

**An Analysis of Ilham Aliyev's Addresses to the Nation:
The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War and the Enemy Image of Armenians**

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Submitted to Central European University

Nationalism Studies Program

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Vienna, Austria

2023

Abstract

The thesis looks into the construction and reinforcement of the enemy image of Armenians in the discourse of the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. The thesis uses the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA), and the discursive strategies of nomination, predication, perspectivation, intensification and mitigation, to analyze the language in ten addresses to the nation, issued by Aliyev, between September and November of 2020. The thesis demonstrates Aliyev's use of the argumentative topoi of religion, history and nation, as part of his discourse, to amplify the sense of unity within the in-group and the negative perception of Armenians by the Azerbaijanis. It argues that by presenting Armenians as an "enemy" in his discourse, Ilham Aliyev is able to justify his military actions, boost his legitimacy and unite the country in opposition to the enemy. The thesis illustrates how political actors utilize language in the creation and reinforcement of negative stereotypes and enemy images and determines that Aliyev contributes to the formation of myths and conflict narratives that keep setting Armenia and Azerbaijan on the path of conflict.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my appreciation to everyone who supported me on this thesis journey. This accomplishment would not have been possible without your encouragement and guidance and I am truly grateful for the presence of each and every one of you in my life.

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Michael Miller, for your encouragement and support, not only with my thesis but also throughout my time at CEU. I am grateful for your mentorship and guidance.

I also want to thank my family members, from the bottom of my heart, for their love and support and for encouraging me to deliver my best work. My heartfelt gratitude goes to my sisters, Milana and Sabina, whose unwavering belief in my abilities has been a great source of motivation.

I am also grateful to my friends, who were my biggest supporters on this journey. I would like to thank Leli, Unaiza and Samara, who despite being far away, have encouraged me during the highs and lows of this thesis journey. I would also like to thank my friends in Vienna, Yasmeen, Jelena and Kathy, for believing in me and for their support, understanding and patience. A special thank you to Leli, Aida and Ali, who embarked on this thesis journey alongside me. Your camaraderie gave me strength and I will cherish the memories we made in the process.

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Introduction

The Highland Karabakh, better known in Russian as Nagorno-Karabakh, is a landlocked mountainous region located between Southwestern Azerbaijan and Eastern Armenia.¹ Internationally, Nagorno-Karabakh is recognized as part of Azerbaijan, however some of the territories within the region are governed by *de-facto* Armenian leaders of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR) since the first Nagorno-Karabakh War between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, which lasted between 1988 and 1994. Upon the conclusion of the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, elites in the newly formed states of Armenia and Azerbaijan began to ethnicise the conflict and attempted to hegemonise their power by simplifying the differences and similarities between people and articulating “the other” as the enemy.² The clash in narratives and the competing myths and claims have created an identity conflict between the groups, which has made it difficult for them to reconcile. The mediation groups failed to foster peace and stability in the region, with sporadic fighting taking place throughout the years and a more recent full-scale war erupting between Azerbaijanis and Armenians in September of 2020. The war ended with the signing of a new peace deal between the Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan and the Russian government on November 10, 2020, with Azerbaijan regaining most of the occupied territories.

This research paper focuses on the presidential addresses to the nation by the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, during the 2020 War in Nagorno-Karabakh. The conflict plays an important role in Aliyev’s nationalist project because by carrying out military action and justifying

¹ Nikolay Gvozdetsky, Owen Lewis and Bruk Solomon Ilich, "Caucasus," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, March 15, 2023.

² Ohannes Geukjian, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus: Nagorno-Karabakh and the Legacy of Soviet Nationalities Policy* (Ashgate Publishing Group, 2011).

it through the negative portrayal of Armenians, he is able to unite the public, dismantle his enemy and to strengthen his hegemonic power. His discourse may not be immediately embraced by the people, but it is important to analyze as it has a justifying power, particularly considering his successes during the 2020 war and the subsequent increase in his popularity in the country.

It is also important to bring awareness to the dangerous nature of the enemy discourse in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as despite Aliyev's unprecedented popularity after the war, a transformation of political relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia is vital to ensure there is long-lasting peace in the South Caucasus. Armenians and Azerbaijanis continue to live in close proximity and are saturated with the worst possible stereotypes of one another. To resettle and build viable communities in the de-occupied areas, the governments of Azerbaijan and Armenia need to lessen the promotion of negative images of one another, which will in turn encourage new trade and better transit paths across the region as multipliers of wealth and well-being for both ethnic groups.³

As one of the main sources of state narratives, released frequently during the war, the addresses offer insight into the president's arguments and assist in the analysis of the prevalent narratives on Armenians in Azerbaijan as well as of his choice of discursive strategies to present them. The main research question is how does Ilham Aliyev construct the narrative of Armenians as the enemy group in his presidential addresses during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War? This paper explores Aliyev's construction of narratives through three themes, which include nation, religion and history, and determines the role of each of these argumentative topoi in the assignment of positive attributes to the Azerbaijani in-group and negative attributes to the out-group, the

³ Laurence Broers, "Analysing the Second Karabakh War," *Conciliation Resources*, 2021.

Armenians. It argues that by presenting Armenians as an “enemy” in his discourse, Aliyev is able to justify his military actions, boost his legitimacy and unite the country in opposition to the enemy.

The paper first outlines the historical context, which is useful in demonstrating the existing narratives and the events which have contributed to the rise in tensions between the ethnic groups and which were utilized by the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, in his presidential addresses to the nation. The paper then presents the theoretical framework, discussing the importance of analyzing political discourse, enemy images and the reasons behind their use and discusses the nature of the anti-Armenian discourse in Azerbaijan. The third chapter presents the methods used for the analysis of the presidential addresses, which include Ruth Wodak’s Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) within the CDA paradigm and the discursive strategies, including nomination, predication, perspectivation and intensification/mitigation. The fourth chapter analyzes the language within Aliyev’s addresses to the nation using the methods outlined above. It then seeks to answer why the argumentative topoi of religion, national unity and historical myths were selected by Aliyev as part of his discourse to amplify the sense of unity within the in-group and the negative perception of Armenians by the Azerbaijanis. It also aims to contribute to wider literature on the nature of political discourse, by illustrating how political actors utilize language in the creation and reinforcement of enemy images. It determines that Aliyev contributes to the formation of myths and conflict narratives that keep setting Armenia and Azerbaijan on a dangerous path of conflict.

Chapter 1. Historical Background

In order to understand the complex conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, the history of relations between the ethnic groups needs to be considered. Nationalists and governments, ruling over the region in the twentieth and the twenty-first century, played an important role in shaping the way in which the ethnic groups understand their identity and historical grievances. In an attempt to diminish the territorial claims made by the opposing group, both ethnic groups have tried to increase their legitimacy for the claim of Nagorno-Karabakh throughout the years and disagree on each other's myths of origin.⁴ Although some scholars argue that the conflict between the two groups became evident during the demise of the Soviet Union, tensions between them existed prior in history, when the region was part of Tsarist Russia.

This chapter provides a brief overview of the history of Nagorno-Karabakh and contributes to a better understanding of the emerging nationalist movements amongst Armenians and Azerbaijanis. As the main focus of this research paper is on Azerbaijan and the country's political discourse on Armenians during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, it is important to discuss the existing narratives and the events which have contributed to the rise in tensions and which were utilized by the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, in his presidential addresses to the nation.

⁴ Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2005).

1.1 History of the Region and Ethnic Claims

As a famous historian of the Caucasus, Thomas de Waal, points out, the history of the Karabakh region is "agreeably untidy".⁵ Historians in Armenia and Azerbaijan argue that their nations have existed in the region for thousands of years. However, the exact history prior to the takeover by the Persian Empire in the eighteenth century remains highly contested. The region witnessed incursions by numerous groups, including Caucasian Albanians, Bagratid Armenians, Turkic monarchies, and confederations, as well as by the Ottomans and the Mongol khanates. However, most historians agree on the evidence that both Armenian princes, known as *meliks*, and Muslim khans, ruled over the region together and, at other times, separately.⁶ The region was also always known for the semi-independency of its leaders, regardless of religion, and a mixed Christian-Muslim population, mostly consisting of Oghuz Turkic tribes and Armenians.⁷ The exact period in which Armenians settled in the region is contested, however, there is evidence of their introduction of script and Christianity in Karabakh in the fifth century.⁸ Unlike Armenian settlers, the Turkic tribes were known for a semi-nomadic lifestyle and travelled with their cattle. Johann Schiltberger, a German traveler, was the first European to visit the region. Writing a record in 1420, Schiltberger noted that "The Infidels call the plain, in the Infidel's tongue, Karawag. The Infidels possess it all, and yet it stands in Ermenia. There are also Armenians in the villages, but

⁵ Thomas De Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 148.

⁶ Thomas De Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 149.

⁷ Frank Viviano, "The Rebirth of Armenia," *National geographic* 205, no. 3 (2004): 28-49.

⁸ Sebastian Muth, "War, language removal and self-identification in the linguistic landscapes of Nagorno-Karabakh," *Nationalities Papers* 42, no. 1 (2014): 63-87.

they must pay tribute to the Infidels.”⁹ Schiltberger’s account suggests that both Armenians and “Infidels”, a word that he used for Muslims, were present in the region.

In the mid-eighteenth century, the region became known as the Karabakh Khanate, governed by a Turkic ruler under Persian suzerainty, with the town of Shusha serving as the center. However, after prolonged wars between Russians, Ottomans, and Persians, in 1813, with the treaty of Gulistan, the Persian Empire gave up what is now known as Azerbaijan, including the Karabakh territory, to the Russian Empire. The Russian Empire created new boundaries and administrative institutions within the region, ignoring historical and geographical boundaries established by the local communities and neutralizing national claims.¹⁰ The Karabakh region was incorporated into the Elizavetpol province, which had an Azerbaijani majority, however, Armenians who lost their semi-autonomy did not give up their claims for the territory, which would raise tensions in the future. As part of the Elizavetpol province, Karabakh became an important part of the economic system of eastern Transcaucasia and, with time, the emotional and nationalistic affinity of Azerbaijanis with Karabakh strengthened. The territory became an important criterion of Azerbaijani national identity as it was a place of birth for many prominent Azerbaijani figures, including poets, authors, and composers. It also suited the semi-nomadic lifestyle of many Azerbaijanis as it had vital conditions for grazing cattle. Armenians of Karabakh, on the other hand, became separated from their ethnic community. The incorporation also proved important in the 1920s, as the Soviet government claimed that due to its vital role in the economic system, territorially, it is better for the region to be part of Soviet Azerbaijan.

⁹ Buchan J. Telfer, ed. *The Bondage and Travels of Johann Schiltberger, a Native of Bavaria, in Europe, Asia, and Africa, 1396-1427* (Taylor & Francis, 2017).

¹⁰ Ohannes Geukjian, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus: Nagorno-Karabakh and the Legacy of Soviet Nationalities Policy* (Ashgate Publishing Group, 2011).

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Russian Empire began to slowly change the demographic composition of the Elizavetpol province in favor of Armenian Christians while placing limitations on Muslim identities and relocating Muslim Azerbaijanis to Persia and the Ottoman Empire.¹¹ Armenians were trusted to occupy important posts and were known to help the Russian Tsars in their campaigns, seeking protection from the Muslim neighboring countries. The Armenian Church also remained independently present throughout the Tsarist rule.¹² By the 1860s and 1870s, economic backwardness, competition for administrative posts, and occupation of jobs became the main factors that caused tensions between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. Despite the presence of powerful Muslim landlords in Transcaucasia and their dominance in most industries, Armenians dominated the oil industry and had influential judges and wealthy merchants. When the oil industry became increasingly successful, Russia tightened its control of the region even more, and the favoritism of Armenians who managed the oil industry for the Empire increased.¹³ The anti-Muslim posture in the region, during the rule by the Russian Empire, shaped the early grievances of the Azerbaijani community. They were underrepresented and increasingly angry that Russians and Armenians were benefiting from the wealth in the region.¹⁴ Religious, ethnic, and linguistic differences also became barriers. Peaceful coexistence became hindered, making it difficult for the threatened groups, which were highly interdependent in their daily lives, to maintain their ties without any tensions.¹⁵

As Armenian profits from the oil industry improved their economic conditions and Armenian migrations to Baku began to rise, the accumulated animosities between the Armenians

¹¹ Ohannes Geukjian, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus: Nagorno-Karabakh and the Legacy of Soviet Nationalities Policy* (Ashgate Publishing Group, 2011).

¹² Ohannes Geukjian, "Political Transition And Ethnic Revival in Armenia and Azerbaijan: The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict (1987-1994)," *Haigazan Armenological Review*, 2003.

¹³ Anahide Ter Minassian, "The Revolution of 1905 in Transcaucasia", *Armenian Review*, 42(2), 1989.

¹⁴ Suha Bolukbasi, *Azerbaijan: A Political History* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013).

