago, I was sitting down with my dad having coffee outside on a balcony, and I was saying, T“here’s no way, there’s no way that we’re ever going to reconcile because it’s literally one group [Azeris] trying to wipe the other group [Armenians] off the face of the planet. The thing is, when you think about the fact that just a few months ago, they [the Turkish government] brought in Syrian mercenaries to decapitate Armenians and gave each of them \$100 for every Armenian head, it’s hard to imagine that peace is possible.

I will say, when you look at other examples, I mean look at Rwanda, Liberia, and Senegal. There were mediation efforts and someone who killed another person’s family is sitting down with that person having coffee. So it’s not impossible. But there has to be a willingness from both sides, right? When both sides say, “Look, we’re both human and for the sake of both of us we should move on.” But with the Azeri mindset as it is right now, Azerbaijani people and its government mindset of complete hatred and a desire to annihilate Armenians, it’s very hard to see that happening any time soon.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Tamar Kocharyan, interview.

Tamar brought up some examples of successful peace efforts in seemingly hopeless situations. Like Armenia, Liberia had a terrible war where terrible atrocities were committed. But a grass-roots effort by a group of women led to real change and sustained peace.<sup>210</sup> I believe the same is true for Armenia. And like Tamar, I believe it will require both sides to decide that the amount lost through continued conflict is more than the amount gained through military victory.

Since both Armenia and Azerbaijan have become increasingly homogenous over the past few decades, any hope for peace will have to begin with a sustained and intentional dialogue. Because of the Armenian travel ban and propaganda within Azerbaijan, coupled with Armenians' extreme distrust of Azeris and a lack of socialization between the societies, it is easy to see how peace efforts have been stymied. Even when peace treaties are signed, if political leaders continue to issue contemptuous statements and citizens are given no means of building relationships with one another, it is no wonder these treaties continue to fail.

Arev, an Armenian diplomat in his forties, spoke about his ideas for a change in negotiation tactics:

Never have women taken part in a negotiation process, period, period, in any way, so no woman was ever involved. And when I'm saying no woman, I mean both, not from the Azerbaijani or the Armenian side, not even from the Russian side as a mediator. I'm referring to the front negotiators when I'm saying no woman; they were not the decision makers. From that perspective, one can argue, because of the effect that women are having in the negotiation process globally, that if we had more women involved in the process from both sides, we would probably have a different outcome than what we have now.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Joan Johnson-Freese, *Women, Peace, and Security: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 147-151.

<sup>211</sup> Arev Grigorian, personal interview by Marion McDow, Zoom, April 5, 2021.



Research compiled by Joan Johnson-Freese in her book, *Women, Peace, and Security*, shows that when women are involved in peace negotiations, peace agreements are 20% more likely to last at least two years, and 35% more likely to last at least 15 years.<sup>212</sup> This is because women face inherently higher risk when there is war: they are more likely to die of indirect effects, lose sons and husbands, and suffer economic devastation.<sup>213</sup> Women are also the foundation of society: they raise the next generation, are more in touch with the community, and are often the first to know if violence is around the corner.<sup>214</sup> They are also usually not seen as violent warriors and can often talk peacefully at the outset without fear. Without the stakeholders of 50% of the population, Armenia and Azerbaijan run the risk of leaving out vital perspectives in their search for peace.

In October 2000, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution 1325, which states: “Both parties in a conflict must support women’s participation in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction, and protect women and girls from wartime sexual violence.”<sup>215</sup> Therefore, the UN—and the United States as signatory to this resolution—have an obligation to take meaningful steps to curb the violence and include women in the peace process.

Human rights organizations such as the International Criminal Court and Amnesty International have an obligation to put pressure on Turkey and Azerbaijan to cease state-sponsored violence, both toward Armenians as well as their cultural heritage. My

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<sup>212</sup> Johnson-Freese, *Women, Peace and Security*, 138.

<sup>213</sup> Johnson-Freese, *Women, Peace and Security*, 19.

<sup>214</sup> Johnson-Freese, *Women, Peace and Security*, 29.

<sup>215</sup> Valerie Hudson, and Patricia Leidl, *The Hilary Doctrine: Sex and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 190-191.

interviewees stated that many Armenians face silence, as happened during the genocide in 1915. If the world continues to turn a blind eye, Armenians run the risk of sleepwalking into another genocide, further destabilizing a region that is the heart of so much cultural and historical wealth.

What was surprising to me was that the types of challenges Armenians face with the most recent 2022 war are remarkably similar to the challenges faced by Armenians in the wars in the 1990s and 2016.<sup>216</sup> The main difference is the increase in cyber violence. But this is just a shift in method; previously, misinformation was spread through word-of-mouth and traditional print media outlets.

