

The role of ideology in mass atrocities: The case of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan

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This article attempts to explore the ideological aspects of the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict by focusing on mainstream Armenian concepts. Its main argument is that the nationalist Armenian ideology provides a substantial answer to the exercised brutality. It draws on theoretical concepts including the role of ideology in perpetrating violence and looks into the main concepts of Armenian nationalism; these include the construction of “the enemy” and its image. The particular focus is on Garegin Nzhdeh’s ideas, which have constituted the bedrock of Armenian ideology since independence in 1991. The peculiarity of Nzhdeh’s vision is that some of his pertinent ideas were “successfully” tested in Zangezur in 1920. Against this ideological background, the article then presents two case studies from the military phase of the conflict which show that the brutality exercised went beyond military necessities and targeted the civilian population. The article concludes that Armenia’s exclusionary ideology, with its indiscriminate “enemy” concept, played a key role in producing brutality on a massive scale against those deemed “guilty.”

Keywords: Armenia, Azerbaijan, ideology, Nagorno-Karabakh region



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Introduction

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 produced several conflicts in the South Caucasus, Moldova, and, recently, Ukraine. Patterns of violence, in particular against civilians, during each of these conflicts have shaped the degree of hostilities and consequently impacted on the conflict resolution processes, which still remain unresolved. More brutal and bloodier among these conflicts is the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict.

Conflicts in Georgia and Moldova also witnessed ethnic expulsions; nevertheless, not all Georgians and Moldovans were expelled from the territories controlled by the separatist entities in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transnistria. Different from this, the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict witnessed ethnic and cultural cleansing of all the territories occupied by Armenia.

Factors that can explain the notorious brutality of the occupying forces against local Azerbaijani civilians remain academically under-discussed. An available perspective is that from an Armenian academic, Aleksandr Manasyan, who holds that the local Azerbaijani population “almost entirely participated in the blockade of and war against the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast/NKAO, that is they were not civilians.”¹ In the context of the Khojaly massacre, former

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President of Armenia Serj Sargsyan also used this argument, saying: “If civilian population stays there ... then it means that it also participates in the military actions.”² It follows from this reasoning that the Azerbaijani population was considered as a legitimate military target.

Most academic research on this conflict is mostly about its roots and context as well as possible models for its resolution. Little attention has been paid so far to the reasons for and patterns of extreme brutality committed during the conflict. As Armenia’s forces advanced and militarily occupied the Nagorno-Karabakh region and seven adjacent districts of Azerbaijan, why did they commit brutalities (massacres) against peaceful residents of those regions?

1 Manasyan, A. *Karabakhskiy konflikt: klyuchevie ponyatia i khronika*, (Yerevan: Noravank, 2005), p. 23.

2 Transcript of interview by Thomas de Waal with Serzh Sarkisian, then minister of defense of Armenia (former president of Armenia), 15 December 2000, 2012, Carnegie Endowment For International Peace. http://carnegieendowment.org/files/DeVaalinterview_r.pdf

The author of this article argues that the nationalist Armenian ideology provides substantial answers to the exercised brutality. To substantiate the article's argument, the author will first dwell upon the role of ideology in mass atrocities, followed by an analysis of the mainstream Armenian ideology: its core, adjacent, and other concepts that define its worldview. Against this background, the author will look back into recent history to illustrate this ideology in action. This, then, will set the stage for an analysis of Armenia's military operation from the perspective of the treatment of civilians, with a focus on two cases studies, Khojaly and Zangilan, which are assumed to showcase the role of the Armenian ideology in the perpetration of mass atrocities. The reasons for selecting these two cases are threefold: (1) The Khojaly tragedy took place in the initial phase of the conflict, whereas Zangilan was the last district occupied; (2) Khojaly and Zangilan (which borders Iran across the Araz river) were both besieged by Armenian forces and apparently did not pose any meaningful military threat; and (3) although Khojaly was within the former Autonomous Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, Zangilan was not part of it, but situated in Azerbaijan's border district with Armenia.

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Ideology and violence

The role of ideology in instigating violence and mass atrocities is a well-studied subject. According to Straus, recent academic literature in genocide studies mostly emphasizes the strategic and ideological causes of genocide.³ The core of the "strategic" approach is that mass atrocities are a result of war, which produces threat and violence to counter that threat. Atrocities take place because of: state (in)capacity in terms of unprofessionalism and lack of information to discern civilians from combatants; state preference to value one group of citizens while targeting the others; and tactics of war such as guerilla and (counter)insurgency.⁴

The strategic approach has certain merits in explaining atrocities, especially in highlighting the lack of professionalism of warring parties in conducting hostilities. However, several problems with the strategic approach are self-evident. First, war, as a kind of violent political

3 Straus, S., "'Destroy Them to Save Us': Theories of Genocide and the Logics of Political Violence," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 24(4), 2012, 544-560, p.544.

4 *Ibid.*, pp.547-548.

interaction, is not in a position to explain the motivations and calculations of warring parties in conducting atrocities. Second, according to Straus, this approach leaves several questions unanswered, especially why a strategic objective is adopted of destroying civilian groups.⁵

In turn, the ideological approach to atrocities is explained in a more consistent way in the academic literature. According to Barbara Harff, a key variable in committing atrocities is an “exclusionary ideology,” which is “a belief system that identifies some overriding purpose or principle that justifies efforts to restrict, persecute, or eliminate certain categories of people.”⁶ Such an ideology acts on the mechanism of exclusion, which divides people into legitimate and illegitimate groups.⁷ Ben Kiernan concurs with Harff on ideology as the key ingredient and distinguishes four specific “preoccupations” that lead to genocidal violence: race, territorial expansion, religion, and cultivation.⁸ According to Straus, ideology puts forward explicit objectives “that carry the seeds of extreme violence.”⁹ The vision of ideology itself offers violence to achieve, *inter alia*, “a purified national community or a return to an idealized past.”¹⁰ Having examined the role of ideology in perpetuating violence, Leader Maynard identifies three proximate causal conduits, such as: (1) produce motivation to perpetuate violence; (2) provide legitimization to perceptions to allow violence before and at the time of execution; and (3) retrospectively postulate rationales on the execution or approval of violence.¹¹

Both Harff and Straus emphasize the role of elites in defining “objectives” and “enemies” on the way to perpetrating violence.¹² Michael Mann suggests a more nuanced and layered approach to perpetrators. According to him, three main layers of perpetrators exist, consisting of: “(a) radical elites running party-states; (b) bands of militants forming violent paramilitaries; and (c) core constituencies providing mass though not majority popular support.”¹³ This differentiation of

5 *Ibid.*, pp.547-548.