¹⁵ Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 24–25.

and Azerbaijanis erupted into violent clashes in Baku, Karabakh, Yerevan, Shushi, Tbilisi, Nakhichevan, and Ganja in 1905 and 1906. The deaths are estimated in thousands, and many villages suffered destruction. However, it is difficult to blame either side for the violence. In some provinces such as Tbilisi and Shusha, Armenians were responsible for starting hostilities, while in Baku and in territories of the Elizavetpol, Azerbaijanis initiated the fighting.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the outbreaks of violence were serious enough to remain in the memories of both groups and were later used by national leaders to justify political actions.¹⁷ They also coincided with the period of the 1905 Russian Revolution, and the weakening of Russia's control further contributed to the politicization of national identities.¹⁸ The unclear political status of both nationalities in the region intensified the conflict, and Armenians and Azerbaijanis began organizing themselves into separate national units.¹⁹ The emerging Azerbaijani ethnic identity was used as a tactic, together with pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism, by Azerbaijanis to seek independence from the unstable Russian domination. The national consciousness emerged slower than their Muslim identity, but it expressed itself through a deep emotional link to the territory of Azerbaijan.

In 1906, the Muslim press of Baku condemned the Armenians for the violence and referred to the notion of an “Azerbaijani nation”, wanting the group to be removed from the generic terms such as ‘Tatars’, used by the Russians to refer to all people of Turkic origin in the Caucasus. The first appearance of the expression “Azerbaijani nation” is found in a newspaper *Kashkul* from 1880, and it was used to refer to those known as the Tatars of the Caucasus.²⁰ When the Soviets

¹⁶ Firuz Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia, 1917-1921* (Westport, CT: Hyperion Press, 1981), 18-19.

¹⁷ Donald E. Miller, Lorna Touryan Miller, and Jerry Berndt, *Armenia: Portraits of Survival and Hope* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2003).

¹⁸ Ohannes Geukjian, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus: Nagorno-Karabakh and the Legacy of Soviet Nationalities Policy* (Ashgate Publishing Group, 2011).

¹⁹ Jeff Chinn and Robert Kaiser, *Russians as the New Minority: Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Soviet Successor States* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 248.

²⁰ Firouzeh Mostashari, *On The Religious Frontier: Tsarist Russia and Islam in the Caucasus* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017).

took over, the term "Caucasian Tatars" was gradually replaced with "Azerbaijani Turks" and "Azerbaijanis". The establishment of the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan was also when the Soviet leader Stalin changed the name of the formal language of the republic from Turkic to Azerbaijani.²¹

Hostilities continued to break out during the First World War, with immense political and economic difficulties. The leaders of the Azerbaijani nationalist Musavat Party, which was created in 1912, considered the neighbouring Muslim countries, including Turkey, as strong allies and sought their help in establishing Azerbaijani control over the mixed area of Karabakh. They wanted to secure direct access to Turkey, while Armenians in the region fought against it as it would lead to their encirclement and would block their access to Persia.²² Tensions further exploded in 1915, when the Ottoman Empire massacred one and a half million Armenians through orders of as a deportation and death marches. This prompted many Armenians to seek refuge in Russian Transcaucasia and migrate to Karabakh. With the close ties between Azerbaijanis and Turks and with some Armenians refusing to differentiate between the two groups, referring to Azerbaijanis as 'Turks', tensions rose further. The genocide of the Armenian population in Ottoman Turkey made the 'Turks' the primary victimizers of the nation, and the association of Azerbaijanis with Turks for Armenians contributed to the rise of emotions when the tensions between the two states for the Karabakh region began to increase in the 1980s.²³

With the dissolution of the Russian Empire in 1917, the Turkish army established temporary power in the region and appointed the Musavat Party as the power in Baku, removing the Armenian Bolsheviks. The Turks also pledged to remove Armenian nationalist units, which became active

²¹ August Freiherr von Haxthausen, *Transcaucasia: Sketches of the Nations and Races between the Black Sea and the Caspian* (London: Chapman, 1854).

²² Ohannes Geukjian, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus: Nagorno-Karabakh and the Legacy of Soviet Nationalities Policy* (Ashgate Publishing Group, 2011).

²³ Stuart J. Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War* (Cornell University Press, 2001).

in Karabakh.²⁴ In 1917, British military forces also gained influence in the region, occupying several strategic locations in Transcaucasia, including Karabakh. They adopted a pro-Azerbaijani policy due to their economic concerns over the oil reserves near Baku.²⁵ Britain believed that by forming an alliance with Azerbaijan, it would prevent future Soviet interferences with British interests, safeguarding their access to India and the established power in the Middle East. On 27 May 1918, Azerbaijanis established a Democratic Republic (AzDR), with Armenians officially losing their privilege status in Baku. Armenians also established an independent Republic on 28 May 1918. The British promised Karabakh to the AzDR, despite the Armenian majority in the region, with the government of Armenia protesting the decision. According to the closest census to the event, Armenians made up around 95% of the population, with Azerbaijanis making up 5%.²⁶ Nevertheless, Azerbaijan asserted that they were the rightful owners of the region and that Armenians, who protested the decision, were violating the sovereignty of the newly established state. Although the British forces pulled out from Karabakh in 1919, their decision sparked new ethnic clashes in the region, and cohabitation became difficult. These small clashes consisted of the Armenian majority population resisting the Azerbaijani military, which was trying to gain control.²⁷

²⁴ Vladimir Priakhin, 'The Black Garden of the International Community: Nagorno Karabakh and the Post-Cold War Order', *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 6(18), 2002, 18.

²⁵ Ohannes Geukjian, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus: Nagorno-Karabakh and the Legacy of Soviet Nationalities Policy* (Ashgate Publishing Group, 2011).

²⁶ Cory D. Welt, "Explaining ethnic conflict in the South Caucasus: Mountainous Karabagh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia.", Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2004, 116.

²⁷ Ohannes Geukjian, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus: Nagorno-Karabakh and the Legacy of Soviet Nationalities Policy* (Ashgate Publishing Group, 2011).

1.2 Formation of the Soviet Republics and the Soviet Era

Following the short-lived south-Caucasian republics and the Soviet takeover, Joseph Stalin, who was the Commissar of Nationalities during Vladimir Lenin's rule, awarded the region of Karabakh to Azerbaijan. One of the potential reasons behind Stalin's decision was his belief that Azerbaijan is a great mediator for the relations of Russia with Persia, Turkey and states in the Middle East. He believed that if the Russians mistreated the Azerbaijanis and their rights, it would be hard to maintain good relations with the Muslim neighbors. Moreover, Stalin's decision was largely influenced by the hope of the Communist government that Turkey would transform itself into a communist state. The security of the economic viability of the territory was another potential reason, as the integration provided Azerbaijani and Kurdish nomads with lands, suitable for grazing animals.²⁸

In 1923, the region officially became the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) within the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan. *Oblast* is the word that was used to refer to an administrative region in the Soviet Union and in Russia. Between 1926 and 1979, the number of Azerbaijanis in the NKAO rose from 13,000 to 37,000, while Armenians only grew from 117,000 people to 123,000 in 1979.²⁹ Many Azerbaijanis settled in the region, mainly populating the ancient capital of the region, Shusha, while well-educated Armenians emigrated to Russia and other parts of the Soviet Union. After the Second World War, Armenians who remained in the NKAO increased their attempts to gain more control. They began campaigning for political concessions from Baku, asked for the introduction of Armenian-language television, and for Armenian history

²⁸ Christoph Zurcher, *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, And Nationhood in the Caucasus* (NYU Press, 2007).

²⁹ Thomas De Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 140.

lessons at the Armenian-language schools.³⁰ Although without success, they also signed petitions for the transfer of the region to Armenia and addressed the issue directly with officials in Moscow rather than the political elites in Baku.

1.3 The First Nagorno-Karabakh War and Political Developments in Azerbaijan

When the collapse of the Soviet Union was approaching in the 1980s, the Azerbaijani community was still a minority in Nagorno-Karabakh, despite the region being part of Soviet Azerbaijan. According to the 1989 All-Union Census, the final census conducted by the Soviet officials, the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) within the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan was made up of 75.8% Armenians and 21.5% Azerbaijanis, as well as Russians, Assyrians, Greeks, and Kurds.³¹ NKAO was seen as an Armenian exclave because, according to the census, the only strip of land, known as the Lachin corridor, which connected the region's majority Armenian population to the Soviet Republic of Armenia, was inhabited exclusively by Azerbaijanis and Kurds.

With the appointment of Mikhail Gorbachev as the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985, a series of reforms came into place, including his issuance of a policy on openness known as *glasnost*. *Glasnost* served as a vital plank in his reform efforts and was meant to democratize the political system and include the Soviet people in the political process.³² It also allowed for more freedom of expression. Although the economic and political situation was slowly deteriorating and Gorbachev was not successful in putting this reform into

³⁰ Thomas De Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 141.

³¹ Human Rights Watch, *Seven Years of Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh*, December 1994, ISBN 1-56432-142-8.

³² Thomas, Sherlock, *Historical narratives in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia: destroying the settled past, creating an uncertain future* (Springer, 2007).

full practice, the initiated social changes resulted in the rise of nationalist movements in ethnically divided regions. The breakdown of the centralized power and the weakening of the Communist ideology also allowed for the rise in ethnocentric nationalism across the Soviet Republics.³³ Ethnic nationalism filled the ideological void due to the different cultural and religious identities, distinct languages, and competing territorial claims among Azerbaijanis and Armenians.

Gorbachev's reformist policies played a big role in providing more freedom to speak up for Armenians and revived their territorial and cultural demands. The Armenian population grew resentful, arguing that the Azerbaijani officials neglected the territory due to its Armenian majority. The Armenians in NKAO believed that they did not receive enough investment from the government and that their standard of living was poor, with the Azerbaijani officials in Baku draining their resources. However, these perceived injustices are hard to prove. The standard of living in Nagorno-Karabakh was relatively high when compared to other regions in the USSR and to the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan as a whole.³⁴ Moreover, the inefficiency and corruption, which the Armenians claimed to have faced, was widespread at the time due to the lack of efficient management by the Soviet Union. Apart from economic hardships, political mismanagement, and cultural, linguistic, and religious tensions on the societal level, contradicting discourses on "who was first" in the region began to rise in both Republics. Armenians and Azerbaijanis portrayed the 'other' ethnic group negatively, with claims that they were the "instigator of tensions" or "occupier" in the region. These rising narratives fueled local nationalisms during the Soviet rule, and after the collapse of the USSR, they shaped the domestic policies and discourses on national identity in independent Armenia and Azerbaijan.³⁵

³³ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

³⁴ Erik Melander, "The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict revisited: was the war inevitable?," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 3, no. 2 (2001): 48-75.

³⁵ Anthony D'Agostino, *Gorbachev's Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1998): 189.

The first demonstrations for the unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia began in 1987. Nationalists in NKAO, Armenia, and the Armenian Diaspora mobilized to support the campaign.³⁶ The calls for unification prompted the NKAO officials to act upon an unprecedented move for a region under Soviet control and to pass an independent resolution in February of 1988, which formally asked the Soviet officials in Moscow to unify the region with Armenia.³⁷ This resolution, for the first time in the history, challenged the Soviet borders. Most scholars agree that this was the decisive event which further escalated the regional tensions between the Armenians and Azerbaijanis. In Stepanakert, one of the largest cities in Nagorno-Karabakh, the initially peaceful protests by the Azerbaijani demonstrators, against the resolution adopted by the provincial council, resulted in clashes. The clashes were largely unorganized with different outbreaks of violence in towns and villages of the NKAO. The year 1988 marked the beginning of the war as tensions sparked ethnic riots across the region. In late February of 1988, in the city of Sumgait, near Baku, where Azerbaijanis fled from Armenian violence in NKAO, 2000 refugees sparked violence, during which 26 Armenians were killed.³⁸ Soviet troops were initially dispatched to disarm the Armenian militia, which became active in the region. However, in 1991, when the dissolution of the Soviet Union took place, the troops were pulled out of Nagorno-Karabakh, further deteriorating the situation. In September of 1991, NKAO was dissolved and the territories of Nagorno-Karabakh became fully integrated into the newly independent Azerbaijan. However, three days later, the Armenian majority in the region adopted a declaration of independence and

³⁶ Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996): 262.

³⁷ Ohannes Geukjian, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus: Nagorno-Karabakh and the Legacy of Soviet Nationalities Policy* (Ashgate Publishing Group, 2011).

³⁸ Erik Melander, "The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict revisited: was the war inevitable?," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 3, no. 2 (2001): 48-75.

voted for secession from Azerbaijan. During this process, the unrecognized *de facto* Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, with an Armenian leadership, was proclaimed.

