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Artsakh and Gaza: A Parallel Struggle

Artsakh i Gaza: paralelna borba

Abstract

Armenian experiences in Artsakh and Palestinian experiences in Gaza are very much similar to each other. Both communities have a history of discrimination and experiences of genocide – Armenia in 1915, Palestine in the present.

Both are threatened by a more powerful external adversary that clearly shows intentions to exterminate the entire community – Armenians by Azerbaijan, Palestinians by Israel. Solidarity between each other has therefore developed in both communities. In this text, I briefly describe some of the characteristics that bind these communities together and explain why they support each other.

The primarily used method is the analysis of historical and modern literature and articles, with a small addition of my personal experiences and conversations.

Keywords: Armenia, Artsakh, Gaza, Hamas, Israel, Palestine

Introduction

*Who Remembers the Armenians?
 I remember them
 and I ride the nightmare bus with them
 each night
 and my coffee, this morning
 I'm drinking it with them
 You, murderer -
 Who remembers you?
 (Najwan Darwish, 2014: 16)*

The parallel events in Gaza and Artsakh¹ resonate with each other. They are characterized by successive occurrences and mutual empathy for both communities. Nancy Kricorian writes in *Stories from the Armenian Quarter*: “K says, just because I’m Armenian doesn’t mean that I’m treated differently from other Palestinians. I think of myself as a Palestinian who is an ethnic Armenian. We breathe the same tear gas” (Kricorian, 2017). On one hand, the Nakba in 1948

¹Artsakh is the Armenian name for Nagorno-Karabakh, a term derived from Azerbaijan. Throughout the text, I will use the Armenian name of this province.

²Hamas’s attack was only a pretext to which Israel responded with the genocide of the Palestinians, under the guise of “fighting against Hamas,” so from here on in the text I will use the term Palestinian genocide for the current events in Palestine.

and the Hamas attack in 2023; on the other, the Armenian Genocide in 1915 and the illegal blockade of Artsakh by Azerbaijan from December 2022 to September 2023.² 18 days after the blockade of Artsakh ended and Azerbaijan completed its ethnic cleansing of the region, Hamas attacked Israel. To this, Israel responded with the genocide of Palestinians. Both tragedies contribute greatly to collective traumas – the Nakba for Palestinians, the Armenian Genocide for Armenians. This created a special bond of sympathy and support between the two ethnic communities. The Armenian community quickly sided with Palestine. I haven't found any data from empirical researchers about the attitudes of Armenians regarding Palestine and Gaza, but during my time in Armenia in May 2024 I spoke with many of them about Palestine and they clearly showed empathy towards their experience. They allowed me to use their words in this examination; however, for the purpose of this paper, their names are changed. Anush³ told me: "In the world of fake/superficial solidarities, where one issue is not really connected to the other, Palestine and Armenia is actually solidarity with substance"; an important reason that N sees similarity with Palestinians is because they have the same enemies: "As we know, Baku fuels the Gaza Genocide, and Israel provides weapons to ethnically cleanse Armenians. So, we have the same enemies". Similarly, T told me she has no problem siding with Palestine (despite them being Muslim as she is an actively religious Christian) and the reason she highlighted the most is that "both

enemies – Azerbaijan and Israel – have been given or forcefully taken land from Armenians or Palestinians and it is never enough for them. Not only do they want their land, but they also want the community and nation (that of Armenians and Palestinians) to disappear. E has a strong opinion on why as an Armenian she supports Palestine and why, she believes that every Armenian, should stand with Palestine: both nations are threatened by terrorist states that deny their wrongdoings. She made it clear: she is not talking about the people, but about the State of Israel:

How can an Armenian stand with the State of Israel? I'm not talking about Jews, I'm not talking about the people, but the state, the country is a terrorist state, it's an aggressor state and I don't understand how an Armenian could stand with Israel, a country that does not recognize the Armenian Genocide, while on the other hand Armenians do recognize the Holocaust. And a country that arms another terrorist country – Azerbaijan.

She said that this is a question of humanity, but highlighted that it is especially important for Armenians to stand with Palestine, as they've also supported and welcomed Armenian refugees during the Armenian Genocide. Across the world, events calling for solidarity have been organized, such as "Who Remembers?", Armenian – Palestinian Solidarities: A Reading,⁴ an online event where Armenian and Palestinian writers and poets came together to read their work, showing solidarity with each other and highlighting the interlocking historical injustices, as well as demanding justice.