6 Harff, B., “No Lessons Learned from the Holocaust? Assessing Risks of Genocide and Political Mass Murder since 1955,” *The American Political Science Review*, 97(1), 2003, pp. 57-73, p.63.

7 Straus, S., *op. cit.*, p.549.

8 Gellately, R. and Kiernan, B., *The specter of genocide*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.29.

9 Straus, S. *op. cit.*, p.549.

10 *Ibid.*

11 Maynard, L., “Rethinking the Role of Ideology in Mass Atrocities,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 26(5), 2014, pp.821-841, p.838.

12 Harff, B., *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63; Straus S., *op. cit.*, p.549.

13 Mann, M. *The dark side of democracy*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 8.

perpetrators presents functional categories among those perpetrating atrocities: those who give orders; those who implement them; and those who support. This broad approach to perpetrators distributes the responsibility for violence across society and can partially explain the outcome of mass atrocities. Mann also highlights the function of ideology in binding together perpetrators in their goals. According to Straus, the ideological approach solves problems that the strategic approach was unable to address, in particular dealing with targeting civilians *en masse* during conflicts.¹⁴

Having tried to describe the role of ideologies in instigating mass atrocities and other crimes against civilian populations, the author will turn to outlining the mainstream Armenian ideology and its relationship to major extreme ideologies and will analyze its morphology.

Armenian ideology: Founder, logic, and concepts

Nzhdeh and the Armenian ideology

There is no single document titled as, or presenting, “the Armenian ideology.” However, the approach to the personality of Garegin Nzhdeh and his ideas by Armenia’s official institutions, political parties, armed forces, and diaspora organizations provides a substantive answer. Nzhdeh’s racial ideas were especially popular on the eve of and immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, i.e., during the war against Azerbaijan. Nationalism was mostly organized along the lines of his ideas and political organizations, including the then-ruling Armenian National Movement, entertained their audiences with Nzhdeh’s ideas.¹⁵ The Republican Party of Armenia (RPA), which controlled the country from 2008 to 2018, located Nzhdeh at the center of the national ideology. According to the “Core Values” section of the RPA’s program, the theory of Garegin Nzhdeh occupies “a substantial place” in the Armenian ideology.¹⁶ It should also be noted that Nzhdeh’s views also formed “the ideological basis of the Armenian Army.”¹⁷ A transnational, semi-clandestine Dashnak party, which expelled Nzhdeh for his radical views but later restored him, continues staunchly

14 Straus, S., *op. cit.*, p. 549.

15 Panossian, R., “The Past as a Nation. Three Dimensions of American Identity,” *Geopolitics* 7(2), 2002, pp.121-146, p.133.

16 Program of the Republican Party of Armenia, *Our Values*, 1999, available at: <http://www.hhk.am/en/program/> (accessed September 17, 2017).

17 Panossian, 2002, *op. cit.*, p.134.

to follow the nationalist ideology, both in Armenia and among the diaspora.¹⁸ The Tsegakron movement, established by Nzhdeh as a kind of youth organization of the Dashnak party, changed its name to Youth Federation of the Dashnak Party in order to hide its racism-based connotations¹⁹ and today operates in the United States.

To better understand Nzhdeh's ideas, it is expedient to look into his personal background and the historical context of his thinking to set the stage for summarizing the main tenets of his ideas. Garegin Nzhdeh (real surname Ter-Arutunyan) was born in 1886. He graduated from Bulgarian military school in 1907. Nzhdeh's political activity started when he became a member of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, Dashnaksutyun. For engaging in revolutionary activities, he was imprisoned by Tsarist Russia. Nzhdeh participated in the First Balkan War against the Ottoman Empire in 1912, then returned to the Caucasus and was "pardoned" by Tsarist Russia on condition that he fight against the Turks in World War I.²⁰ During the short independence of Armenia in 1918–1920, Nzhdeh served as a local military commander who became notorious for his brutal actions against local Muslim populations, particularly in Zangezur. According to Razmik Panossian, this area was ethnically cleansed, which "enhanced the country's [Armenia's] demographic balance in favour of the Armenians."²¹

After Armenia lost its independence in 1921, Nzhdeh, as a member of the Dashnak party, devoted himself to organizing the Armenian diaspora in the West. Nzhdeh was inspired by Nazism in developing his *tsegakron* (literally, "race-religion") ideology. With Nazism on the rise in Germany and its ideology gaining purchase, Nzhdeh penned his "Tsegakronutyun as a victorious power" piece, published in Bulgaria in 1932, which served as a basis for his further activity. At the time, Nzhdeh's views were of such an extreme nature that he was "kicked out of the ARF in 1937 for his extremism, racist views, and sympathy for fascism."²² Later, the

18 Tololyan, Kh., "Terrorism In Modern Armenian Political Culture," *Terrorism And Political Violence* 4(2), 1992, p.112.

19 Arakelyan, D., "Karekin Njdeh: A Biographical Sketch," *Asbarez*, December 21, 2015, available at: <http://asbarez.com/143441/karekin-njdeh-a-biographical-sketch/> (accessed: October 17, 2017).

20 Lalayan, M., *Garegin Nzhde i ego uchenie. Istoriya dvijeniya Tsegakron*, (Yerevan: Republican Party of Armenia, 2004), p.4

21 Panossian, R., *The Armenians*. (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2006), p.255.

22 Panossian, R., "Post-Soviet Armenia: Nationalism and Its (Dis)Contents" in Lowell Barrington (ed.) *After Independence: Making and Protecting the Nation in Postcolonial and Postcommunist States* (University of Michigan Press, 2006), p.245.

ideological affiliation played its role in Nzhdeh becoming a Wehrmacht general, putting under German command a 30,000-strong Armenian Legion that fought in the Crimea and the Caucasus.²³ Owing to this collaboration, Nzhdeh was imprisoned by the Soviets in Bulgaria in 1944 and later died in prison.²⁴ However, after his death Nzhdeh was later restored by both the Dashnak party and the Armenian Government. In 1992, he was exculpated by the Armenian Prosecutor General, who acknowledged “his dedication to the cause of justice for his people.”²⁵