With the establishment of the Azerbaijani state and the *de facto* Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, fighting only became more severe. In 1991, Ayaz Mutallibov, who was initially president of the Azerbaijani SSR, abolished the Communist Party and was elected as president in a single-candidate election.³⁹ Mutallibov's stance on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was not hardline, and he believed reconciliation with Armenia was feasible. However, as the conflict grew, Armenian fighting units in the region attacked Azerbaijani towns and villages, and successfully broke out of the *de facto* Armenian capital, Stepanakert. In 1991, Armenians launched an offensive on the city of Khojaly, which housed a large number of Azerbaijanis, due to a resettlement program by Azerbaijani officials. Armenians cut the roads out of Khojaly, leaving the city without electricity and running water. A few Azerbaijanis were evacuated by air, however, approximately 3000 people remained.⁴⁰ In February of 1992, on the anniversary of the pogroms in Sumgait, Armenians began their assault, surrounding Khojaly from three sides and overwhelming the local Azerbaijani defenders. The massacre is known as one of the worst events of the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, with Azerbaijanis killed within the city as well as during their attempts to flee Khojaly. Although different sources provide different estimates of the casualties, the parliamentary investigation in Azerbaijan announced that the death toll was 485.⁴¹ Today, the massacre is referred to as a "genocide" in Azerbaijan and is a sensitive subject for many Azerbaijani people. At the time of the event, the international coverage of the conflict primarily referred to Armenians

³⁹ Audrey L. Altstadt, "Azerbaijan and Aliyev: A long history and an uncertain future," *Problems of Post-Communism* 50, no. 5 (2003): 3-13.

⁴⁰ Thomas De Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (New York: New York University Press, 2013): 170.

⁴¹ Thomas De Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (New York: New York University Press, 2013): 171.

as the victims of the war, and the international public was reluctant to believe that the massacre had taken place. Mutallibov further made the matter worse as he blamed his opposition party, the Popular Front of Azerbaijan (PFA), rather than Armenians, for the casualties, in an attempt to cover up his mismanagement.⁴² His interview provided the Armenian side with further support and was quoted numerous times by Armenian leaders. Mutallibov was blamed for the poor leadership of the country through war and for failing to declare a state of emergency. In 1992, his popularity plummeted as his government failed to protect the fleeing residents of Khojaly from the Armenian militia and did not prevent Armenians from taking over the Lachin corridor and the city of Shusha, which was the last Azerbaijani-populated town in the region.⁴³ These two events, the massacre of Azerbaijanis in Khojaly and the Armenian capture of Shusha and the Lachin corridor, defined and still define the first Nagorno-Karabakh war for the Azerbaijani people.

In May 1992, armed forces led by Abulfaz Elchibey, the leader of the PFA, deposed Mutallibov, promising a more rigid stance on the Karabakh issue and the proper management of the army.⁴⁴ Using the war as a way to boost his popularity, Elchibey subsequently won a nationwide election in June of 1992. Despite Elchibey's hardline stance on the war and attempts to launch large-scale offenses, the government's political and economic instability was not resolved during his presidency, and, similar to his predecessor, he was overthrown by Heydar Aliyev in 1993. Heydar Aliyev was a former KGB official and served in the security organs for 28 years. He also led Soviet Azerbaijan between 1969 and 1982 and was the first Deputy Premier of the Soviet

⁴² Ohannes Geukjian, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus: Nagorno-Karabakh and the Legacy of Soviet Nationalities Policy* (Ashgate Publishing Group, 2011).

⁴³ Thomas De Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

⁴⁴ Vicken Cheterian, "Azerbaijan," In *The Colour Revolutions in the Former Soviet Republics* (Routledge, 2010); 119-135.

Union from 1982 until 1987.⁴⁵ Coming to power when the country was at the peak of political instability and suffered major losses in Nagorno-Karabakh, Heydar Aliyev established a strict, authoritarian regime. As political opposition prevailed in the country, he began to exercise extreme control and allowed for very few political freedoms. During his presidency, he worked to mobilize international support for Azerbaijan, building a closer relationship and strengthening ties with Turkey, declaring that the two are "two states but one nation".⁴⁶ His stance on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue gradually became more hardline during his presidency, however, he pushed for a diplomatic resolution. He played an important role in ensuring that the fighting came to an end, and a ceasefire agreement was signed in Bishkek on the 12th of May 1994 by the defense ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan. It brought the active fighting in the region, which began in 1988, to an end and initiated a peacekeeping mission. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) established the OSCE Minsk Group in 1994 to manage the conflict. The Group is co-chaired by France, Russia, and the United States. The permanent members of the group include Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as Belarus, Germany, Finland, Italy, Turkey, and Sweden. However, the organization has done little to achieve its goal. The member states, and co-chairs proposed peace plans which differed from one another and continued pulling in different directions.

The first Nagorno-Karabakh war resulted in approximately 35,000 dead and one million refugees on both sides.⁴⁷ An estimated 400,000 Armenians who lived in Azerbaijan and 30,000 Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh fled to Russia and Armenia, with some coming back to the

⁴⁵ Audrey L. Altstadt, "Azerbaijan and Aliyev: A long history and an uncertain future," *Problems of Post-Communism* 50, no. 5 (2003): 3-13.

⁴⁶ Shamkhal Abilov, "The Discourse "One Nation Two State": The Position of Turkey in The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," *Journal*, Vol 51, no. 1 (1997): 80.

⁴⁷ Thomas De Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

region when the war ended. Approximately 40,000 Azerbaijanis from Nagorno-Karabakh, 350,000 Azerbaijanis from five southwest districts of Azerbaijan which were captured by the Armenian forces, and thousands of Azerbaijanis residing in the Republic of Armenia had to flee their homes during the war.⁴⁸ As reported by the census on the ethnic groups in Nagorno-Karabakh, the population of Nagorno-Karabakh in 2005 was made up of 137,380 Armenians, which formed around 95% of the population.⁴⁹

With the lack of harmony between the international actors and the inability of the two states to agree on a compromise, tensions remained high after the war. Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians were not guaranteed peace if the region was handed back to Azerbaijan, while Azerbaijan was not willing to accept a settlement in which the region was not under its complete sovereignty. The discourse on who is the rightful owner of the region continued with both groups destroying each other's cultural heritage. The Azerbaijani government has ordered the destruction of traces of Armenian heritage in the territories controlled by the state. In territories of Nagorno-Karabakh, which were controlled by pro-Armenian parties with close links to the Armenian state, after the first war, Azerbaijani cultural heritage has also been destroyed and misappropriated.⁵⁰

1.4 21st-Century Tensions and the Rise of Ilham Aliyev

After the first Nagorno-Karabakh war, despite his establishment of an autocratic rule with reliance on oil revenues and family clan dynamics, Heydar Aliyev was successful in restoring the

⁴⁸ Thomas De Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

⁴⁹ "Nagorno-Karabakh (Unrecognized State)", *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples*, Minority Rights Group, 2018.

⁵⁰ Marja van Heese, "The war over Nagorno-Karabakh and its lasting effects on cultural heritage," *Cultural contestation: heritage, identity and the role of government* (2018): 177-196.

economy and improving the living and working conditions in the country. Azerbaijan became a major international energy producer under his leadership. A cult of personality, known as Heydarism, developed in the country and remains widely present to this day. Approximately 60 Heydar Aliyev museums and centers operate in the country, and every city has a street named after the leader. Politically, he is presented as the "national leader of the Azeri nation".⁵¹ Following Heydar Aliyev's death in 2003, his son, Ilham Aliyev, came to power through a controversial election. Despite allegations of fraud and voting irregularities, Ilham Aliyev continues to rule the country and was reelected in 2008, 2013, and 2018, winning with a large majority. The GDP of the country tripled under Aliyev since 2003, and poverty in the country decreased from 49% in 2001 to 4.3% in 2019, according to the World Bank.⁵² However, according to Freedom House, Azerbaijan remains "Not Free" due to multiple restrictions on political opposition, media freedom, and civil society activism.⁵³ Azerbaijan's presidential system is strong, and Aliyev dominates the political landscape. Since the beginning of his presidency, Aliyev has conducted high-profile arrests of opposition figures, which remain active in the country, and has targeted civil society actors and media figures who opposed or criticized his leadership.⁵⁴

In the early stages of his presidency, he adopted his father's foreign and domestic policy and emphasized the need for a peaceful resolution in Nagorno-Karabakh, stating that a dangerous war should be avoided. He exchanged prisoners of war with Armenia and opened up transportation links between the countries. However, little progress was made at the negotiation table, and frustrations grew, with Aliyev increasingly criticizing the Armenian side and the Minsk Group for

⁵¹ Alan Edwin Day, Roger East, and Richard Thomas, *A Political And Economic Dictionary of Eastern Europe* (Routledge, 2003).

⁵² "Azerbaijan", *Economic Growth Data 2019*, World Bank.

⁵³ "Azerbaijan: Freedom in the World Country Report 2020", *Freedom House*, 2020.

⁵⁴ Shahla Sultanova, "Challenging the Aliyev Regime: Political Opposition in Azerbaijan," *Demokratizatsiya* 22, no. 1 (2014).

failing to agree on a resolution. Despite his claims of his openness to compromise, he refused to negotiate with the *de-facto* leadership in Karabakh and began to boost military spending, reproducing his authoritarian power. Some critics believe that the Nagorno-Karabakh issue became a way for Aliyev to distract the public from the existing political and social issues by uniting the nation against an external enemy, Armenia.⁵⁵ Although it is difficult to obtain information on the incentives behind his choice to hardline his position, the number of statements by Aliyev that depicted Armenia as the main enemy of the state and which referred to the use of force, if negotiations do not prove fruitful, began to increase. The irredentist political approach became explicit with Aliyev making statements such as, "Present-day Armenia is actually located on historical lands of Azerbaijan. Therefore, we will return to all our historical lands in the future. The young people and children should know this. We must live, we live, and we will continue to live with this idea".⁵⁶ Statements of such nature resulted in the emergence of the term, "Western Azerbaijan", used by Azerbaijani officials in reference to Armenia.

The year of 2008 witnessed sporadic fighting took place at the line of contact. This was the first significant violation of the ceasefire agreement, with 16 soldiers killed. As in most instances of the breaches, both sides accused one another of opening fire.⁵⁷ In the first half of his presidency, Aliyev utilized the oil revenues to increase the military budget of Azerbaijan to approximately 4 billion dollars a year.⁵⁸ Although since then, the oil revenue has fallen and the budget was reduced, it is still much larger than that of Armenia. In 2014, fighting at the line of contact escalated again. Although there are different possible reasons for the escalation, the widely argued reason is

⁵⁵ Zaur Shiriyev, "The 'Four-Day War': Changing Paradigms in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (2017): 52–58.

⁵⁶ Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, "Ilham Aliyev reviewed a new residential settlement built for 1,500 IDP families in Ganja" (*President.az*, 2014).

⁵⁷ RFE/RL Caucasus Report, "Fighting In Nagorno-Karabakh: War Or War Dance?" (*RFERL.org*, 2014).

⁵⁸ Thomas De Waal, "The Nagorny Karabakh Conflict in Its Fourth Decade," *CEPS Working Document* 2 (2021).

Azerbaijan's growth in power and Aliyev's determination to take back the occupied lands in the region. For several years, he has been building a stronger military and purchased weapons from Russia, Israel, Turkey, and Ukraine. He also faced political opposition, which could have played a role in the escalation of tensions. In 2013, a coalition called the National Council of Democratic Forces (NCDF) was formed, consisting of several parties and civil society organizations, including the Popular Front and the Musavat parties, which called for Aliyev's release of political prisoners and for free and fair elections.⁵⁹ Although Aliyev imprisoned several members of the NCDF and banned its leaders from elections, his increasingly hardline stance on the Karabakh issue could have been a way to divert attention from his opponents and bolster his legitimacy. Attaining a victory in Nagorno-Karabakh would help him demonstrate his ability to achieve foreign policy goals for the country.

In 2014, as part of a new crackdown on free press, Aliyev issued a policy banning information containing "bad news" related to Azerbaijani soldiers.⁶⁰ This policy is significant as it demonstrates that people in Azerbaijan are sensitive towards losses but also shows Aliyev's authoritarian approach towards the conflict and his fear of not appealing to the nationalist sentiment of the people. The tension further increased in 2016, as the worst clashes since 1994 erupted in the region. The fighting resulted in the deaths of 350 civilians and soldiers on both sides, as The US State Department reported.⁶¹ The fighting in April of 2016 lasted four days, with Azerbaijan regaining 20 kilometers of land, which the International Crisis Group labeled as heights of strategic importance.⁶² Azerbaijan was also able to showcase its accumulated military power, including

⁵⁹ Sofie Bedford, "Introduction to the special section: Political mobilization in Azerbaijan-The January 2013 Protests and beyond," *Demokratizatsiya* 22, no. 1 (2014): 3.

⁶⁰ "Azerbaijan," *Reporters Without Borders*, 2023.

⁶¹ "Background Briefing on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," *U.S. Department of State*, May 2016.

⁶² "Nagorno-Karabakh's Gathering War Clouds," *International Crisis Group*, June 2017.

tanks, heavy artillery, attack helicopters, and military drones. However, according to the US State Department and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Azerbaijan did not gain a lot of territory back while suffering many casualties.⁶³ In the aftermath, most experts on the conflict agreed that the escalation was an attempt by Azerbaijan to bring the issue back to the negotiation table and to put pressure on Armenia. Sporadic clashes and incidents of intensified fighting continued to occur until 2020, when violence erupted and developed into the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War.