³All names of the people who were willing to tell me their opinion have been changed.

⁴The event was co-hosted by International Armenian Literary Alliance, PalFest, RAWI, Mizna, Fikra, Armenian-American Action Network, Writers Against the War on Gaza (WAWOG), and Yerazad.

Articles were published as well, such as Hakopian's *Where Scenes of Catastrophe Reappear: On Armenian and Palestinian Solidarities* (2024) and Shirinian's *A plea to all Armenians to think about the genocide of the Palestinians* (2023). In her article, Shirinian calls to action by reminding Armenians that as survivors of a genocide they have a responsibility to take any kind of action they can to support the Palestinian people.

Every Armenian who has been watching the mass deportation – the ethnic cleansing – of Armenians from Artsakh in devastation, in horror and in rage should be called to this cause as their own cause. The genocide – the senseless catastrophe – that Israel is doing to Palestinians today is a part of the Armenian cause. To speak about this and to act against this in any way we can is our responsibility as survivors. (Shirinian, 2023)

Furthermore, at the protests in the USA, Armenians showed their support to Palestinians with banners that read: “You had the power to save us and didn’t. Here’s a(nother) chance to get it right” (Picture 1).

The two communities are therefore linked by the experience of genocide and the repetition of its crime. The pictures from different times thus show horrific scenes that repeat themselves again and again (Picture 2 and 3).

Each diptych, each doubling of Armenian and Palestinian catastrophe, also contains within it the possibility of a triptych, a quadtych, a polyptych. Each of its panels is an index of the recursivity of colonial violence, a structure whose horror is infinitely iterable. Beyond the diptych's frame is an n-dimensional plane of

atrocities spanning multiple spatiotemporal coordinates, not pictured (Firunts Hakopian, 2024).



Picture 1: Protest banner



Picture 2: Nakba and Palestinian Genocide (1915 and 2023)

Mashinka Firunts Hakopian (2024) uses these photographs to highlight the contiguity between the Armenian and Palestinian tragedies and their liberation struggles. Collective memory is not the



Picture 3: Armenian Genocide and Artsakh (1948 and 2023)

only thing that connects the tragedies of these communities. Their struggle is intertwined with similarities such as the imperialist authority enforcing a narrative that negates violence, othering of the indigenous population, rebellions against occupation, financing of the occupiers, and the supply of weapons from other countries (for example the USA) (Firunts Hakopian, 2024).

During the British Mandate in Palestine (1920-1948), the British enforced policies that often minimized or ignored the grievances and rights of the Palestinian Arab population while supporting Zionist ambitions as outlined in the Balfour

Declaration (Segev, 2000). Palestinian Arabs revolted against the British rule and Zionist immigration, notably during the 1936-1939 Arab Revolt, to which the British response involved harsh military action, mass arrests, and punitive measures (Swedenburg, 1995). Similarly, the Ottoman Empire denied the systematic nature of the Armenian Genocide, framing it as a necessary wartime measure against a disloyal minority (Dadrian, 1995). Just like Palestinians, Armenians in regions like Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) resisted Ottoman and later Azerbaijani control, seeking autonomy or union with Armenia (Hovannisian, 1971). These rebellions were met with brutal suppression (Sunny, 1993).

One of the most important Artsakh heroes, Monte Melkonian, also expressed solidarity with Palestine and highlighted the parallels:

“Accordingly, I submit that the Turkey-Armenia status quo is no more acceptable than the “Israel”/Palestine status quo. Just as the whole of Palestine is “the land in question” for the Palestinians, so too the whole Armenian homeland is “the land in question” for Armenians” (Melkonian, 1993, p. 18).

In addition, they (Armenians and Palestinians) are also connected by Israeli weapons, which kill both communities, as Israel also supports Azerbaijan with weapons (Petrosyan, 2020). We can now look more closely at some of these similarities between the tragedies at different times.

The following text can be divided into two parts. In the first part, I will explain what imperialism is and briefly restore the historical events of the Nakba and the Armenian genocide. In the second part

of the text, I will move on to contemporary events, the blockade of the Lachin corridor and the attack by Hamas, which we can call the Palestinian genocide. At this point, I will also briefly show some comparisons between these catastrophic humanitarian situations, such as the characteristics of genocide and the labeling of communities as “other.” These similarities can be used to explain the solidarity and understanding shown between the communities of Armenians and Palestinians.