There is also the issue raised by many participants about the failure of large international organizations to help with the peace process and human rights concerns. I believe there is much potential for grass-roots peace efforts between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. As Tamar mentioned, Liberia saw an end to their brutal civil war when Muslim and Christian women banded together and demanded an end to violence.<sup>217</sup> If more inroads were created for mediation between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, each side might be able to see the humanity in the other, therefore circumventing efforts to paint one side as inhuman or as conclusively abominable. Tamar offered her perspective:

We are specks of dust in this universe, right? Wars and empires happen and collapse and rise and fall and entire languages are forgotten. The world has operated this way for forever. It's very easy to take that stance and let injustice continue. But when you have the chance to do something about injustice, you have to do it, because when you think about it, these are your people, this is your language. And you know, Azeris have lost their young men, too, just like we have. There have been the ethnic clashes

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<sup>216</sup> De Waal. *Black Garden*.

<sup>217</sup> Franck Kuwono, "Women: Liberia's Guardians of Peace," *Africa Renewal*, 6 Apr 2018. <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/april-2018-july-2018/women-liberia%E2%80%99s-guardians-peace>.

in the past between us and Azeris, too. I really hope that someday we decide that we're tired of losing our young men, we're tired of bombing each other, we're just tired.<sup>218</sup>

Indeed, it will take both sides agreeing they are tired of the bloodshed. Following the war in the 1990s, there were dozens of grass-roots peace efforts that rose from concerned citizens who were tired of the bloodshed. These small, peace-building organizations ranged from registered NGOs, to groups on Facebook, and ad-hoc community organizations. None of them received government support or much media attention, but they all had one goal: ending the incessant violence in Artsakh by supporting dialogue between Armenians and Azerbaijanis and educating the public about the peace-building process. Unfortunately, all such organizations were shut down in Azerbaijan, which resulted in the demise of the Armenian organizations as well. As of this writing, I was unable to find a single NGO that funded in-person dialogue and peace efforts between Armenians and Azeris.

However, I did find a Facebook group called “Crossroads” (*Перекресток* in Russian), which uses its platform to nurture online dialogue between the two countries using the common language of Russian.<sup>219</sup> In observing Crossroads over the past year, I noticed that the moderators are quick to condemn any overly political comments and ban anyone who does not comply with their rules of no hate speech, inflammatory political remarks, or harassment. This seems to be necessary, as such a digital meeting room could quickly devolve into a battlefield. Participants share beautiful places in their respective countries, stories of inter-ethnic relationships, and historical photos and stories of

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<sup>218</sup> Tamar Kocharyan, interview.

<sup>219</sup> Crossroads / Перекресток [Russian]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/4456859751016518>.

Armenians living in Baku and Azeris living in Yerevan. If there were more of these spaces, inter-ethnic dialogue would be normalized, but I believe digital platforms, while a good starting point, can only go so far; there needs to be the opportunity for in-person meetings.

Through archival internet research, I found a few [now closed] peace-building organizations that may offer a blueprint for what is possible in the future. The Azerbaijan Department of Transcaucasian Women’s Dialogue (ADTD) is a now-defunct NGO that specialized in educating women and youth about methods of grassroots peace-building. Their three-day training course, “Women’s Role in Peace Building Process,” had more than 1,200 participants. With 60 chapters throughout Azerbaijan, they taught women how to be peace-keepers in their own communities as well as methods for inter-ethnic dialogue. Elmira, one youth participant from Baku, describes what it means to be a peace-keeper:

When I tell people that I am a peacemaker, they are surprised. They think peacemakers are only military men. I always tell them about the student club that has become a part of my life. If more people knew about this, then we wouldn’t listen to xenophobes for which conflicts are the goal and a means of existence.<sup>220</sup>

Empowering women and young people as agents of peace has enormous potential.

Women are 48% of the population in Azerbaijan and children (under 18) account for another 25%.<sup>221</sup> Therefore, empowering women and children as peacemakers could normalize relations with Armenia.

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<sup>220</sup> Creation of the Armenian Peace Coalition, Azerbaijan Gender Information Center, 2009. [http://gender-az.org/index\\_en.shtml?id\\_doc=138](http://gender-az.org/index_en.shtml?id_doc=138).

<sup>221</sup> “Azerbaijan—The World Factbook., 2021. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/azerbaijan/>.

The Coalition for Peace (CFP) in Armenia integrates women's organizations and individuals into active peacemakers. Founder Ilona Ter-Minasyan publishes a newsletter dedicated to understanding peace values and highlighting women's contributions. CFP also facilitates an educational workshop for children called "Peace Lessons," which familiarizes students with the UN Resolution 1325, which requires equal participation of women in peace and security efforts.<sup>222</sup>

Armine Mikaelyan is the founder of Nor Luyce, a center for peace in Artzakh, focused on empowering young women. Their Peace Center was unique in the region in Gyumri, northwestern Armenia. Children learned peace-building and dialogue techniques at the Center so they could express themselves, understand other points of view, and become "peace ambassadors."<sup>223</sup> Mikaelyan says: "Peace not only means the absence of war but our relationship with the people around us. In order to secure this kind of peace it is necessary to seriously consider the issues of youth training in peacemaking."