Nzhdeh's views as a subset of Nazism

The timing of the Nzhdeh's paper, developed in the 1930s, coincides with the rise of Nazism and fascism in Europe and the content of his writing leaves no doubt as to the impact of those ideologies on Nzhdeh in developing his ideas. Interestingly, Nzhdeh's ideology at the time was not embraced by all Armenians: “anti-Dashnaks called it [the ideology] ‘race worshipping.’ Sympathizers translated it as ‘devotees of the race,’ ‘followers of the race’ or ‘believers of the race.’”²⁶

To understand relationship of Nzhdeh with fascism and Nazism, it is important to explain, in a nutshell, what they stand for. Nazism and fascism have no universal appeal (like socialism or capitalism) as they are tailored to their own communities and, differently from some other secular ideologies, both are anti-intellectual and anti-rationalist in their approaches.²⁷ While many experts equate fascism and Nazism, there is no wide consensus that the two are identical.²⁸ For example, the United States Department of State in its statements does not use the two terms interchangeably, but differentiates between the two.

The two notions differ in some key aspects. Nazism's focus is on biological racism, whereas Fascist Italy was concerned with a cultural nationalism. Moreover, Nazism's conception of history is based on the conflict between races, in which the Germanic Aryan is superior,

23 Jerusalem Post, *Armenian monument to Nazi collaborator draws criticism*, June 17, 2016, available at: <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/armenian-monument-to-nazi-collaborator-draws-criticism-457072> (accessed: December 23, 2017).

24 Arakelyan, D., op. cit.

25 *Ibid.*

26 Panossian, 2006, *op. cit.*, p.301.

27 Schuman, F. “The Political Theory of German Fascism,” *The American Political Science Review*, 28(2), 1934, p.211.

28 The US State Department, Press Statement: Message on the 75th Anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE Day), May 8, 2020, available at: <https://www.state.gov/message-on-the-75th-anniversary-of-victory-in-europe-ve-day/> (Accessed: December 23, 2020).

the Negro is inferior, and the Jew is corruptive, while others are in between.²⁹ Fundamental to this conflict is an eternal struggle for survival and domination. Other races try to suppress and persecute Germans, in particular the Jews, who were seen as responsible for the defeat of Germany in WWI.

Like Nazism, Fascism draws its legitimacy from its nation, is preoccupied with perceived decadence, and aspires to the rebirth of the national spirit, culture, and society. Fascism emphasizes revolution in a sense of “hardening the character and purifying and energizing the community,” rather than remaking the social or economic system; the primary goal is forming a new fascist man.³⁰ Central to it is to foster “civic religion,” which brings together the nation “in a new common faith and loyalty.”³¹

Despite their differences, both fascism and Nazism share certain key features. Both ideologies accept violence as a means for restructuring their imagined society. For Fascism and Nazism, eternal struggle is essential to survive.³² In essence, Nazism and Fascism are revisionist ideologies designed to mobilize a mass base and rebuild their societies along the “third way.”

It should be also emphasized that Nazism was fully race-based while Fascism was initially silent on it and only later doctrinally adopted it (perhaps under Hitler’s influence). The main feature of the racist ideology is the superiority of one’s own race and the inferiority of “others.”³³ It follows that the “superior” race, as a matter of biology, has primary rights including the right to dominate and discriminate against “inferiors.” Another aspect of it is that “inferior races” are the source of continued threat to, and/or to blame for, the hardships and difficulties of the “superior races.” If, in the case of the Nazi Germany, Jews were guilty for “many contemporary evils,”³⁴ in the case of Nzhdehist Armenians, Turks are the main source of their hardships.³⁵ A sense of victimhood that justifies any action against perceived internal and external enemies is the third aspect of the racist ideology.

29 Schuman, F. op. cit., p.218.

30 Griffin, R. and Feldman, M., *Fascism*, (London: Routledge, 2004), p.374.

31 Payne, S. *A History of Fascism 1914–1945*, (University of Wisconsin, 1995), p.9.

32 Paxton, R. *The Anatomy of Fascism*, (New York, NY: Random House, 2004), p.20.

33 Guillaumin, C. *Racism, Sexism, Power, and Ideology*, (Routledge, 1 edition, 1995), p.35.

34 Schuman, F. op. cit., p.214.

35 Gamaghelyan, P. “Rethinking The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Identity, Politics, Scholarship.” *International Negotiation* 15 (1): 33-56, 2010, p.37.

For Nazism and Fascism, violence is doctrinal and gets inspiration from Darwinism (survival of the fittest). As history has shown, the fascist or Nazi ideology is a vivid example of the role of an exclusionary ideology in perpetrating mass atrocities. Nzhdeh’s ideas, as a subset of Nazism, also put a premium on violence and he refers to war as “one of the most vigorous expressions of human evolution.”³⁶

As history has shown, the fascist or Nazi ideology is a vivid example of the role of an exclusionary ideology in perpetrating mass atrocities. Nzhdeh’s ideas, as a subset of Nazism, also put a premium on violence and he refers to war as “one of the most vigorous expressions of human evolution.”

As Table 1 shows, Nzhdeh based his main ideas on the conception of Nazi Germany. At the same time, Nzhdehism, like Fascism refers to national revival – regeneration and necessity of “national religion.” However, differently from Fascism, which emphasizes “civic religion,” Nzhdehism’s national religion implies ethnic-based worldview. Table 1 below is designed to visibly compare Nzhdeh’s ideas with Nazism’s main tenets.

Table 1. Comparison of Nazism and Nzhdeh ideas

	Nazism ³⁷	Nzhdeh’s ideas ³⁸
1	Germany is superior - Better (Aryan) race; - Better blood.	Armenian people and mentality is Aryan - Devotion to the Armenian race and blood.
2	Anti-Semitism	Anti-Turkism ³⁹
3	The «others» persecute and suppress innocent Nazi-Germany - Germany is encircled and in danger - Germany must defend herself	Armenia is besieged by its age-old enemy - The enemy is determined to exterminate us; - Self-defense is our new religion.
4	War is the father of all things	War is one of the most vigorous expressions of human evolution

36 Danieliyan, È. and Nzhdeh, G. *Selected Works*, (Montreal, Quebec: “Nakhijevan” Institute of Canada (NIC), 2011).

37 The six points related to Nazism are an abridged version of the six Nazi dogmas identified by R. Eikstein (Rudolf Eikstein., “Ideologies in psychological warfare,” *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 37(3), 1942, pp.369-387.