1.5 Opposing Arguments and Claims

The Armenian people believe that they are the ancestors of Hayk, the grandson of the Biblical Noah, and use the word "Hay" in Armenian, which derives from "Hayk", as a term for "Armenian". They are members of an Armenian Apostolic Church and are known to be the first nation to adopt Christianity as a state religion in 301 AD.⁶⁴ Christianity is an important part of identity for Armenian people and it is closely tied to their ethnicity. Moreover, the ethnic group legitimizes its claims for its territories, including the Nagorno-Karabakh region, by tracing its historical myths of origins and territorial possessions to an Armenian empire, also known as the Kingdom of Greater Armenia, which some scholars believe to have existed back from 321 BC up until 428 AD.⁶⁵

To further legitimize their claims for the territory, Armenian historians overemphasize the presence of Armenian princes in the region while not acknowledging that oftentimes they were under the power of Muslim overlords. Armenian nationalists also use the fact that Karabakh Tatars

⁶³ "Background Briefing on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," *U.S. Department of State*, May 2016.

⁶⁴ "Armenian Apostolic Church: Holy See of Cilicia," *World Council of Churches*, December 2016.

⁶⁵ Mack Chahin, *The Kingdom of Armenia* (Routledge, 2013).

lived semi-nomadic lives to claim that they never enjoyed statehood in Karabakh like the Armenians. While the Muslim inhabitants left behind much less due to seasonal migration, Armenians, who did not move around, have a great treasure house of monuments and inscriptions.⁶⁶ Moreover, Armenians use the argument of the creation of Azerbaijan in the twentieth century, claiming that the country has no historical rights and that the word “Azerbaijani” was created by Turks who migrated into the region in the last 100 years.⁶⁷

Opposing the arguments of the Armenian nationalists, Azerbaijani scholars argue that Karabakh has been under Turkish and Muslim control for the past thirteen centuries. Delegitimizing Armenian presence in the region, they point out that Armenians in both Armenia and Karabakh are descendants of the immigrants from the nineteenth century.⁶⁸ In their claims, upon the Russian takeover of the region, the Empire resettled Armenians from Persia and Iran, in Armenia and in Karabakh. According to them, the lands were given to them by the Russian Empire at the expense of the native Muslim population. Historians indeed agree that a portion of the Armenians living in Karabakh in the 1830s were settlers, however, the exact number is unclear. Professor Zia Buniatov, one of the prominent Azerbaijani historians, claimed that while the Azerbaijani ethnicity comes from the ancient states of Caucasian Albania and Iranian Azerbaijan, Karabakh Armenians were Armenianized Albanians.⁶⁹ The consensus among historians is that “Albanians”, discussed by Buniatov, are a group of Caucasian Christians, who inhabited primarily what is now the north of Azerbaijan. However, when the Arabs invaded the region in the tenth

⁶⁶ Ohannes Geukjian, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus: Nagorno-Karabakh and the Legacy of Soviet Nationalities Policy* (Ashgate Publishing Group, 2011).

⁶⁷ Levon Chorbajian, Patrick Donabedian, and Claude Mutafian. *The Caucasian knot: the history & geopolitics of Nagorno-Karabagh* (Zed Books, 1994).

⁶⁸ Ohannes Geukjian, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus: Nagorno-Karabakh and the Legacy of Soviet Nationalities Policy* (Ashgate Publishing Group, 2011).

⁶⁹ Ceylan Tokluoglu, “The Political Discourse of the Azerbaijani Elite on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict (1991–2009),” *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 7 (2011): 1223–1252.

century, the Albanians assimilated with other groups in the region.⁷⁰ Despite this consensus, Buniatov has reclaimed their role the region, arguing that they were a major nation in the Caucasus and are the ancestors of the majority of the Azerbaijani population.⁷¹ Another Azerbaijani historian, Farita Mamedova, further claimed that Caucasian Albania included the territory of the modern Republic of Armenia and all of its churches are Albanian.⁷² She wrote that Caucasian Albania survived into the modern era, but Armenians appropriated its church, rewrote its literature, and got rid of the originals.⁷³ Although the real history of Caucasian Albanians remains unclear, the claims made by Buniatov and Mamedova have been successful politically.⁷⁴ The Albanian argument became popular in Azerbaijan, and most of the pre-nineteenth-century churches in the country are referred to as "Albanian".⁷⁵

1.6 The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War

In 2020, tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan increased further, with the Armenian Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan, moving the parliament of the *de-facto* government of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic to Shusha. This move provoked the Azerbaijani side as Shusha is a city which holds a lot of cultural and historical meaning for Azerbaijanis. Moreover, in July 2020, Armenian and Azerbaijani soldiers exchanged fire at the international border between the two

⁷⁰ Thomas De Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (New York: New York University Press, 2013): 152.

⁷¹ Levon Avdoyan, "Nagorno Karabakh: a historical perspective," *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 3, no. 2 (1995): 161–167.

⁷² Suha Bolukbasi, *Azerbaijan: A Political History* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013).

⁷³ Ohannes Geukjian, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus: Nagorno-Karabakh and the Legacy of Soviet Nationalities Policy* (Ashgate Publishing Group, 2011).

⁷⁴ Thomas De Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

⁷⁵ Ceylan Tokluoglu, "The Political Discourse of the Azerbaijani Elite on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict (1991–2009)," *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 7 (2011): 1223–125

states, 185 miles north of Nagorno-Karabakh.⁷⁶ As a result of the July clashes, 12 Azerbaijani and 5 Armenian military personnel, as well as 1 Azerbaijani civilian died.⁷⁷ Both sides accused each other of initiating the hostilities. The clashes coincided with protests in the capital of Baku, where the crowds criticized the government for poorly handling the COVID-19 pandemic and the economy. Azerbaijan suffered a sharp drop in oil prices and a decrease in revenue due to the pandemic, and many felt that the government was not doing enough to address the difficulties faced by the people. The protesters also demonstrated discontent with the failure of the government to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh issue and to regain the territory. The public dissatisfied with the government policies was eventually dispersed using the police force. Following the protests and the July clashes at the border, Azerbaijan conducted a series of military exercises with the involvement of Turkey.⁷⁸

Large-scale fighting broke out between Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenian forces on September 27, 2020. The new armed conflict with significant casualties continued until November 10, 2020. The two-month-long armed conflict became known as the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War and the 2020 War. Azerbaijan relied heavily on drone strikes, inflicting significant damage upon Armenian defense systems, tanks, and military personnel. Much of the population of Stepanakert, the capital of the *de-factor* republic, fled during the war. By November, Azerbaijan successfully recaptured numerous areas, including Shusha, a historically important city for Azerbaijan and the second-largest settlement in the region. On November 10, a new ceasefire agreement was signed by the Prime Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan, the President of

⁷⁶ Cory Welt and Andrew S. Bowen, "Azerbaijan and Armenia: The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," *Library of Congress*, Washington DC, (2021).

⁷⁷ Avet Demourian, "Armenia-Azerbaijan Border Fighting Escalates; 16 Killed," *Washington Post*, July 17, 2020.

⁷⁸ Vardan Ghaplanyan, "Armenia and Azerbaijan: High Risk of Cross-border Violence in Nagorno-Karabakh Despite Ceasefire," *Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, (2021): 24-26.

Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, and the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin. A Russian peacekeeping force consisting of 2000 soldiers, from the Russian Ground Forces, was deployed to the region for a minimum of five years. The aim of the peacekeeping force is to oversee the withdrawal of the Armenian armed forces from the territories regained by Azerbaijan and to guard the areas that remain under Armenian control.

Aliyev presented the victory in the 2020 war as a major achievement for the country and a result of his hard work and policies. Aliyev issued a number of presidential addresses to the nation during the war, which assisted him in mobilizing the public for the military campaign. The slogan "Karabakh is Azerbaijan", used by Aliyev in these addresses, spread across the country and became a national slogan among the public.⁷⁹ Aliyev successfully portrayed the nation as a defender of its territories, fostering unity and pride among the Azerbaijanis. However, the post-war ceasefire did not prevent the tensions from reemerging. Armenia and Azerbaijan continue to disagree on a long-lasting solution for the conflict and the hatred between the two ethnic groups continues to grow.

⁷⁹ Philip Gamaghelyan and Sergey Rumyantsev, "The road to the Second Karabakh War: The Role of Ethno-centric Narratives in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," *Caucasus Survey* 9, no. 3 (2021): 320-336.

Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework and Research Questions

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 The Importance of Political Discourse

This research paper focuses on analyzing how heads of states, who are members of the political elite, can influence discourse and shape opinions of the public, through their power and potential to manage and control the mass media.⁸⁰ The presidents have an ability to initiate, monitor and control institutional, academic and public discourse, which gives them the power to shape and reproduce the dominant knowledge and ideologies and to be persuasive, indirectly impacting the opinions of the larger public. The elite does not simply impose opinions and ideologies on the audience, but members of the elite can use their resources to promote certain beliefs, while suppressing other views and opinions, which are not in line with their interests.⁸¹ As argued by Teun A. van Dijk, “Because prejudices are not innate, but socially acquired, and because such acquisition is predominantly discursive, the public discourses of the symbolic elites are the primary source of shared ethnic prejudices and ideologies.”⁸² Therefore, political actors have responsibility over the management of ethnic relations. Political discourse can serve as an area for social combat and political actors can use discourse and expressions of certain ideologies and beliefs to “legitimize” or “delegitimize” identities and relations.

⁸⁰ Teun A. Van Dijk, “Elite Discourse and the Reproduction of Racism,” In *Methods in Race and Ethnic Relations Research*, ed. J. Stanfield and R.M. Dennis (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992), 4.

⁸¹ Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill, and Bryan S. Turner, *Dominant Ideologies* (Allen & Unwin Australia, 1990).

⁸² Teun A. Van Dijk, “Elite Discourse and the Reproduction of Racism,” In *Methods in Race and Ethnic Relations Research*, ed. J. Stanfield and R.M. Dennis (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992), 4.

As argued by Rogers Brubaker and David Latin in 1998, conflicts framed in ethno-nationalist terms are irresolvable.⁸³ When a state frames its narratives on the conflict in ethno-nationalist terms, it makes it difficult for those who potentially want to foster peace to challenge the powerful ethno-nationalist narratives, forcing the affected groups to pick a side.⁸⁴ Scholars of nationalism, including Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm, have discussed the way in which modern nations construct national myths and symbols to create and maintain imagined communities and a sense of belonging in people to these communities.⁸⁵⁸⁶ The construction of national identities using identity markers and symbols as well as the creation and recreation of historical myths or cultural markers are important steps in the process of nation-building.⁸⁷ Such events and factors as victory, defeat and humiliation, faced by a group, shape its identity and bind its members together. Members and enemies of a group are identified and form the collective memory of the group over time. In deep-rooted conflicts among ethnic groups, political actors often utilize these constructs, narratives and identity markers to strengthen the boundaries between the in-group and the out-group, to justify the need for military action and certain events during the course of the conflict as well as to promote the positive images of the in-group itself by appealing to the identities, feelings and opinions of the public.⁸⁸

⁸³ Rogers Brubaker and David D. Laitin, "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence," *Annual Review of sociology* 24, no. 1 (1998): 280.

⁸⁴ Philip Gamaghelyan and Sergey Rumyantsev, "The Road to the Second Karabakh War: The Role of Ethno-centric Narratives in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," *Caucasus Survey* 9, no. 3 (2021): 320-336.

⁸⁵ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁸⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso Books, 2006).

⁸⁷ George T. Kurian, *The Encyclopedia of Political Science*, (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2011): 1088.

⁸⁸ Fahimeh Khansari Fard and Elaheh Koolae, "The Impact of Historical Narratives on Ethnic Conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia," *International Studies* 17, no. 1 (2020): 65.

2.1.2 Enemy Images in Political Discourse

Discourse by political leaders, which utilizes enemy images, is particularly dangerous. Enemy images assist in both, the self-identification and self-definition of the group but also in drawing and ensuring the preservation of the national boundaries by representing the danger through the “other”.⁸⁹ Enemy images are beliefs or hypotheses that become stereotypes when they become widespread.⁹⁰ When the concept is applied to a group rather than an individual, all of its members are assigned negative characteristics and qualities and the group evokes feelings of threat and fear.⁹¹ Dehumanization, trait characterization, outcasting and group comparison are devices that are commonly used for the creation of enemy images.⁹² Dehumanization is particularly dangerous as it ties the out-group with inferior groups or even animals to demonstrate that the enemy group is not within the limits of norms and values that are accepted by humans.⁹³ Relying on the divide between the in-group, “we” or “us” and the out-group, “them” or “the other”, vices are assigned to the out-group and virtues to the in-group, impacting the in-group’s identity by reinforcing its depth and uniqueness as well as a sense of moral superiority.⁹⁴ In conflict times, when groups delegitimize “the other”, they assign the responsibility for the conflict to the out-group, without mentioning or acknowledging their own misdeeds. The groups refrain from

⁸⁹ Aram Terzyan, "Identity conflicts? The Sense of ‘Victimhood’ And the Enemy Images of Turkey and Azerbaijan In the Foreign Policy Discourse of Armenia," *Slovenian Political Review* 18, no. 2 (2018): 155-175.

⁹⁰ Babak Bahador, "Mapping the Enemy Image Through Different Conflict Stages," *International Studies Association Annual Conference, School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Canterbury*, 2011.