Imperialism

Imperialism is generally understood as a foreign policy of military power and supremacy. In a narrower sense, imperialism can be defined as unrelenting competition and conflicts between stronger capitalist countries for dominance, wealth, world resources and the exploitation of people (Awad and Bean, 2020). Along with this, Awad and Bean (2020) also warn that military power is only the most obvious expression of imperialism, but it is not the only way of implementation.

Other common methods are “policies of trade deals, zones, tariffs, and the like” (Awad and Bean, 2020 p. 5). We cannot talk about imperialism without associating it with capitalism. “Imperialism is the use of non-economic resources of the state or economic organizations for dominance in international relations, which enables the accumulation⁵ of capital” (Kržan, 2021 p. 220). Kržan (2021) roughly divides capital accumulation into two types: original and conventional. In original accumulation, non-capitalist re-

sources are incorporated into the capitalist economy, yielding surplus value that is used as capital.

Conventional accumulation generates surplus through economic means such as technological advancements. Initially, classical economists like Adam Smith considered original accumulation a transitional phase of capitalism’s emergence. However, it became evident that political accumulation¹³ persists as a form of dominance exerted by capitalist centers over peripheral regions, where resources are exploited at lower costs. This dynamic enables central states and economic entities to maintain control over the periphery. Capital accumulated in peripheral regions is mostly owned by the center’s capitalist class, leading to profits flowing back to the center.

This unequal exchange results in a significant concentration of value in the center, fueled by low wages and direct profit transfers. Consequently, the periphery struggles to develop its productive capacity and labor productivity, perpetuating a cycle of dependency on low-wage exports (Kržan, 2021). Capitalism therefore enables development in the center on the one hand, and underdevelopment on the periphery on the other. Therefore, Kržan defines imperialism as “the dominance of the world center over the periphery, which enables capital to exploit the working people and natural resources of the periphery in an excessive (above average) way and hinders its development” (Kržan, 2021 p. 222).

Imperialism in Armenia and Artsakh

⁵Political accumulation is a third type of accumulation that Kržan (2021) mentions. It is a form of accumulation where political power and its mechanisms are used to maintain control over the periphery, ensuring the continuous flow of resources and profits to the central capitalist entities.

First let's make a simple overview of imperialist powers in Armenian history and after that we will focus more on Azerbaijan's role in Artsakh. Before the Ottoman conquest of Armenia, Armenia was divided by the Ottoman and Persian Empires: the first division lasted 387-591 and the second division lasted 591-628. This was followed by many centuries of different shapes and sizes of Armenia on maps (Hovhannisyanyan, 2007), until in the 19th century, when Eastern Armenia was annexed by the Russian Empire. After a brief period of independence following World War I, Armenia was incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1920. Throughout the Soviet era, Armenian cultural and political expression in Artsakh was suppressed and the region's autonomy was limited. As the Soviet Union collapsed, Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh sought unification with Armenia, leading to war with Azerbaijan – the First Artsakh War (1988-1994).

The conflict resulted in Armenian control over Artsakh, but internationally the region was still recognized as part of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan continued to engage in diplomatic, economic, and military efforts to fully reclaim Artsakh. In 2020, supported by weaponry and military assistance from Turkey, Azerbaijan launched a military offensive to retake Artsakh and recaptured significant parts of the region. The war resulted in a cease-fire mediated by Russia.

Azerbaijan's role in imperialism over Armenia, especially concerning Artsakh, involves historical grievances, suppression of Armenian identity, military aggression, and strategic geopolitical maneuvers (de Waal, 2003). The persistent conflict is marked by attempts to control

the territory, cultural erasure, and narratives that delegitimize the Armenian presence, reflecting broader imperialist patterns of domination and resistance (Cornell, 2011). Azerbaijan is driven to control Artsakh by a combination of historical, geopolitical, economic, and nationalistic factors (Hovannisian, 1997). One of the most commonly heard arguments is that Artsakh (or, as Azerbaijanis call it Nagorno-Karabakh) has historically been part of its territory. In fact, according to Azerbaijani history, not only was Artsakh Azerbaijani land, but the whole of Armenia is actually Azerbaijani territory (Ismailov, 2017). That is why Aliyev often uses the words "liberation" and "occupation", when speaking about villages and battles:

On November 9, Azerbaijan's Armed Forces liberated 72 settlements from the occupiers. By liberating Shusha, by liberating 72 settlements on November 9, by liberating about 300 settlements since September 27, we broke the Armenian army's back. [...] This statement allows us the opportunity to return our other occupied regions – Aghdam, Lachin, Kalbajar – without bloodshed. [...] Every time an occupied district or city was liberated, I congratulated the residents of those cities and districts. (Aliyev, 2020).