38 Nzhdeh’s ideas and statements corresponding to these six points are drawn from his interviews and other works compiled in Danieliyan, È. & Nzhdeh, G., op. cit.

39 Armenian popular narrative equates Azerbaijanis with Turks. See, for example, Gamaghelyan, P., “Rethinking the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Identity, Politics, Scholarship,” *International Negotiation* 15(1), 2010.

5	The individual is unimportant	Individual is nothing beyond the content of the nation's life
6	The leader-principle	Elite is the most sacred of titles and the greatest responsibilities.

As can be seen from Table 1, like Nazism, Nzhdehism is a racially based ideology linking itself to the Aryan nation and devotedness to blood, with all associated elements of an eternal struggle for domination or extermination, a sense of victimhood, the existence of an enemy “guilty in all problems,” and a prevalence of war over peace. Therefore, violence and war are considered as necessary and noble, whereas peace is cowardice and a pause between wars.⁴⁰ At the time, Nzhdeh was “kicked out of the ARF in 1937 for his extremism, racist views, and sympathy for fascism,”⁴¹ but was later restored.

It is also important to note that the Table 1 is not a comprehensive list of all the concepts of Nazism and Nzhdehism but reveals the similarity of their underlying dogmas. Apart from these dogmas, Nzhdehism shares other concepts of Nazism, including the necessity of territorial expansion for national survival (see below).

Morphology of the Armenian ideology

Having examined the relationship of Nzhdeh’s ideas with Nazism/Fascism, it is time to turn to the core tenets of the Armenian ideology. Along with Nzhdeh’s ideas, the works of other Armenian ideologues will be also referenced. It should also be noted that G. Nzhdeh did not invent all these concepts but added to them special dimensions of anti-rationalism and mysticism (as all Nazi-inspired ideologies do) along with shaping and operationalizing them with a special sense of urgency.

The author used Freeden’s morphology framework as an analysis tool for distilling the main and adjacent concepts of the Armenian ideology. The author did not use Freeden’s category of “peripheral concepts,” as it might distract from the core purpose of this paper.⁴² Instead, the author introduced the “enemy concept” of the Armenian ideology, which derives from the main and adjacent concepts. These concepts sanction operational action on the basis of the “enemy concept” to achieve the visionary objectives of the Armenian ideology. An important

40 Danielyan, È. & Nzhdeh, G, op. cit..

41 Panossian, “Post-Soviet Armenia...,” 2006, op. cit., p.245.

42 Freeden, M., Ideologies and political theory (2nd ed.). Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006.

point is that the concepts should, in this regard, not be understood as scientifically sound theoretical constructs, but rather as conceptualized myths, beliefs and utopian visions.

The core concept of the Armenian ideology is the establishment of “Greater Armenia,” a permanent theme of the All-Armenian agenda. Adjacent concepts to it are the (1) ancientness of the Armenian people; (2) racial supremacy of the Armenian people; and (3) Armenians as the “first Christian nation.” The “enemy concept” refers to Turkish (and by extension Azerbaijani) people as the source of Armenian problems. Closely interrelated with this is the alleged “Armenian Genocide,”⁴³ international recognition of which should bring “moral authority” to be used as a vehicle for achieving the core concept.

The core concept of the Armenian ideology permeates all main national discourses of Armenia and its diaspora. Nzhdeh made his contribution to this concept by bringing to it a layer of alarmist thinking. According to Nzhdeh, Armenia comprises 1/19th of historic Armenia. It is “deprived of all strategic points” and because of that it is not the “Motherland but a native corner.”⁴⁴ Armenians saw their historical lands as covering all territories “between the Kur river to the east, the Pontic mountain range to the north, the Euphrates river to the west and the Taurus Mountains to the south.”⁴⁵ According to Ayvazian, “‘Greater Armenia’ comprises Western Armenia (Eastern part of Turkey), Eastern Armenia (present-day Armenia), ‘Artsakh’, ‘Javakhk’ and ‘Nakhijevan.’”^{46, 47} According to him, Armenia exists “in three-time dimensions: in her historic, present and aspirational boundaries.”⁴⁸

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The “Greater Armenia” concept has also become one of the most intensely discussed political topics at the national and diaspora levels since late 1980s. One of the first vocal messages in this regard was sent by the Armenian Democratic Party Leader, who declared in the

43 Genocide as a legal term requires recognition by judicial means. As the Armenian case has not been recognized as genocide in legal terms, I will use the term in quotation marks.

44 Danielyan, É. & Nzhdeh, G., op. cit.. p.27, 30.

45 Panossian, 2006, op. cit. p.34.

46 The controversial term of “Artsakh” used by Armenia is referred to the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, and “Javakhk” term to the Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia, and “Nakhijevan” to the Azerbaijan’s Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic.

47 Ayvazyan, A., “Western Armenia vs. Eastern Anatolia,” *Europe & Orient* (Journal Of The Institute Tchobanian, Paris), No. 4, 2007, p.58.

48 Ibid.

Parliament in 1990, on the eve of the country's independence: "(W)e have always maintained that the territory of this Republic of Armenia is the nucleus of tomorrow's Greater Armenia."⁴⁹ The Declaration of Armenia's Independence of 1990 went further in identifying the vectors

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of Armenia's expansion. It emphasized "reunification" with the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan and "restoration of historical justice," thus hinting at territorial claims to other neighbors as well.⁵⁰ In the context of pan-Armenian objectives, in 2011 the current president of Armenia, Sargsyan, referred to his country's occupation of the Nagorno-Karabagh region as his generation's achievement (he used to be defense minister of the so-called "NKR") and, in this context, declared that every generation has its own duty.⁵¹

Reinforcing the claim to "Greater Armenia" are adjacent concepts, the main function of which is to showcase Armenian greatness in terms of history, origin, and religion. In this regard, Razmik Panossian provides a good overview of these concepts in the context of the Armenian identity in his article "The Past as a Nation," published in 2002. In the context of ancientness, as Panossian points out, the Armenian nationalists refer to this, along with indigenusness, as substantiation of their politics.⁵² Ancientness serves to lay claim to wider territories on the basis of alleged characteristics of indigenusness, such as that Armenians originated on the Armenian plateau, or even the claim that the "fatherland" of Indo-Europeans is the Armenian mountains or nearby territories. Based on a primordial approach to their national genesis, this approach claims that the Armenian people can be traced back to the sixth millennium BC.⁵³ As Panossian emphasizes, ancientness helped the nationalist discourse with vast material at the beginning of the conflict in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh region.⁵⁴

Related to ancientness is the concept of the "racial supremacy" of the

49 Astourian, S., "State, homeland, and diaspora: The Armenian and Azerbaijani cases," in Atabaki, Touraj, and Sanjyot Mehendale (eds), *Central Asia And The Caucasus*. (London: Routledge, 2004), p.83.