⁹¹ Debra Merskin, "The Construction of Arabs as Enemies: Post-September 11 Discourse of George W. Bush," *Mass Communication & Society* 7, no. 2 (2004): 157-175.

⁹² Daniel Bar-Tal, "Delegitimization: The Extreme Case of Stereotyping And Prejudice," *Stereotyping and prejudice: Changing conceptions* (1989): 169-182.

⁹³ Babak Bahador, "Mapping the Enemy Image Through Different Conflict Stages," *International Studies Association Annual Conference, School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Canterbury*, 2011.

⁹⁴ Jan Germen Janmaat, "The Ethnic ‘Other’ In Ukrainian History Textbooks: The Case of Russia And The Russians," *Compare* 37, no. 3 (2007): 307-324.

acknowledging the history, culture as well as any future ambitions and goals of the out-group. The out-group is depicted as an external oppressor, from whom, the territories as well as identities of the in-group need to be liberated.⁹⁵

There is a number of the political functions which can be fulfilled through the enemy images. At times of conflict, the state and its actors play an important role in garnering support and mobilizing the public for the upcoming violence. Through the use of language, political discourse can cue the activation of stereotypes and express them, sparking tensions between the groups and widening the distance between them. Through their consumption of the political discourse, in-group members can develop stronger opinions and emotional reactions towards the out-group, especially if enemy images are used as part of the narratives.⁹⁶ To prompt negative feelings towards the out-group, the enemy is commonly portrayed as uncivilized, barbaric and threatening. These descriptions have the potential to mobilize the in-group against the threat of the dangerous enemy and to ensure that the in-group will support the government and all of its policies and actions, regardless of their correctness and fairness in the conflict.⁹⁷ Furthermore, leaders of states can generate support from the public through the negative depictions of the enemy as their own negative characteristics and weaknesses may be overlooked when the fear and threat of the enemy is high.⁹⁸ The enemy becomes the focus for aggression and the attention of the public can shift from potential internal problems.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Daniel Bar-Tal, *Intractable Conflicts: Socio-psychological Foundations And Dynamics* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁹⁶ Daniel Bar-Tal, "Development of Social Categories And Stereotypes in Early Childhood: The Case of "The Arab" Concept Formation, Stereotype And Attitudes by Jewish Children in Israel," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 20, no. 3-4 (1996): 341-370.

⁹⁷ Richard K. Herrmann, D. O. Sears, L. Huddy, and R. Jervis, *Image Theory and Strategic Interaction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): 285- 314.

⁹⁸ Rune Ottosen, "Enemy Images And The Journalistic Process," *Journal of peace Research* 32, no. 1 (1995): 97-112.

⁹⁹ Gerald J. Middents, "Psychological Perspectives on Enemy-making," *In Organization Development Journal*, (1990): 44-48.

2.1.3 Anti-Armenian Discourse in Azerbaijan

In the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan, the two rival groups in the region have found themselves with inflexible and unchanging collective memory, however accepting very different historical narratives about common historical events. When Armenia and Azerbaijan began their development as independent nations, elites in both states began to ethnicise the conflict and attempted to hegemonise their power by reducing the complexities of multiethnicity, simplifying the differences and similarities between people and articulating “the other” as the enemy.¹⁰⁰ Ethnic nationalism rose further, and identity replaced interest as the main factor in politics in both countries. The clash in narratives and the competing myths and claims have created an identity conflict between the groups, which has made it difficult for them to reconcile. Since the end of the first Nagorno-Karabakh war in 1994, Baku pursued a ‘cold war’ policy against the Armenians. Contact was limited on the societal level and economic boundaries were established. The anti-Armenian sentiment is also visible on the institutional level in Azerbaijan. Stereotypical opinions circulate in the mass media and exist in the addresses and speeches of state officials, establishing strong roots in the consciousness of the public. The government under the current president of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, has been accused of spreading anti-Armenian narratives, including his propaganda of hate through speeches and the destruction of Armenian cultural heritage in Azerbaijani territory. Historian Jeremy Smith argues that the national identity in independent Azerbaijan is heavily rested on Aliyev’s rule, on a sense of injustice and victimhood and a developed hatred towards Armenians.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Ohannes Geukjian, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus: Nagorno-Karabakh and the Legacy of Soviet Nationalities Policy* (Ashgate Publishing Group, 2011).

¹⁰¹ Jeremy Smith, *Red Nations* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

The government of Azerbaijan, which is a consolidated authoritarian regime, relies heavily on symbolic politics for its legitimacy and utilizes presidential addresses and speeches, state-owned media and other sources to attack the Armenians but also to intimidate those from within the state.¹⁰² Up until the Second War in 2020, the public and the opposition in Azerbaijan were divided into those who criticized the president of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev for his unwillingness to negotiate and compromise and those who believed he was too passive and was failing at regaining the territories. The conflict plays an important role in Aliyev's nationalist project because by carrying out military action and justifying it through the negative portrayal of Armenians, he is able to unite the public, dismantle his enemy and also to strengthen his hegemonic power. His discourse may not be immediately embraced by the people, but it is important to analyze as it does have justifying power, particularly considering his successes during the 2020 war and the subsequent increase in his popularity in the country.

There is gap in academic publications on the nature of political discourse on ethnic affairs. Policies, rules, addresses and statements are all ways in which political communication and discourse about ethnic groups is spread. Although there are works which focus on ethnic affairs in Nagorno-Karabakh, they tend to avoid the language and the terminology within the different forms of communication as well as strategies and structures utilized by the political leaders in constructing such discourse.¹⁰³¹⁰⁴ This research paper aims to contribute to the available literature by utilizing discursive strategies and the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) to analyze the language used in presidential addresses to the nation by the president of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev,

¹⁰² Arthur Atanesyan, "Media Framing on Armed Conflicts: Limits of Peace Journalism on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 14, no. 4 (2020): 534-550.

¹⁰³ Elif Şeşen, Ünalın Duygu, and Şeyhmus Doğan, "Political Discourse Analysis of Aliyev's Address to the Nation Regarding the Second Karabakh War," *MANAS Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi* 11, no. 4: 1739-1751.

¹⁰⁴ Mustafa Gökcan Kösen, and Emre Erdoğan, "'Now We Are Whole': Humiliation, Shame And Pride in Aliyev's Discourse on the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* (2022): 1-18

during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. Considering the lack of independent media in Azerbaijan, Aliyev's discourse is widely shared and is very accessible. It also has a clear mission and is a great representation of how enemy images are articulated through discourse in a way which resonates with identities of the Azerbaijani people.

2.2 Research Questions

As presented through the theoretical framework, presidential discourse deserves attention as it offers insight into the narratives that are put out and have the potential to influence the public. This research paper focuses on the presidential addresses to the nation by Ilham Aliyev during the 2020 war in Nagorno-Karabakh. As one of the main sources of state narratives, released frequently during the war, the addresses offer insight into the president's arguments and assist in the analysis of the prevalent narratives on Armenians in Azerbaijan as well as of his choice of discursive strategies to present them. The main research question is how does Ilham Aliyev construct the narrative of Armenians as the enemy group in his presidential addresses during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War? This paper explores Aliyev's construction of narratives through three themes, which include nation, religion and history, and determines the role of each of these argumentative topoi in the assignment of positive attributes to the Azerbaijani in-group and negative attributes to the out-group, the Armenians. It argues that by presenting Armenians as an "enemy" in his discourse, Aliyev is able to justify his military actions, boost his legitimacy and unite the country in opposition to the enemy.

To answer the questions, the paper analyzes the language within Aliyev's addresses to the nation during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War using the critical discourse analysis, with focus

on the discourse-historical approach. The thesis then seeks to answer why the argumentative topoi of religion, national unity and historical myths were selected by Aliyev as part of his discourse to amplify the sense of unity and the negative perception of Armenians by the Azerbaijanis. This paper aims to contribute to the literature on political discourse, by illustrating how political actors utilize language in the creation and reinforcement of the enemy image. It determines that Aliyev contributes to the formation of myths and conflict narratives that keep setting Armenia and Azerbaijan on a path of conflict.

Chapter 3. Methods and Research Design

3.1 Data Selection

To address my research question, this research paper considers a total of 10 presidential addresses to the nation by Ilham Aliyev, issued within a period of two months. The first seven addresses were published during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, between September 27 and 10 November, 2020. An additional three addresses were issued after the ceasefire, with Aliyev officially ending his addresses to the nation on the topic of the war on December 1, 2020. As this research focuses on the language used rather than the tone, movements or behavior of the president, the addresses were accessed in written format through the official government website, where they are available in Azerbaijani, English and Russian.¹⁰⁵ They are also available in video format on Aliyev's YouTube channel and in the press in Azerbaijan and internationally. Using addresses is useful as they were frequently published at the time of the war and are a widely accessible textual source that directly focuses on the conflict and depicts the state narratives on the enemy group.¹⁰⁶ However, it is important to consider whether they provide an accurate depiction of Aliyev's discourse and narratives. The presidential discourse is not free from external influences, such as expert advice, opinion and pressure from the public, media, power relations, political parties and ally states, the socioeconomic situation at the time of the address and others.¹⁰⁷ Despite this

¹⁰⁵ "Addresses – Documents", Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, April 19, 2023.

¹⁰⁶ John E. Richardson, and Ruth Wodak, "Recontextualising Fascist Ideologies of the Past: Right-wing Discourses on Employment and Nativism in Austria and the United Kingdom," *Critical Discourse Studies* 6, no. 4 (2009): 251-267.

¹⁰⁷ Teun A. Van Dijk, "Elite Discourse and the Reproduction of Racism," In *Methods in Race and Ethnic Relations Research*, ed. J. Stanfield and R.M. Dennis (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992).

heterogeneity of sources and influences, this research paper considers political discourse in a narrow sense, just as the body of text or talk by the politicians. Although it is difficult to assume that the political actors delivering speeches are responsible for drafting them, it is not always of great importance. This is because, especially in case of political leaders, the individual takes full accountability for the content, making him the ‘principal’ of his own statements.¹⁰⁸ Rather than analysing each of the 10 addresses in chronological order, a thematic approach outlined in the next section is applied. Analysing each address separately would substantially extend the scope of the study and is not deemed as effective because the analysis aims to focus on the language and the content of the speeches. The thematic analysis is useful in identifying the main linguistic strategies and themes utilized by Aliyev to portray the enemy figure of Armenians in his addresses.

3.2 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)

This research presents a qualitative analysis of presidential addresses based on Ruth Wodak’s Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) within the CDA paradigm, which allows for the deconstruction of how social realities, identities and relations are represented and shaped through text in a particular social or political context.¹⁰⁹ As this research analyzes the way in which Armenians are represented in the text of presidential addresses by Aliyev, during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, this method of analysis is the most relevant. It allows for the analysis of the immediate language of the texts but also for a multi-level understanding of the context and its

¹⁰⁸ Erving Goffman, *Forms of Talk* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

¹⁰⁹ Norman Fairclough, *Analysing discourse: Textual analysis for social research* (Psychology Press, 2003).

influence on the discursive patterns.¹¹⁰ Given the deep-rooted nature of the conflict, its historical resonance, the political setting and the shifting discourses of collective memories and narratives, the research question constitutes an important topic of investigation under the Discourse-Historical Approach.¹¹¹ The use of DHA will help me identify how language was used in political discourse to make claims and draw boundaries between the groups.¹¹² For the purpose of this study, the political events leading up to the war, the tensions between the two ethnic groups and the historical roots and arguments with regards to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict have been summarized in the first chapter. These sources and events will be utilized in the analysis to reveal how various events and arguments have been readopted and recontextualized in the analyzed time, space and setting.¹¹³

In order to effectively track and detail the discourse on the enemy within Aliyev's addresses, this research applies the discursive strategy of argumentation by identifying and analyzing three *topoi*, also known as claims of argumentation: topos of nation, topos of history and topos of religion.¹¹⁴ In DHA, the *topoi* assist in breaking down larger concepts into different angles for investigation and assist in proving a certain condition and correlation of elements within a larger theme to the conclusion.¹¹⁵ Three themes were selected to argue that Aliyev uses a number of different rhetorics to shape his discourse on the enemy and strengthen his narrative. They are used to analyze the way in which Aliyev uses language to reinforce his arguments by appealing to

¹¹⁰ Ruth Wodak, *The Discourse of Politics in Action: Politics as Usual* (Springer, 2009).

¹¹¹ Gerlinde Mautner, Greg Myers, Helmut Gruber, and Jackie Abell, *Qualitative Discourse Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017).

¹¹² Paul Baker, Costas Gabrielatos, Majid Khosravinik, Michał Krzyżanowski, Tony McEnery, and Ruth Wodak, "A useful methodological synergy? Combining critical discourse analysis and corpus linguistics to examine discourses of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK press," *Discourse & Society* 19, no. 3 (2008): 279.

¹¹³ Norman Fairclough, and Gunter Kress, "Critical discourse analysis," In *How to analyze talk in institutional settings: A casebook of methods* (2001): 25-38.

¹¹⁴ Ruth Wodak, "Critical Discourse Analysis, Discourse-Historical Approach" (The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction, 2015): 8.