Citizens in Azerbaijan and Armenia are already doing the hard work to build and promote peace. They succeeded where their governments have failed in decades of peace talks. These grassroots efforts are powerful tools for the next generation of peacemakers. If there is to be any hope for the next generation, the governments of both countries need to not only allow these kinds of efforts to take place, but they need to actively promote them.

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<sup>222</sup> UN Security Council, Office of the Special Advisor on Gender. "Landmark resolution on Women, Peace and Security (Security Council resolution 1325)," 2000). <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/>.

<sup>223</sup> Equal Power—Lasting Peace. "Women's full participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding," 2020. <http://www.equalpowerlastingpeace.org/five-conflicts/nagorno-karabakh/>.

Another vital segment of the peace-building process between Armenia and Azerbaijan are women in the negotiation process. Because women are not involved in formal negotiations, Armenian and Azerbaijani women lead informally: negotiating for the release of prisoners, de-mining efforts, and securing the safe-passage for refugees, journalists, and other civilians.

Arzu Abdullayeva of Azerbaijan and Anahit Bayandur of Armenia successfully brokered prisoner of war exchanges and promoted dialogue following the 1988 Artzakh war, for which they won the Olaf Palme Peace Prize in 1992. Abdullayeva and Bayandur (before her death in 2011),<sup>224</sup> had been working in reconciliation efforts for the last 26 years. Encouraged by memories of times when Armenians and Azerbaijanis lived side by side as neighbors and friends, they created the Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation and co-wrote the textbook, *Gender and Peace*.<sup>225</sup> Their partnership in peace-building efforts in the south Caucasus represents one of the most enduring and successful cooperative efforts between Armenians and Azerbaijanis to date.

In 2013, young Armenian and Azerbaijani activists Zaruhi Hovanesian and Khadija Ismailova jointly won the Young Women's Caucasus Peace Award. Hovanesian founded "The Army in Reality," an organization dedicated to eliminating corruption in the Armenian army. Ismailova, a journalist, is actively working to advance human rights

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<sup>224</sup> "Armenian peace promoter has left us," Ålands Fredsinstitut, February, 2011. <https://peace.ax/en/en-armensk-fredskaempe-har-gatt-ur-tiden-en/>.

<sup>225</sup> Gular Mehdizade, and Sabina Abubekirova. "Meet Arzu: Peace Agent Between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Chaikhana Media. The Peace-Builders, 18 Oct 2019. <https://chaikhana.media/en/stories/731/meet-arzu-peace-agent-between-azerbaijan-and-armenia> .

and democracy in Azerbaijan while exiled in Sweden.<sup>226</sup> These efforts point to enthusiasm in peace-building dialogues within the next generation.

In my own experience, I happened to serendipitously meet an Azeri-American. At first, I had no idea she was Azeri, so when I told her the subject of my thesis, she said, “You know I’m Azeri. I was born in Syria, but my parents are from Azerbaijan.” I was admittedly shocked and immediately assessed whether she felt hostility toward me. But I also wanted to let her know that I wanted a dialogue with her and did not harbor any automatic resentments.

She acknowledged that present conditions of hate speech were difficult. She spoke of Azerbaijan as an almost completely closed society, likening it to Iran. She described the internet as heavily censored, with citizens regularly jailed and tortured for speaking out against the government since all news media is government-owned. In Azerbaijan, there was only one acceptable way to think: the regime was perfect and Armenians were not only a sworn enemy, but they were totally inhuman, worse than dogs. She insisted that if I spoke about our conversation I could not use her name or any details of how we met or when. She told me that if our conversation had not been in person, she would have been too afraid to speak for fear that she would be tracked down by the Azerbaijani government. She said, “You don’t know what they do to people who speak out. No one can, it’s too dangerous.” She acknowledged that given the present situation in Azerbaijan, peace was nearly impossible. Still, I was extremely grateful to have met her and to learn that she was not only sympathetic to the pain propagated by governments, but how willing she was to speak with me about these issues.

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<sup>226</sup> Equal Power—Lasting Peace.