50 Government of Armenia, "Armenian Declaration of Independence," August 23, 1990, available at: <https://www.gov.am/en/independence/> (accessed: October 18, 2017).

51 Official Website of the President of Armenia, "In Tsakhkadzor President Sargsyan Met with the Participants of the 5th Pan-Armenian Olympiad and with the Students Sponsored by the Luys Foundation," July 23, 2011, available at: <http://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2011/07/23/news-1713/> (accessed: October 18, 2017).

52 Panossian, 2002, op. cit., p.131.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

Armenian people, the conceptual basis for which was laid by Nzhdeh, as explained above. For him, there are two supreme judges—God and the (Armenian) people.⁵⁵ By this statement, Nzhdeh elevates the Armenian people to the status of supreme judges and implicitly attaches supranational qualities to it. As put by Panossian, the three main components of Nzhdeh’s *tsegakron* ideology refer to the Armenian race “as a supreme force and being” with “the knowledge of being born from that force and being” and “loyalty to that force and being until death.”⁵⁶ Nzhdeh’s racial ideas were especially popular on the eve of and immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, i.e., during the war against Azerbaijan. Nationalism was mostly organized in line with his ideas and political organizations, including several parties, entertained their audiences with Nzhdeh’s ideas.⁵⁷ Panossian also makes a very important point by underlining that “racialist ideas remain important, and racial interpretations of Armenian identity are heard often in private (and almost always in the Armenian language).”⁵⁸ This aspect points to an important distinction from fascism or Nazism in terms of public communication. Whereas the former was adamant in “sincerely” communicating the essence of their ideology, the respective segments of the Armenian public, especially its elite, are careful not to discredit themselves in light of the international condemnation of all forms of discrimination, including racism.

The third concept—Armenians as “the first Christian nation”—is one of the most internationally communicated themes in the Armenian ideology. This is a clear political statement, since self-identifying as the first Christians is religiously unimportant because what matters is not when a person accepted the religion but how well and consistently one observes its main tenets and values. By articulating their religion, the Armenian elite try to connect themselves to the powerful Western countries. This approach is referred to as a “third force” concept, which implies relying on external great powers to achieve Armenia’s national goals because Armenia’s capabilities to accomplish those objectives are limited.⁵⁹

The “enemy concept” of the Armenian ideology is based on anti-Turkic view as the main factor in the way of achieving “Greater Armenia.”

55 Danielyan, È. & Nzhdeh, G., op. cit.

56 Panossian, 2002, *op. cit.*, p.132.

57 *Ibid.*, p.133.

58 *Ibid.*, p.132.

59 Astourian, S. op. cit., p.83.

Nzhdeh held the view that “Armenia is deprived of all strategic points,” is “besieged by its age old-enemy” and Turks will “at the opportune moment exterminate Armenianhood.”⁶⁰ According to this view, Turks played a destructive role in the history of Armenian because “[t]hey invaded the region along with other Turkic tribes in the 10th through 12th centuries and have been responsible for innumerable massacres and the colonization of indigenous peoples, including Armenians.”⁶¹ In this context the tragic events of 1915 are described as the culmination of Turkish misdeeds against Armenians.

The “enemy” concept was also fueled by a religious dimension in the context of Armenian claims to the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

Nzhdeh fighting against the Ottomans and, later, the Turkish Republic during and after WWI was actually a process of building up “Greater Armenia” by conducting atrocities and ethnic cleansing against the Turkish or Azerbaijani populations. As this venture failed, Turks became the enemy to whom all guilt was ascribed. Nzhdeh believed that unfavorable peace conditions might lead to extermination and for Armenia: “it is a peace of slow annihilation in the contemporary dominating conditions of the Middle East.”⁶² By declaring vengeance against Turks, Nzhdeh outlined the “enemy” of all Armenians. His ideas were further developed by his supporters to conceptualize the “enemy” image of the Turks. In this regard, the final shape of this “enemy” concept was introduced by Musheg Lalayan, deputy to President Sargsyan of Armenia in the ruling Republican Party who labels Turks not only historical but also “biological enemy.”⁶³ As put by Gamaghelyan, the Armenian narrative equates Azerbaijanis with Turks and refers to the former also as Turks.⁶⁴

The “enemy” concept was also fueled by a religious dimension in the context of Armenian claims to the Nagorno-Karabakh region. In this regard, the notorious Armenian nationalist, Zori Balayan, drew parallels between Armenians and Moses, “for whom God was justice incarnate” (Searle-White 2001, 88–89). By locating Armenians on the justice side of the spectrum, their enemies are placed on the opposite—evil—side. To “uproot the evil” was also an objective put forward by priests during the war.⁶⁵ Contextualizing the Bible phrases “Thou shalt not kill” and

60 Danielyan, È. & Nzhdeh, G., op. cit., p.27.

61 Gamaghelyan, op. cit., p.37.

62 Danielyan, È. & Nzhdeh, G., op. cit., p.29.

63 Lalayan, M., op. cit., p.33.

64 Gamaghelyan, op. cit. p.37.

65 Tchilingirian, H., “Religious Discourse On The Conflict In Nagorno Karabakh,” *Occasional Papers*

“Love your neighbor,” Balayan concludes that “God understood that his commandments were worth nothing if evil was not punished.”⁶⁶ By this religiously covered statement, Balayan sent a clear instruction to his audience that fighting for Karabakh was equivalent to a religious duty. In the fascist/Nazi tradition of inferiorizing “others,” Balayan labels Azerbaijan as an “artificial buffer state” while claiming that there are no such people as “Azerbaijanis.”⁶⁷ As Joshua Searle-White puts it, “this is as direct a threat to identity as an actual physical attack, since it denies to the Azerbaijanis any sense of independent existence.”⁶⁸