¹¹⁵ Gerlinde Mautner, Greg Myers, Helmut Gruber, and Jackie Abell, *Qualitative Discourse Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017).

religious values, strengthening the ‘us vs. them’ boundaries and unity within the in-group and drawing on historical references. The topoi of nation, history and religion are beneficial because they assist in understanding of the complex relationship between language, politics and power as well as in breaking down the analysis into useful thematic sections. However, it is important to keep in mind that these themes can and do overlap and certain discourses fall into more than one theme.

3.3 Topoi of Research

The topos of religion is a theme which assists in analyzing Aliyev’s arguments on Armenians through religious references, the glorification of martyrs and the enemy as a threat to religious values. The analysis of the religious rhetoric is useful as it helps to investigate how the nation’s major religion is framed against the enemy. Aliyev’s speeches were extensively focused on the destruction of religious sites by Armenians and on the lost martyrs of Azerbaijan, which were utilized as justifications for his actions in the war. The topos of history helps in demonstrating how Aliyev references the ancient past of Azerbaijan and a homeland that was taken away from the nation. He selectively emphasizes on certain events to strengthen his negative portrayal of Armenians and uses the past to make arguments for present actions. Lastly, the topos of the nation is used to discuss Aliyev’s discourse on unity and patriotism and on Armenians as the enemy group, which is in direct opposition to the values and beliefs of the Azerbaijani nation and its people. Aliyev uses his addresses to mobilize people against the enemy by drawing differences and creating the ‘us vs. them’ boundaries, emphasizing the legitimacy of Azerbaijani claims and the country’s democratic values, through extensive emphasis on the people and will of the nation.

This research also adopts other discursive strategies, including nomination, predication, perspectivation and intensification/mitigation, however these are to be utilized holistically, with only those relevant for each topos considered in the analysis.¹¹⁶ Nomination allows for the consideration of how Aliyev presents and labels Armenians as the enemy linguistically. The predication strategy assists in identifying how Aliyev attributes negative traits and actions to Armenians which further reinforce the negative stereotypes. Perspectivation considers the perspectives or viewpoints through which arguments and nominations on the enemy are framed in the text. Lastly, the intensification/mitigation strategy sheds light on the way in which certain events, emotions, or evaluations with regards to the enemy are intensified or downplayed through linguistic devices. Overall, the use of the discursive strategies allows for a deeper focus on the language used, such as specific terms used to construct in-groups and out-groups as well as tools and devices used to perpetuate negative stereotypes about Armenians, dehumanize them and justify violence.¹¹⁷ While this study considers the context of the conflict and the discursive strategies through its focus on DHA, it would be useful if future research included quantitative studies on the language used as it would allow for a comparison to be drawn between the narratives in different settings and contexts and would assist in further identifying patterns and trends within the discourse.

¹¹⁶ Martin Reisigl, and Ruth Wodak, “The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)”, In Wodak, Ruth, and Michael Meyer, eds. *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies* (Los Angeles, London and New Delhi: Sage, 2009): 87-121.

¹¹⁷ Martin Reisigl, and Ruth Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism* (Routledge, 2005).

Chapter 4. Analysis of the Selected Addresses by Ilham Aliyev

Between September 27 and November 10 of 2020, the period of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, Ilham Aliyev gave a total of ten addresses to the nation. In his addresses, Aliyev voices the dangers and threats posed by Armenians, through religious, historical and national narratives. The language used by Aliyev in his addresses assisted him in mobilizing the Azerbaijani public in support of his decision for military action and in boosting his popularity in the country, while also strengthening the existing negative perception of Armenians in the country outlined in the context chapter.

4.1 Topos 1: The Topos of Religion

Ethnic Azerbaijanis are primarily Muslim and make up 96% of Azerbaijan's population. Shia' Muslims make up 65% of the population and Sunni Muslims make up 35%.¹¹⁸ The rest of the population includes Jews, Baha'is and Christians of various denominations. In Armenia, 97% of the citizens are members of the Armenian Apostolic Church.¹¹⁹ In attempts to leverage national sentiment and unite the public in the struggle for the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, media sources and political actors in both countries have presented religion as a divisive factor. Some have even gone as far as to claim that the Nagorno-Karabakh war is a struggle between Muslims and

¹¹⁸ United States Department of State, "2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Azerbaijan," *Office of International Religious Freedom*, May 12, 2021.

¹¹⁹ United States Department of State, "2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Armenia," *Office of International Religious Freedom*, May 12, 2021.

Christians and religion is the core reason for the conflict.¹²⁰ Armenian leaders have used religiously tinged language to present Armenia as a threatened Christian outpost surrounded by Muslim states. In Azerbaijan too, Armenia has been presented as a mono-ethnic and intolerant state, which is barbaric and hostile in relation to the Muslim world.¹²¹

One of the aims of this research paper is to demonstrate how Ilham Aliyev employed religion as an argumentation strategy during the 2020 war. As demonstrated in the chapter on historical context, Muslim Azerbaijanis had a developed sense of religious identity before the development of their national identity, making religion an important identification factor. Although contemporary Azerbaijan is not based on a divine source and Aliyev portrays it as a poly-confessional country of diverse ethnicities, open and tolerant of all religious backgrounds, he recognizes the overlap between the national boundaries and a well-established religious community.¹²² Not only are the people in Azerbaijan predominantly Muslim but the country is also surrounded by other Muslim states, including its ally Turkey and Iran, which is known for its wide support for Armenia in the conflict. A religious rhetoric is employed by Aliyev in a Brubakerian sense, wherein it is used to achieve secular objectives, such as justifying actions during the war, minimizing internal tensions and overcoming accusations of war crimes.¹²³ Religious nationalism is used by Aliyev to promote the enemy image of Armenia and to appeal to the fraternal relation between Muslims within Azerbaijan as well as those outside of the state, attempting to unite them in support of the fighting. While the political views of the people in

¹²⁰ Andrew Higgins, 2020. "Armenia's Leader Makes Plea to U.S. as Conflict Rages with Azerbaijan." *The New York Times*. October 4. Accessed April 15, 2022.

¹²¹ Philip Gamaghelyan and Sergey Rumyantsev, "The road to the Second Karabakh War: The Role of Ethno-centric Narratives in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," *Caucasus Survey* 9, no. 3 (2021): 320-336.

¹²² Philip Gamaghelyan and Sergey Rumyantsev, "The road to the Second Karabakh War: The Role of Ethno-centric Narratives in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," *Caucasus Survey* 9, no. 3 (2021): 320-336.

¹²³ Rogers Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches," *Nations and Nationalism* 18, no. 1 (2012): 2-20.

Azerbaijan differ and not all would agree with Aliyev's cause, the majority Muslim population could perhaps feel stronger towards the cause if religion was under a threat.

The first way through which Aliyev utilizes the topos of religion to assign negative attributes to Armenia and positive attributes to Azerbaijan is through religiously tinged language, including references to the martyrs. While portraying the Azerbaijani soldiers as martyrs, who sacrifice their lives for the nation, he portrays Armenians as immoral and aggressive. On October 20, when the fighting was still in full speed, Aliyev released his fifth address to the nation on the war, in which he attacked Armenians for their military operations and praised the Azerbaijani soldiers for their efforts. In the text of the address, he states that:

“The liberation of every village, every city and every strategic elevation from the occupiers requires great professionalism, courage, bravery and heroism. Our servicemen are becoming martyrs. May Allah rest the souls of all our martyrs in peace! Our martyrs will always live in our hearts. [...] May Allah send healing to all our wounded soldiers! At the same time, the despised enemy is constantly firing on our settlements. [...] Terter district is particularly exposed to cowardly fire. [...] As a result of the cowardly shelling of the city of Ganja, civilians were killed – children, women, and the elderly. But it does not matter to the enemy. There is no difference for them. [...] The whole world sees what an ugly and savage enemy Azerbaijan is liberating its native lands from.”¹²⁴

The above quote demonstrates Aliyev's use of the strategy of predication, which is employed to construct the image of the out-group, the Armenians, as a “cowardly”, “ugly” and “savage” enemy. He does not mention the word “Armenian” in the paragraph, further stripping the out-group from its identity. The stereotypical attribution of negative traits is further intensified as

¹²⁴ Aliyev, Ilham. “Ilham Aliyev Addressed the Nation.” October 20, 2020, Baku, Azerbaijan, Transcript, The Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/41713>

he uses the above terms repeatedly. As an example, in five of the ten speeches, he refers to the enemy as “cowardly”, using the word a total of nine times. Aliyev further emphasizes on the targeting of the civilian population by Armenians, to depict them as uncivilized and immoral and as an argument to justify the need for Azerbaijan’s military involvement in Nagorno-Karabakh. In contrast to his description of the enemy, Aliyev assigns positive traits such “courage, bravery and heroism” to the in-group. He uses religiously tinged language to depict his gratefulness and appreciation for the martyrs. It is important to note here, that although the English version of the speech was used, Aliyev uses the word *shaheed* when referring to the martyrs in Azerbaijani, which can also have a religious connotation, despite the word not having a fixed and immutable definition. He ends the paragraph by using a hyperbole, an intensification device, stating that the “whole world” is aware of the negative characteristics and qualities of the out-group. After the signing of the ceasefire, during his final address to the nation on the topic of the 2020 war, Aliyev further states:

“We did not retreat a single day. Our wounded soldiers, who were in serious condition, were saying in hospitals that they wanted to recover as soon as possible and return to the combat zone. May Allah rest the souls of our martyrs. The parents that put them to rest were still saying – long live the Motherland. They were saying – forward, only forward. May Allah rest the souls of all our martyrs!”¹²⁵

By adding religiously tinged language and employing the concept of martyrdom, he depicts the dedication, strength and unity of Azerbaijan’s soldiers. In this above quote, Aliyev also makes his interpretation of the word *shaheed* more evident. He states that the soldiers have died, so that the nation can live, highlighting the nation as a priority and showcasing his secular motives.

¹²⁵ Aliyev, Ilham. “Ilham Aliyev Addressed the Nation.” December 1, 2020, Baku, Azerbaijan, Transcript, The Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/48205>

However, remaining careful, he utilizes the perspectivization strategy, presenting this discourse as if it is that of the people rather than his own, stating that it is the parents of the soldiers who believe that they have died for the right cause. According to his quote upon losing their children, the parents continued to focus on the war and encouraging Aliyev to go forward and continue with the fighting. He depicts that the will of the people is with his cause and families are sacrificing their children because the cause is just, further strengthening his argument for the need of a military solution in Nagorno-Karabakh. Furthermore, as both of the above quotes demonstrate, Aliyev prays for the martyrs together with his people, which could draw an ideological connection between him and the public. The religious references and symbolism are important not only culturally but also morally and spiritually for the national community.

The second way through which Aliyev utilizes the topos of religion to assign negative attributes to Armenia and positive attributes to Azerbaijan is through his emphasis on the destruction and appropriation of religious sites by Armenians. While the references to martyrdom and religiously tinged language are mainly effective in uniting the in-group, the references to religious sites are powerful in strengthening the negative perception of the out-group and pushes Azerbaijanis to identify Armenians as the enemy and as a threat, both in religious and national terms. Despite the fact that schools, homes, and other important infrastructure was destroyed, mosques are the sites which Aliyev focuses on the most as the pain of their destruction is more likely to be felt by the entire population due to the sense of religious affiliation. In nine out of the ten addresses on the war, he discusses the destruction and appropriation of religious sites, portraying them as elements of cultural pride, which the enemy tries to erase. The two quotes on the destruction of religious sites, from the address from the first day of the war, the 27th of September, and the conclusion of the war, on the 10th of November are below:

“Azerbaijani mosques are being destroyed and desecrated. Armenia keeps cows and pigs in our mosques. This is the greatest insult to the entire Muslim world. The graves of our ancestors are being destroyed by tractors. It is fascists, vandals and savages who have done this.”¹²⁶

“I said I would not stop. No-one can stop me. [...] We forced him, we compelled him, and we made him commit by beating him up for all his evil deeds, for keeping those pigs in our mosques. He who keeps pigs in our mosques is a pig himself. [...] No-one can insult us. If you do, you will learn a lesson. [...] In the half-destroyed mosques in the liberated lands, the savage enemy kept pigs to insult us and hurt our pride. But we took revenge on them with a vengeance. We have avenged the victims of Khojaly. We have avenged our martyrs.”¹²⁷

The above quotes demonstrate the way in which Aliyev uses his discourse to appeal to the religious identities of the public. Portraying the enemy as dangerous to the Muslim world, he expresses the incompatibility of Armenians not only with Azerbaijanis but also with Muslims everywhere. This discourse can have substantial implications as it has the potential of instilling fears of threat and invasion in people, regardless of their proximity or connection to Nagorno-Karabakh. A narrative of barbarianism is an important part of Aliyev’s mobilization strategy and the mention of Armenians using the mosques to house cattle, especially pigs, which possess a powerful cultural baggage for Muslims and are seen as unclean, strengthens the negative public opinion. Aliyev also uses the discursive strategy of predication to assign explicit nouns to Armenians, referring to them as fascists, vandals and savages. In the second quote, when speaking

¹²⁶ Aliyev, Ilham. “Ilham Aliyev Addressed the Nation.” September 27, 2020, Baku, Azerbaijan, Transcript, The Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/40968>

¹²⁷ Aliyev, Ilham. “Ilham Aliyev Addressed the Nation.” November 10, 2020, Baku, Azerbaijan, Transcript, The Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/45924>

on the president of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan, he further states that “he who keeps pigs in our mosques is a pig himself”. Although Aliyev refrains from assigning the noun in a direct manner, it can be interpreted as his indirect description of the Armenians. Associating the enemy with animals that are associated with filth in Islam further dehumanizes the out-group.