I told her I understood that neither Armenia nor Azerbaijan had ever been 100% homogenous; there have always been Muslims living in Armenian lands and Armenians living in Muslim lands. Therefore, the idea that all Azeris or all Armenians can be expelled from Artzakh is antithetical to how these lands have operated since the first historical accounts of the region in the 13th century. That first account is from Johann Schilitberger, a German who served in the Mongol armies. He describes Artzakh as a majority Christian region with a sizable Muslim minority.<sup>227</sup>

Some of my interviewees also acknowledged the difficulty that Azeris have had to endure in the face of Manichean government policies:

Many Azeris have lost their homes, too, right? I know we have done massacres on them, too. I don't think anyone should just be kicked out of their home, so of course they're angry. We're angry for some of the same reasons. I think if we could both just acknowledge where we have wronged the other, we could really get somewhere. Like, if Turkey and Azerbaijan acknowledged the genocide, and we also acknowledged the ways in which we've hurt them, then maybe there could be an understanding.<sup>228</sup>

Peace may look impossible right now because both sides have stated their immovable positions. Azerbaijan claims all of Artzakh, that most of mainland Armenia is theirs; Armenians claim Azeris never lived in Artzakh. I believe if enough people have the will to see the humanity across the border, peace is indeed possible.

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<sup>227</sup> Waal, Thomas de. *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*. 10th Anniversary, Revised, Updated ed. edition. New York ; London: NYU Press, 2013. pg. 162.

<sup>228</sup> Nuneh Hovhannisyanyan. Interview by: Marion McDow. Personal interview. Zoom, July 16, 2022.



## Chapter X

### Conclusion

It would be easy to suggest that both states should allow each other to travel and live in their respective territories. However, given the current levels of hatred, aided and abetted by the governments of Turkey and Azerbaijan, such a suggestion is all but wild fantasy. I believe that nothing will break this cycle of war until both governments become willing to allow their citizens to dialogue freely and cease all forms of state-sponsored hate speech and harassment.

None of this can happen, however, as long as Azerbaijan and Turkey continue their aspirations for a pan-Turkish state and denial of the genocide. There must be some concessions and willingness to negotiate. Because the situation in Artsakh has been allowed to fester for so long, I believe the only viable solution is for the region to become an independent republic. This would allow both Armenians and Azerbaijanis to live in the region without either population feeling they were subject to the other. It would also force both Armenia and Azerbaijan to cede control because each successive war sets up conditions for the next one.

Increasingly advanced military technology today creates a situation where there are more casualties and worse mental and physical harms to both combatants and civilians. I believe each war also further poisons the waters between the two countries and stymies any hope for change.

In this thesis I have argued that Armenia's experience in the 2020 Artzakh war is can be understood in terms of several themes that could be identified throughout my interviews:

- how Armenian family history is shaped by ethnic cleansing,
- cyber warfare,
- mental and physical health challenges,
- possibilities for peace, and
- modes of resilience.

The early chapters detail the major challenges faced by my interviewees and the latter chapters discuss possibilities for the future, and how individuals are dealing with the challenges of war.

### Suggestions for Further Research

There is much room for further research into this population, expanding participants and broadening perspectives to include more women, blue-collar workers, and the elderly. It would be beneficial to include research on the Azeri population. Based on my research, it is unclear if the vast majority of Azeris view Armenians in a negative way or if this is the narrative espoused by the Azerbaijani government while other viewpoints are shunned or silenced. However, the aggression experienced by the interviewees suggest a highly negative view of Armenians has been widely adopted by Azeris.

It was not clear from my interviews why some individuals tend to find within themselves greater resilience than others. Further research is required to discover all the

factors that lead to greater resilience. It is also probable that some factors are more salient than others, such as having a cohesive community (or not), having a strong will to live, etc. It is unclear if external or internal factors are more important to individual resilience, it will require more research to determine if some individuals tend toward resilience no matter their circumstances.

It was clear however, that recovery from unspeakable trauma is possible. The nature of the human brain (which we know alarmingly little about), the effects of complex experiences, and environmental factors may make it challenging to predict exactly where any individual will fall in terms of recovery. But I do believe that if we can understand which factors play a significant role and which do not, we will have better opportunities to help survivors of war and other traumas.

If these factors can be identified, then aid groups, NGOs, and governments can target specific community supports to foster greater resilience. People who have not yet healed from traumatic experiences are more likely to react with hostility or violence, they are less likely to be contributing members of society, and have difficulty forming and nurturing relationships. Armenia and Azerbaijan will need to focus on all of these factors if they are to have any possibility of lasting peace.

Finally, it is my belief that—given the history of ethnic cleansing, genocide, and human rights abuses in recent wars—the international community has a moral obligation to dissuade states from using these tactics. As in the escalation of World War II and the Nazi internment camps, the world cannot afford to sit idly by while some nations spout aspirations to exterminate one another. Therefore, I believe ethnic cleansing to be an

issue that affects everyone. When it is not condemned everywhere, there is greater likelihood it will happen anywhere.

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