Nzhdeh’s ideas in action

Ethnic cleansing of Zangezur

With Nzhdeh’s ideas prevailing in the main Armenian state and among political and diaspora institutions, Armenian policies became driven by the power of this exclusionary ideology vis-à-vis its perceived “enemies.” In this context, it should be no surprise that Armenia’s armed forces, equipped with Nzhdeh’s ideology, were motivated to perpetrate violence against enemy civilians as “illegitimate groups.” The scale and intensity of atrocities and ethnic cleansing in the Nagorno-Karabakh region and other surrounding regions of Azerbaijan leave no doubt that it was nothing other than an intentionally designed policy to achieve “purified Armenian areas”—as the Nazis tried to do through the concept of Lebensraum. As confessed by former warlord, and later President of Armenia, Serj Sargsyan to British journalist Tomas de Wall, “our war somehow differed from others. We had it so that ethnic cleansing takes place. Otherwise was not possible.”⁶⁹

The scale and intensity of atrocities and ethnic cleansing in the Nagorno-Karabakh region and other surrounding regions of Azerbaijan leave no doubt that it was nothing other than an intentionally designed policy to achieve “purified Armenian areas”

Mistreatment of civilians, including ethnic cleansing and atrocities committed in the Nagorno-Karabakh region and other surrounding districts of Azerbaijan, have historical antecedents that took place

On Religion In Eastern Europe, 18(4), 1998, <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1721&context=ree>.

66 Searle-White, J., *Psychology of Nationalism*. (New York, NY, USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), pp.88-89.

67 *Ibid.*, p.76.

68 *Ibid.*

69 de Waal, Th., 2012, *op. cit.*

during 1917 to 1920. It was the collapse of Tsarist Russia in 1917, when wars and interethnic violence ensued to define spaces for national states, that led to wars between Armenians and Georgians as well as Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

In this context, events in the Zangezur *uezd* during this period deserve special attention. As described by Richard Hovannisian, Armenian military forces expelled Muslims from central Zangezur “into the peripheries of the uezd, down to the steppes in the east, or across the Araxes River into Persia.”⁷⁰ According to Musheg Lalayan, two hundred villages settled by Turkish and Tatar (read: Azerbaijani) peasants “were returned to Armenians.”⁷¹ Razmik Panossian refers to those events as “ethnic cleansing” that “enhanced the country’s [Armenia’s] demographic balance in favour of the Armenians.”⁷²

Various Armenian authors have emphasized the importance of those events for Armenia and their role in Armenian thinking. First of all, Nzhdeh played a key role and personally commanded forces engaged in atrocities. Second, Zangezur was a bridge geographically linking Azerbaijan and Turkey. By taking control of this territory and ethnically cleansing the Azerbaijani population from there, Armenians solved one of strategic problems in Nzhdeh’s vision. In this regard, Musheg Lalayan considers the Zangezur events as “the most famous page not only in his [Nzhdeh’s] life but also in the whole Armenian history of the modern times.”⁷³ Third, the ethnic cleansing and atrocities in Zangezur paid off, as the British commander in charge of the region at the time accepted the status quo and changed Britain’s position by acquiescing to Armenian rule in Zangezur.⁷⁴

Replicating historical success: Ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh region and adjacent regions of Azerbaijan

As the Zangezur events described above confirm, along with Nzhdeh’s radical ideas, his military achievements in Zangezur back in 1920 also

70 Hovannisian, R. “The Armeno-Azerbaijani Conflict over Mountainous Karabagh, 1918–1919,” *The Armenian Review*, 24, 2–94, 1971, p.194.

71 Lalayan, M., op. cit., p.8.

72 Panossian, 2006, op. cit., p.255.

73 Lalayan, op. cit., p.5.

74 Hovannisian, op. cit., p.195.

had an appeal for Armenians. Unsurprisingly, Nzhdeh's ideas formed "the ideological basis of the Armenian Army."⁷⁵

Occupation of Khojaly

Khojaly is centrally located in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. To the south was Khankendi ("Stepanakert"); to the north, east, and west, Askeran—both, at the time of the Khojaly occupation, under Armenian control. It hosted the only airport in the region and served as the main railway and road transport hub of the region. This town was considered as a hindrance to further Armenian expansion in the region.

According to the "Memorial" report, the Armenian forces blockaded the town beginning in early autumn, 1991 (September 11 and October 1 were mentioned).⁷⁶ After this period, the only communication with the town was an occasional helicopter transport, which usually in-transported foodstuffs while out-transporting the sick, elderly, and women. Air communication was disrupted after a helicopter was shot down over Shusha city on January 28, 1992. As survivors recall, following the shooting down only two helicopters flew into Khojaly, on February 13, which evacuated mostly some women and children. According to Azerbaijani estimates, around 2500 people were still in town by the time of the Armenian attack.

Interviews with former Khojaly defenders reveal that the town had local self-defense teams comprising around 160-200 fighters.⁷⁷ Of them, around 20 were from the special police (OMON) who focused on the defense of the Khojaly airport. The fighters were armed mostly with light weapons (rifles, sub-machine-guns, machine-guns, and three grenade launchers). The Memorial Report indicates that "according to the information received from both sides there were three armored vehicles and 'Alazan' launcher in the town."⁷⁸ The report additionally cites "NKR" officials claiming that there were also two "Grad" multiple rocket launch systems. Interviews with surviving Khojaly defenders

75 Panossian, 2002, op. cit., p.134.

76 "Report of the Human Rights Center 'Memorial' on mass violations of human rights by armed groups during the seizure of the town of Khojaly in the night from February 25 to February 1992," in Russian, 1992, available at: <http://old.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/karabah/hojaly/index.htm> (accessed: November 1, 2017).

77 Interview with Shamil Sabiroglu, Recollecting Armenia's attack on Khojaly, conducted by Vugar Gurbanov (in person), Office of the Public Union on the Recognition of the Khojaly Genocide, Baku, December 12, 2015.