The mention of the destruction of graves by Armenians is also significant. Cemeteries are sites which allow for those who have passed to live in the memory of the people. Construction over graves is considered a sin and visitation is an integral part of Islam. There is a saying among Muslims, when one passes a graveyard, “Assalamu alaikum, peace be to you. This is the dwelling place of people who were believers”.¹²⁸ Hence, through the destruction of graveyards, Armenians are seen as demonstrating no respect for the deceased, for Muslims and strip the Azerbaijani population from their ability to commemorate those who have passed as well as from the memory and presence of their ancestors in the region. He ends his address, upon Azerbaijan’s military victory on November 10, by arguing that the enemy committed these crimes with the purpose of insulting the honor and pride of the Azerbaijani people. He effectively follows up this argument by stating that because he did not stop the military action, the in-group has prevailed over the dangerous, barbaric enemy, further boosting the self-image of the Azerbaijanis as strong and victorious. He further states that the nation has successfully avenged not only the insulted public but also the dead, including both the martyrs and the “victims of Khojaly”. The historical context chapter demonstrated the failure of previous leaders of Azerbaijan to prevent the massacres during the first Nagorno-Karabakh war. Ayaz Mutallibov was deposed in 1992, due to his inability to protect the residents of Khojaly from the Armenian militia. Similarly, Abulfaz Elchibey was overthrown in 1993, due to his failure to establish political and economic stability and to improve

¹²⁸ Salahi, Adil, “Saying Salam to the Dead,” Arab News, February 23, 2004. <https://www.arabnews.com/244694>

Azerbaijan's military operations in Nagorno-Karabakh. By arguing that military operations in Nagorno-Karabakh are a form of revenge for the lost martyrs of the first Nagorno-Karabakh war and the victims of the Khojaly massacre, Aliyev indirectly showcases the strength of his leadership and his ability to properly manage the conflict to Azerbaijan's advantage. As mentioned in the contextual discussion on his rise to power, Aliyev faces political opposition to his regime. However, by showcasing that he was able to manage the conflict better than his predecessors, he indirectly targets those members of the opposition who criticized him for his lack of action and incapability to solve the long-standing issue. Portraying Armenians as violent instigators who need to avenge through military action, he also fights back against those who criticized him for his unwillingness to negotiate and compromise. The image of the people Azerbaijan as strong nation able to prevail over a dangerous, barbaric enemy, motivates and stimulates the Azerbaijanis national pride as well as appreciation for the president's actions.

Ilham Aliyev also discusses churches as religious sites that are protected by Azerbaijanis and destroyed and appropriated by Armenians. The topoi of religion and history are intertwined as Aliyev makes arguments on the history of the churches within Nagorno-Karabakh, demonstrating how the outgroup is not only an enemy of Islam but is also disrespectful of fellow Christians, appropriating Albanian churches and erasing their history. He further argues against the existence of Armenian churches in the region. The below quote demonstrates Aliyev's discourse on the matter:

“Kalbajar is our ancient land. It is the land of ancient Azerbaijan. [...] The historical sites of Kalbajar are our great asset. Both mosques and churches are our historical treasures. The people of Azerbaijan know this well, and the whole world should know that churches in Kalbajar belong to the ancient state of Caucasian Albania. Many historical documents

confirm this. It is no secret. Armenian "historians" and impostors have simply Armenianized the ancient Albanian churches, added their own inscriptions, and appropriated them. Suffice it to look at history, and anyone can see that in the 1830s, Tsarist Russia abolished the Albanian Church, gave all its property to the Armenian Gregorian Church. Armenian priests and their patrons then began to appropriate these churches. Their main task was to purge Caucasian Albania's history. But we did not allow that to happen. [...] Therefore, no-one should be worried. These churches will continue to be protected by the state. The whole world and world leaders praise Azerbaijan's policy on multiculturalism and inter-religious relations."¹²⁹

In the above quote, Aliyev points out the openness of his government and celebrates Azerbaijan as a land of religious tolerance. He once again uses hyperboles, such as "it is not secret" and "anyone can see that" to demonstrate that his arguments are widely supported and justified. He depicts his good will and tolerance by stating that his policies on multiculturalism and inter-religious relations are praised by everyone. He therefore depicts his regime as democratic in opposition to undemocratic Armenians who hijack and destroy religious sites, whether Muslim or Christian.

He uses words such as "historical treasure", "great asset" and "cultural heritage" to demonstrate the way in which Azerbaijanis protects and cherishes the churches in question. Using the nomination strategy, he then uses verbs such as "purge" and "appropriate" to denote the actions of the Armenians. The word "Armenianize", which is found in the quote, used by Aliyev in multiple addresses and is effective as it depicts the out-group as taking over and changing something that is not originally theirs. He uses quotation marks when referring to Armenian historians to further discrediting their existence as well as the existence of history of Armenians in

¹²⁹ Aliyev, Ilham. "Ilham Aliyev Addressed the Nation." November 25, 2020, Baku, Azerbaijan, Transcript, The Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/47778>

the region. Aliyev is selective in the way in which he bridges the past and the present, referring to an ancient past where Albanian churches were built on the land, while ensuring to state that the land was part of “ancient Azerbaijan”. Through this quote, Aliyev demonstrates the continuation of the Azerbaijani nation in the region as well as its respect and preservation of religious sites, while showcasing Armenians as invaders and appropriators. Overall, Aliyev has utilized both the religious affiliation of the people and the sense of connection that people have to religious sites to make arguments for the mobilization in Azerbaijan and to unite the public against Armenians in the war.

4.2 Topos 2: The Topos of History

In navigating his policies as part of the Second Nagorno Karabakh War, Aliyev uses historical narratives to further strengthen the enemy image and unite the country against Armenians, which are threatening Azerbaijan’s presence in the region as well as its cultural heritage. In his addresses, Aliyev makes his nationalist discourse salient by framing the nation as historical.¹³⁰ He emphasizes that the Azerbaijani nation has an ancient past in Nagorno-Karabakh, which is part of its historical homeland, while delegitimizing Armenian presence and history in the region. In the below quote, Aliyev presents his vision of the history of Armenians in the region:

“I am absolutely right when I say that we are restoring historical justice. During the live debates at the Munich Security Conference, I proved to the whole world that this is our historical land. I provided information about the Kurakchay Peace Treaty signed at the beginning of the 19th century. [...] After my remarks, I am sure that a broad international

¹³⁰ Anthony D. Smith, “Introduction: ‘Ethno-symbolism’ and the Study of Nationalism. In *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

audience keenly following the current situation on the battlefield will visit those websites and see that there was no mention of the Armenian people in that agreement. The Armenian people were not here at that time. The Armenian people were brought to our ancestral lands after the Kurakchay, Gulistan and Turkmenchay peace treaties. They were deliberately brought and resettled in Karabakh, one of the most fascinating corners of our country, and appropriate conditions were created for them. The objective of this was obvious – to change the religious composition in the new lands of the empire, to expel Muslims from their ancestral lands, drive them away and create a new reality. Unfortunately, they achieved that goal. [...] After that, the Armenian population was brought en masse from neighboring countries, settled in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, in the Azerbaijanis' ancestral lands. Then they demonstrated their typical nature and gradually began to appropriate all our lands.”¹³¹

Aliyev takes credit for raising awareness regarding Karabakh being a historically Azerbaijani land, demonstrating his role in spreading the narrative. He mentions the treaty of Kurkachay, signed between a Karabakh Khan and the Russian Empire as well as the treaties of Gulistan and Turkmenchay, signed between the Russian and Qajar Iran, between 1805 and 1828, highlighting that the presence of Armenians in the region was not mentioned in these documents. Despite the treaties focusing on the transfer of territory to the Russians and not on the demographic composition of said territories, Aliyev's mention of the treaties is effective in diminishing the claims of Armenian presence in the region. He states that Armenians did not settle in the territory themselves. They were brought there by the Russian Empire, which aimed to change the religious composition of the lands. This argument ties in with the topos of religion and further depicts the Armenians as in opposition and overtaking not only Azerbaijani territory but also the homes of the Muslims. Using this narrative, Aliyev also demonstrates that although Armenians and Azerbaijanis

¹³¹ Aliyev, Ilham. “Ilham Aliyev Addressed the Nation.” October 26, 2020, Baku, Azerbaijan, Transcript, The Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/44435>

lived side by side before the first Nagorno-Karabakh war, the lands were inherently Azerbaijani. As discussed in the historical context chapter, the region was also always known for its semi-independent leaders, regardless of religion, and a mixed Christian-Muslim population, mostly consisting of Oghuz Turkic tribes and Armenians. However, Aliyev is selective with his mention of historical events to strengthen his discourse on the Armenians as “invaders”, who are not native to the lands. Rather than mentioning other historical events, he selected the incorporation of the region into the Russian empire, which alludes to the time when limitations on Muslim identities and favoritism of Armenians was prevalent. This strengthens the appeal of his discourse as it evokes the historical grievances of the Azerbaijanis. He further contributes to the existing narrative, raised by Azerbaijani historians, such as Buniatov and Mamedova, who argued that Armenians have Armenianized lands and churches which belonged to Caucasian Armenia. Aliyev uses his discourse to support these existing claims and to reinforce them by showcasing how Armenia is conducting similar atrocities today.

He ends the above quote by arguing that Armenians demonstrated their “typical nature” and began to appropriate their lands. Hence, despite the Russian Empire being responsible for their immigration to the region in his narrative, Armenians are still portrayed negatively and are to blame. The word “typical” hints to a stereotypical discourse and to an assumption that Armenians are known and have been appropriating religion and culture in history. Therefore, in the text above, topos of history is used to point to the consistency and the prevalence of the negative behavior of Armenians and establish a generalized image, classifying them as one group, that has remained unchanged in its essence. The next quote focuses on the negative portrayal of Armenians through the depiction of their destruction and appropriation of the territories and traditions:

“Like savages, they have demolished, burned, plundered everything and cut down the forests. They portray themselves as a people, so to speak, who have lived here for centuries. A people who has lived here for centuries would never have done this, would not have committed such barbarism. They lived there in the houses of the Azerbaijanis. They didn't build anything themselves, they did not lift a finger, they just exploited everything. [...] Like savages, they invaded and exploited a foreign land; they wanted to change its origin, the names of our settlements. They destroyed our historical sites, created a false history and published maps. This completely contradicts the traditions, rules, the rules of conduct in this region. This shows again that the Armenian people had nothing in common with our region. They have never been indigenous people of the Caucasus. They are aliens. We, for our part, have already restored justice. We have restored historical justice. [...] But our goal is to prevent Armenian fascism from reemerging in this region.”¹³²

In the above quote, Aliyev uses the nomination strategy, using verbs such as “demolished”, “plundered”, “exploited” and “invaded” to refer to the actions of Armenians. In contrast, he describes Azerbaijan as “restoring historical justice”. As demonstrated in the historical context chapter, the narrative of “who was first” in the region has dominated the public and political discourse in both countries since the 1980s. By presenting his version of history, Aliyev further fuels the debate and reinforces the image of Armenia as an “occupier”, historically foreign to region. He also uses predication to describe Armenians using nouns such as “savages” as well as “aliens”. The categorization of people as aliens, beings that are not familiar, points to the stereotypical portrayal of Armenians as untrustworthy and threatening. He alienates Armenians from Muslims through his use of religiously tinged language and their destruction and appropriation of Muslim homes and mosques, from Christians through his discussion on the appropriation of churches, and through the quote above he also he creates a divide between

¹³² Aliyev, Ilham. “Ilham Aliyev Addressed the Nation.” December 1, 2020, Baku, Azerbaijan, Transcript, The Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/48205>

Armenians and the region as a whole. He states that Armenians have “nothing in common” with the region. He positions Azerbaijan as a fighter against “Armenian fascism” and as a country that is safeguarding and ensuring that the entire region remains safe from the enemy.