78 Report of the Human Rights Center "Memorial," op. cit.

Several Khojaly defenders and residents also stated that, before the final offensive on the town on February 25, the Armenian forces launched massive artillery attacks to test the response capability of the defenders. do not confirm the presence of the Grad systems.⁷⁹ Moreover, according to them, one of the armored vehicles had broken down, while lack of diesel due to the blockade prevented operating those vehicles. Also, lack of supplies—munitions and guns—hamstrung the defenders’ resistance.⁸⁰ Several Khojaly defenders and residents also stated that, before the final offensive on the town on February 25, the Armenian forces launched massive artillery attacks to test the response capability of the defenders. According to these witnesses, as there were no available means to respond, the Armenian forces proved for themselves that the town defenders were defenseless against heavy weapons.⁸¹

The attack on Khojaly by the Armenian forces started on the evening of February 25, 1992. According to the Memorial Report, the Russian 366th Regiment, stationed in Khankendi, took an active role in the attack. The Armenian side confesses the participation of that regiment’s armored vehicles together with their crews.⁸² Human Rights Watch report also confirms the participation of 366th regiment personnel in the attack.⁸³ According to interviews with Khojaly defenders, about 40 armored vehicles and tanks participated in the attack.⁸⁴ Starting with heavy artillery shelling at about 23:00, the attacking forces entered the town from three directions and quickly broke the resistance of the defenders, which was confirmed by damage characteristic not of street fighting, but of artillery destruction.⁸⁵

As Khojaly was encircled from all sides by the Armenian forces, residents tried to flee the town via the northern part, through Askeran to Aghdam. According to the Memorial Report, the population left the town in two directions: (1) from the eastern part of the town to the north-east along the Gargar river, left west of Askeran (the Armenian side alleges this route was left as a corridor for population to leave the

79 Khojaly survivors (five persons), Recollecting Armenia’s attack on Khojaly. Interview by Vugar Gurbanov (in person). Office of the Public Union on the Recognition of the Khojaly Genocide, Baku, December 12, 2015.

80 Khojaly survivors (five persons), op. cit.

81 Ibid.

82 Report of the Human Rights Center “Memorial,” op. cit.

83 Human Rights Watch, “Azerbaijan: Seven Years of Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh,” ISBN 1-56432-142-8, 1994, p.6, available at: <https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/AZER%20Conflict%20in%20N-K%20Dec94.pdf> (Accessed: November 27, 2017).

84 Khojaly survivors (five persons), op. cit.

85 Report of the Human Rights Center “Memorial,” op. cit.

town); (2) from the northern part of the town to the north-east, right east of Askeran (it is assumed that a minor part of population tried to flee through this route). According to survivors, the population left the town in groups and had to walk about 8–12 km through Armenian-controlled lands to reach Aghdam city in Azerbaijan. The same report indicates that around 200–300 people did not leave the town but stayed in their houses.

The well-coordinated massive artillery shelling and follow-on attack by the Armenian army on the town of Khojaly was a tragedy that had “significant impact on military, political and moral dimensions on the situation in Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh region.”⁸⁶ The Memorial report further reveals that:

*Escaping people were dropping across Armenian outposts and were being shot at. A part of population managed to reach Aghdam, another part, mainly women and children (number not exactly known) froze to death during their escape in mountains; another part, according to accounts of those who reached Aghdam, was captured at Pirjamal and Nakhchivanik villages. There are accounts of exchanged Khojaly residents that certain number of hostages was gunned down.*⁸⁷

Azerbaijan’s official statistics provide details of the massacre. The Foreign Ministry website states the following:

*As a result, 613 persons were killed, including 106 women, 63 children and 70 elderly people. 1,275 inhabitants were taken hostage, while the fate of 150 persons remains unknown to this day. In the course of the tragedy 487 inhabitants of Khojaly were severely maimed, including 76 children not yet of age. 6 families were completely wiped out, 26 children lost both parents, and 130 children one of their parents. Of those who perished, 56 persons were killed with especial cruelty: by burning alive, scalping, beheading, gouging out of eyes, and bayoneting of pregnant women in the abdomen.*⁸⁸

Human Rights Watch estimated the number murdered at about 200 while

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, “Khojaly Genocide,” 2017, available at: <http://mfa.gov.az/en/content/850> (accessed: November 25, 2017).

emphasizing that “as many as 500–1,000 may have died.”⁸⁹ It should be noted that some of the interviews with Khojaly survivors and town officials as well as journalists and others indicated higher figures. Some of them claimed that the number murdered was about 1500, while the 1275 hostages are only those freed through official channels; other people were freed through private channels by paying a ransom. A Khojaly town official indicated that Khojaly also hosted displaced persons from neighboring villages and some refugee Meskheti Turks from the Fergana Valley.⁹⁰ According to them, population registration documents were lost in Khojaly, which is why it was practically impossible to make an exact accounting. This also reveals that there might have been more than 2500 people in Khojaly on February 25, 1992.

In their respective reports mentioned above, Human Rights Watch refers to Khojaly as a “massacre,” whereas the Memorial report classifies it as “massive violence against the civilian population of the town.” If we take the official statistics as a basis of calculation, then the following picture emerges. More than 80% of the town’s population were either murdered, taken hostage, or remain missing. As indicated on the Azerbaijan Foreign Ministry website, many of the hostages suffered physical and psychological trauma as a result of mistreatment.⁹¹ A part of this mistreatment was the rape of women and girls, which was used to serve as “one of the tools of ethnic cleansing, a way to terrorize the Azerbaijani population and make sure that they did not come back to Armenia and Karabagh.”⁹²

Another proof of the culpability of the Armenian side is presented by the current President of Armenia. In his interview with a British journalist he explicitly admitted the violence against Khojaly civilians, stating that:

*Before Khojali, the Azerbaijanis thought that they were joking with us, they thought that the Armenians were people who could not raise their hand against the civilian population. We were able to break that [stereotype]. And that’s what happened.*⁹³

⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch, op. cit., p.6

⁹⁰ Interview with Khojaly town official. Recollecting Armenia’s attack on Khojaly. Interview by Vugar Garbanov (in person). Office of the Executive Power of the Khojaly District, Baku, December 19, 2015

⁹¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, “Khojaly Genocide,” op. cit.

⁹² Isgandarova, N., “Rape as a Tool against Women in War Rape as a Tool against Women in War: The Role of Spiritual Caregivers to Support the Survivors of an Ethnic Violence,” *Cross Currents* 63(2), 2013, pp.174-184, p.177.

⁹³ De Waal, Th., *Black Garden*. (New York: New York University Press, 2003), p.172.

It would be no exaggeration to state that the Khojaly massacre continues to influence the social and political dynamics of the conflict. As rightly put by Thomas Goltz, “Khodjali has been turned into a horrible symbol of terror.”⁹⁴ Moreover, it has also become a symbol of lack of culpability for misdeeds in this conflict.

Occupation of Zangilan

Zangilan was the last Azerbaijani district to be occupied by Armenia during the 1991–1994 war. The district is located in the south-western part of Azerbaijan, bordering both Iran to the south across the Arax river and Armenia to the west. Located to the north was Gubadli, and to the east Jebrail—districts of Azerbaijan occupied by Armenian forces in August 1993.

Similar to any Azerbaijani border region with Armenia, Zangilan district was under fire during the conflict. The situation gradually worsened beginning in March 1993, when several villages were occupied. With the summer Armenian offensive, when the Fuzuli, Jebrail, and Gubadli districts were occupied towards the end of August, Zangilan also lost some territories. Most importantly, after this offensive Zangilan was almost encircled by Armenian forces and the Arax river, with no bridge to Iran. Soon, Armenian forces also occupied the Sighirt and Bartaz heights, which cut Zangilan off from any connection with Azerbaijani areas outside of Armenian control.⁹⁵ Before this happened, some military hardware, including two “Grad” artillery systems and a tank, was withdrawn from the district. According to eyewitness interviews, the districts still had around two hundred fighters and four tanks to withstand the Armenian attacks.⁹⁶

Having consolidated the recently occupied territories, the Armenian side concentrated the bulk of its forces against Zangilan. At the end of October, Armenian forces launched an offensive to occupy Zangilan

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94 Goltz, T., “The Successes of the Spin Doctors: Western Media Reporting on the Nagorno Karabakh Conflict,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 32(2), June 2012, p.189.

95 Azerbaijan National Library Portal, “Information About Zengilan’s Occupation,” available at: <http://www.anl.az/zengilan.htm> (accessed: September 13, 2017).

96 Khojaly survivors (five persons), op. cit.

from three main directions: (1) from Armenia's Mehri region; (2) from Armenia's Gafan region; and (3) from the occupied Gubadli district of Azerbaijan (Azerbaijan National Library Portal). According to Human Rights Watch, Armenian forces were also attacking from the eastern side, the recently occupied Jebrail district⁹⁷. An ICRC official, Micheal Tschanz, also confirmed the presence of Armenian troops in Zangilan. According to him, "Armenians from Armenia have crossed the border and occupied some villages in Zangilan province."⁹⁸

Sources vary about number of residents in Zangilan by the time of offensive. According to information from the electronic portal of the Azerbaijan National Library, "34 thousand residents gathered along the Araz river" in Zangilan,⁹⁹ whereas a Human Rights Watch report indicates around 60,000 people, "overwhelmingly Azeri civilians with some soldiers were trapped in Zangilan."¹⁰⁰ According to eyewitnesses, as the Armenian offensive progressed, district defenders also focused on helping to organize the population to escape and avoid "another Khojaly genocide."¹⁰¹ The problem was that there was no land connection to Azerbaijan left for that retreat.

The Human Rights Watch report mentions a radio broadcast from the Armenians calling on the Azerbaijani population to flee the area before the launch of its offensive on October 23, 1993.¹⁰² Reportedly, some people could flee Zangilan via the Horadiz bridge, which was later destroyed by Armenian shelling¹⁰³. The only option was across the Arax river to Iran, even though there were no remaining bridges over it. According to multiple sources, under pressure not to face a second Khojaly genocide, the then Azerbaijani leadership had to request help from Iran, which accepted Zangilani residents and then transferred them to Azerbaijan. Iran also helped by stopping reservoir discharges to the Arax river to lower the water level so that the population could cross it with minimal losses.

As reported by Human Rights Watch, the attacking Armenian army

97 Human Rights Watch, op. cit., p.78.

98 Human Rights Watch, op. cit., p.56.

99 Azerbaijan National Library Portal, op. cit.

100 Human Rights Watch, op. cit., p.77.

101 Interview with Ismayilov Abbasgulu, Recollecting Armenia's attack on Khojaly, conducted by Vugar Gurbanov (in person), Baku, January 2016.

102 Human Rights Watch, op. cit., p.71.

103 *Ibid.*

perpetrated grave violations of international humanitarian law. According to the report, “(d)uring this offensive, they (Armenians) forcibly evicted the civilian population, took hostages, killed civilians with indiscriminate fire, and looted and burned civilian property.”¹⁰⁴ Eyewitness accounts given in the same report indicate that dead civilians “appeared to have been shot at close range.”¹⁰⁵

Conclusion

As predicted by the academic literature, any country or organization armed with an exclusionary ideology produces violence on a massive scale against those deemed guilty of standing in the way of its achieving imagined greatness, or for perceived misdeeds that are assumed to have created problems for a country or organization. The Armenian ideology brought into action by the Armenian ruling elite was, and still is, in line with this logic. First, this ideology helped to produce a sense of mission for the Armenian nationalists and mobilize them to action. Importantly, the current territory of the Armenian state is perceived to be only “a native corner” of greater Armenian territories that should be recovered. Second, it takes a confrontational approach towards most of its neighbors. Azerbaijanis and Turks, in particular, are viewed as the people to whom is ascribed guilt for “all historical injustice” that Armenia faces today. The claim to the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan stood first in the order of priority. This claim is a vital component of the sense of mission that Nzhdeh promoted. It wrongly securitized the issue for Armenia’s national security. War, in this context, is a justifiable option to aggrandize Armenia while the population of those territories is viewed as hostile, and that is why it is incompatible to live with Armenians. The Azerbaijani population in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh region faced the destiny promoted by this ideology. The Khojaly and Zangilan cases clearly show that the employed military tactics of excessive brutality were directed not only against the military objectives of the Azerbaijani army, but against the whole population of the targeted regions.

It should be noted that, while this article attempts to provide certain broader explanations for the violence exercised against civilians during

104 Human Rights Watch, *op. cit.*, p.69.

105 *Ibid.*, p.75.

the conflict, it fails to provide more empirical data on the subject. One reason is the lack of access to the relevant target group; another is the culture of denial and non-discussion of a “dark past.” The article also suggests other questions about the ideological perspectives on the Azerbaijani side and the role of those ideologies in the persistence of conflicts. However, the biggest added value of the article is potentially opening up a space for academic debate and, through that, helping to distill realities from unsubstantiated claims.