4.3 Topos 3: The Topos of the Nation

The topos of the nation constitutes the discourse of national unity and the opposition of this single unity to the ‘other’, a common enemy. This section focuses on Aliyev’s use of the scope of deictic “we”, to emphasize the need for collectiveness and unity in the fight against the out-group, while using “them”, to distinguish the dangerous, uncivilized threat posed by the Armenians. In all addresses, from the onset of the war, Aliyev has used the linguistic techniques of predication and nominations to denote negative attributions to the out-group, categorizing them as unjust and barbaric. The below quotes are examples in which the president employs othering and portrays the enemy as incapable of complying with international norms:

“Now we have shown who is who. We are driving them away like dogs! Azerbaijani soldiers drive them away like dogs! The Azerbaijani flag is being raised in the occupied territories! Azerbaijani soldiers are standing in their trenches! Their posts are in our hands! We are driving their tanks! Their other weapons are in our hands, their trucks are in our hands! We are fulfilling our mission of salvation and we will complete it!”¹³³

“When we talk about the city of Fuzuli, of course, we should all know that there is nothing left of the city, no monuments, not a single building. For 30 years, it was in the hands of

¹³³ Aliyev, Ilham. “Ilham Aliyev Addressed the Nation.” October 4, 2020, Baku, Azerbaijan, Transcript, The Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/41713>

vultures, in the hands of predators, in the hands of jackals. It was as if a wild tribe had taken over the city.”¹³⁴

The above quotes demonstrate Aliyev’s use of the predication strategy, through which he uses nouns such as “jackals”, “predators”, “vultures”, “wild tribe” and “dogs” to describe Armenians. The language used by the president points to his attempt to dehumanize the out-group by assigning it animalistic rather than human traits. The target group is connected with animals that are considered inferior and do not possess the norms and values of humans.¹³⁵ By portraying Armenians as lacking human emotion and awareness, he is able to spread a narrative which increases the potential negative perception and lack of empathy for Armenians from the public. It assists in the decision of Azerbaijanis to mobilize and support Aliyev’s military action in Nagorno-Karabakh. In the first quote, he also describes the victory against the dangerous enemy through metaphorical depictions of Azerbaijanis as in possession of everything that was used by Armenians to occupy the territories and fight against Azerbaijan during the war. The quote is motivating as he ensures that Azerbaijan will fulfill its mission and return the territories to its control. The below quote is also useful as it shows how the dehumanized out-group is portrayed in opposition to the in-group:

“I said earlier that the city of Tartar is similar to Stalingrad, which was destroyed during World War II. Every day, hundreds of shells landed there. Even though it is not a big city, not a single person has left. But the Armenians fled. [...] Did any of us run away? It didn't happen! Not a single person! This is who the people of Azerbaijan are! Civilians lost their homes, property, and loved ones but kept saying, "Long live the Motherland". Go ahead,

¹³⁴ Aliyev, Ilham. “Ilham Aliyev Addressed the Nation.” October 17, 2020, Baku, Azerbaijan, Transcript, The Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/43334>

¹³⁵ Babak Bahador, "Mapping the Enemy Image Through Different Conflict Stages," *International Studies Association Annual Conference, School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Canterbury*, 2011.

go forward! The letters to me say, Commander-in-Chief, go on! We support you, go forward, don't stop, and so I did. I did not stop.”¹³⁶

Aliyev uses group comparison as a device to create an enemy image, drawing a distinction between the in-group and the out-group in the above quote. He describes Armenians as deserters who fled the fighting, while Azerbaijanis as strong and persistent in the cause. He intensifies his argument by stating that “not a single person”, on the Azerbaijani side, left the dangerous areas despite the destruction of their property. This demonstrates the difference between the will of the in-group and the out-group and the lack of emotional attachment and care that the out-group displays for the territory, as they are simply fleeing the region due to the war. On the other hand, Azerbaijanis residing in areas under the fighting have not left, due to their strong faith in the leadership and in the cause. As discussed in the theoretical framework, by assigning vices to the out-group and virtues to the in-group Aliyev reinforces the sense of moral superiority in the in-group. He offers the perspective of the civilians, referencing their encouragement towards the president and their love for the nation, as they are willing to sacrifice their property for the sake of the victory and for the nation. The below quotes further demonstrate other ways through which Aliyev references the national unity of Azerbaijanis:

“Today, we, all the people of Azerbaijan, are writing the brightest page of our people and our state together. Today, we are writing this glorious history of solidarity, mutual support and unity. [...] Despite the fact that the cowardly, treacherous and vile enemy commits war crimes, fires on the civilian population and kills children as a result of today’s bombardment, I want to say again that we must not take revenge on civilians. We are taking revenge on the battlefield. The blood of our martyrs and civilians does not and will not

¹³⁶ Aliyev, Ilham. “Ilham Aliyev Addressed the Nation.” November 10, 2020, Baku, Azerbaijan, Transcript, The Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/45924>

remain unavenged. I warn the fascist leadership of Armenia again – leave the remaining lands of your own accord. We will throw you out of there anyway. There will be no trace of them left on those lands. We will drive them out of our lands to the end.”¹³⁷

By describing the Azerbaijani nation as a nation which has been united and harmonious through history, he contrasts the in-group from the Armenians, which are “cowardly” and “vile” in their nature. He uses trait characterization to reinforce the enemy image. He is emphasizing that unlike the Armenians, Azerbaijanis do not target civilians in the conflict, portraying the in-group as just and civilized. By referencing the killing of children and civilians by Armenians, he justifies that through its military action, Azerbaijan is merely seeking revenge for its losses and that its mission is that of justice. He speaks of getting rid of the enemy through a metaphoric phrase further depicting the out-group as something that can be “thrown out”. Aliyev also highlights the unity of Azerbaijanis by arguing all sections of the public support his decisions, while contrasting Armenia as a state that is not livable and intolerant to people of different backgrounds:

“Representatives of all nationalities and all religious denominations living in our country showed courage fighting the enemy and restored Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. This is our great asset, a great value. [...] Armenia is deprived of such happiness because it is a mono-ethnic state; no-one lives there except for the Armenians. In Eurasia, there is no other country like this in our region because no-one can live there. They are expelled, subjected to ethnic cleansing like the Azerbaijanis, or representatives of different nationalities cannot live there. They are being squeezed out, out, and out. But our advantage lies precisely in

¹³⁷ Aliyev, Ilham. “Ilham Aliyev Addressed the Nation.” October 17, 2020, Baku, Azerbaijan, Transcript, The Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/43334>

this. A multinational and multi-confessional Azerbaijan has asserted itself in this war; representatives of all peoples have displayed true unity and heroism.”¹³⁸

Aliyev attempts to further widen the gap between Armenia and other countries in the region by arguing that Armenians “expel” and “commit ethnic cleansing” against people of all other nationalities living in the Republic of Armenia. Describing the instability in Armenia and the failure of the people to coexist in the country further strengthens his argument of Armenian savagery. The above quote contrasts Azerbaijan as a “multinational” and “multi-confessional” state, linking his arguments made in the quotes discussed in the section on religion. According to Aliyev, unity and heroism are able to prevail in Azerbaijan due to the political openness but also the nature of Azerbaijani people who are happy and supportive, showing unity in the cause. The last quote also strengthens the argument as Aliyev brings back all of his arguments to justify his decision for mobilization, effectively stating that his decision proved to be right:

“Sitting in a bunker, the Armenian dictator has completely isolated himself and his nation from the world. In Azerbaijan, there is unity between the people and the government. This is the difference. This is our strength. Our strength is in our unity. Strength and unity define us. The Azerbaijani people probably remember me repeatedly saying in the last three to four years that the world is changing. Relations are changing; international law does not work; the factor of strength comes to the fore; the principle of “might is right” prevails. All of this is available in my speeches and statements because I have correctly analyzed the international situation.”¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Aliyev, Ilham. “Ilham Aliyev Addressed the Nation.” November 10, 2020, Baku, Azerbaijan, Transcript, The Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/45924>

¹³⁹ Aliyev, Ilham. “Ilham Aliyev Has Addressed the Nation.” November 20, 2020, Baku, Azerbaijan, Transcript, The Official Website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, <https://president.az/en/articles/view/47221>

He describes the Armenian leader as a “dictator”, highlighting his inability to lead the nation. While the leader of Armenia isolated the country, Aliyev was able to lead his country to victory. He also intensifies his argument by stating that the international law has failed at resolving the conflict and military action was necessary. He adds that the fact that Azerbaijan has demonstrated strength and was victorious in the war, points to it being in the right. This rhetoric allows him to strengthen his legitimacy and empower his claims and policies against his opponents. Aliyev’s statements demonstrate that he is relied on and he takes advantage of Armenia’s provocations to take back the territories. Aliyev’s discourse of democracy is prevalent in the speeches and is one of the central parts of his nationalist discourse as it differentiates Azerbaijan from its enemy. He uses his speeches to promote his image as a democratic leader who is merely responding to violations from another state.

4.4 Results

The analysis section demonstrates how Ilham Aliyev uses language in his addresses during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War to spread the enemy image of Armenians. Through discourse analysis of his addresses to the nation, it showcases how the topoi of religion, history and nation are utilized by the president to construct a narrative of Armenians as a dangerous “other”.

The first section of the analysis demonstrates how the president employs a religious rhetoric to promote the enemy image of Armenians. By using religiously tinged language and employing the concept of martyrdom, he depicts the dedication, strength and unity of Azerbaijan’s soldiers and creates an ideological connection between him and the public. After uniting the in-group on the basis of faith, he uses dehumanizing language, historical myths and group comparison to strengthen the negative perception of the “enemy group” by identifying Armenians as a threat,

both in religious and national terms. He does so through narratives on the appropriation and destruction of Muslim and Christian religious sites. He points out the openness of his government and celebrates Azerbaijan as a land of religious tolerance, depicting his regime as democratic in opposition to undemocratic Armenians who hijack and destroy religious sites. The discourse on religion has substantial implications as it has the potential of instilling fears of threat and invasion of important identity markers for the public and reinforces the existing myths and conflict narratives that fuel the conflict between the ethnic groups.

The second section demonstrates how Aliyev uses references to an ancient past and historical myths to amplify the sense of unity within the in-group and further the negative perception of Armenians, as the “enemy”. He utilizes selective historical events to emphasize that the Azerbaijani nation had an ancient past in Nagorno-Karabakh, which is part of its historical homeland, while delegitimizing Armenian presence and history in the region. By alluding to the time when limitations on Muslim identities and favoritism of Armenians was prevalent, he appeals to the historical grievances of the Azerbaijanis. He connects the past and the present, arguing that Armenians have appropriated lands and churches in history and continue to do so today, increasing the feelings of threat and danger felt by the public. The topos of history is also utilized by Aliyev to justify the need military measures against Armenians, as according to him, there is a need to stop the enemy group from destroying and appropriating cultural heritage and historical sites in order to ensure a peaceful future in the region.

The last section of the analysis focuses on the argumentative topos of the nation. Through his use of discourse on national unity, the president uses language to attribute the country’s plight to the hostile actions of its barbaric and uncivilized neighbor, Armenia, feeding the narrative of the victimized country, bound to never-ending threats from Armenians. He also uses strategies of

predication and nomination to dehumanize Armenians and portrays them as irremediably aggressive, morally inferior and barbaric in nature. By discussing the targeting of the civilian population by Armenians and the intolerant and undemocratic nature of the Republic of Armenia, Aliyev contrasts the in-group by presenting Azerbaijan as a nation that is democratic, tolerant and just. By dehumanizing the out-group through the argumentative topos of the nation, Aliyev justifies his decision for military mobilization, presenting himself as a democratic leader who is merely responding to violations from a dangerous and barbaric enemy that threatens communities not only in Azerbaijan, Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh but also in all of the South Caucasus.

Conclusion

The in-depth analysis of the presidential addresses by the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, contributes to a better understanding of the complex nature of the ethnic and territorial conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. It demonstrates how by presenting Armenians as an “enemy” in his discourse, Aliyev is able to justify his military actions, boost his legitimacy and unite the country in opposition to the enemy. The presidential addresses demonstrate that Armenians continue to be utilized as the main “other”, which is in opposition to the Azerbaijanis as a group, and that the barriers of mistrust and fear are instilled through the enemy images in discourse. The language used by Aliyev and the victim-perpetrator narrative appeals to the religious and national identities of the people as well as to their public consciousness. Aliyev positions himself as a leader who is “bringing Armenians to justice”, not only for the crimes committed during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, but also for the historical injustices which have shaped the collective memory of Azerbaijanis. The analysis of the presidential discourse, in combination with the historical context of the conflict, have demonstrated that even though the discourse and reasons for tensions between Armenian and Azerbaijani ethnic groups have witnessed shifts, the underlying ideology and the enemy image of Armenians remains constant and manifests itself in discourse.

After the conclusion of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, the political elites in Armenian and Azerbaijan continue to engage in a discursive struggle over narratives. Mutual accusations and enemy images of one another overpower the international and domestic efforts to promote acceptance and peace between the groups. This paper sheds light on the dangerous nature of the enemy images and negative stereotypes and demonstrates how Ilham Aliyev’s discourse

contributes to the formation of myths and conflict narratives that keep setting Armenia and Azerbaijan on a path of irreconcilable conflict. With Azerbaijan regaining a significant part of the territory back after the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War and Azerbaijanis resettling in towns which are in close proximity to the towns that remain under Armenian control, now more than ever, a transformation of political relations between the states is important. Rather than attempting to change the existing historical narratives, the political elites should loosen their control over mass media, allowing the public to gain more access to the narratives and beliefs of the opposing group, and should also work on establishing friendly relations, which will in turn encourage new trade and transportation paths in the region ensuring that viable communities can coexist in the region.

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