We can see here that Azerbaijan regards the Armenian-controlled region of Artsakh as an illegal occupation of its sovereign territory. Regaining control over this region is seen as essential to restoring Azerbaijan's full territorial integrity. Additionally, Artsakh also holds geopolitical significance due to its location in the South Caucasus, a region bordered by major powers like Russia, Turkey, and Iran. Control over it strengthens

Azerbaijan's geopolitical position in the region and allows it to secure its western borders. Some of these areas that Azerbaijan demands, include valuable agricultural lands and potential mineral resources. Control over these territories would provide economic benefits and enhance Azerbaijan's resource base. While Artsakh was still under Armenian control, Azerbaijan blamed Armenia of "exploiting the natural resources in occupied land":

"Armenia is implementing new plans in order to illegally exploit the underground natural resources of the Azerbaijani territories it has occupied. Information from Armenian sources indicates that ore produced from the coal, copper and gold deposits of Nagorno-Karabakh and adjacent Azerbaijani territories is being delivered to Armenia." (Mammadov, 2012)

Moreover, Artsakh's economic potential fueled Azerbaijan's efforts to establish control over the region. Their primary economic interests in Artsakh and the surrounding areas are rich natural resources and good potential for oil and gas reserves. Azerbaijan is a major oil and gas provider, with petroleum as the strongest part of their economy (De Waal, 2013). In 1992 British Petroleum (BP) opened an office in Baku, Azerbaijan (British Petroleum). They realized the strategic value and potential of Azerbaijan's oil reserves, as well as a chance to utilize Azerbaijan for its geographical position. According to Global Witness (2023), BP is Azerbaijan's largest foreign investor. Since The Second Artsakh War (2020), BP has transferred \$35 billion to Azerbaijan (data from 8. 10. 2023). During the war BP's regional president said that Azerbaijan's "liberated territories" have great solar potential (Global Witness, 2023). And while

BP turned down a 20% stake in Russian oil following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which cost them over \$24 billion (BP, 2022), they turned down a request to sign a joint letter from global business leaders urging Azerbaijani president Aliyev to protect the human rights of all people in Artsakh (Global Witness, 2023).

Imperialism in Palestine

The Ottoman Empire ruled over Palestine for about four centuries (1517-1918). During World War I, Britain captured Palestine from the Ottomans. The Balfour Declaration (1917) expressed British support for the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine, legitimizing Zionist aspirations. In 1920 Britain was granted the mandate to govern Palestine, which included conflicting obligations: supporting Jewish immigration and development of a national home while ensuring the civil and religious rights of the existing Arab population. Increasing violence and international pressure led Britain to refer the Palestine issue to the United Nations, which proposed partitioning the land into separate Jewish and Arab states. This plan was accepted by Jewish leaders, but rejected by Arab leaders. Following the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948 was the Nakba – the ethnic cleansing of Palestine (Awad and Bean, 2020).

Palestine is economically dependent on Israel. Israel has control over Palestinian trade – both imports and exports. About 80% of Palestinian exports were directed to Israel and 55% of imports were from Israel in 2020 (PCBS, 2021). If we look at some more recent data, we can still see the trade imbalance. Approximately 76% of exports from Palestine were directed

to Israel, while roughly 57% of imports came from Israel (PCBS, 2024).

This kind of dependency means that Palestinian producers must align with the demands and regulations of the Israeli market to be able to export their goods, and at the same time, it means that essential goods are controlled by Israeli suppliers - making Palestine vulnerable to Israel's policies. Additionally, Israel controls Palestinian resources as well (land and water) and has settlements and military zones on the West Bank, which creates obstacles for their agricultural potential. Approximately 60% of the West Bank is designated as Area C and covers most of the region's fertile lands and resources, but Palestinians are denied access to it (B'Tselem, 2019). On the other hand, Israel has control over water resources in the West Bank as well, giving Palestinians limited access to it, which creates limitations for Palestinian agriculture and overall economic development (Selby, 2003).

Nakba

Nakba is generally translated as "catastrophe" and refers to the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1948. It is a period when the Zionists, through the paramilitary organizations Haganah and Irgun, carried out raids, massacres, and actions to depopulate Palestine. Their goal was to expel Palestinians en masse. After the signing of the Balfour Declaration⁶ in 1917, which legitimized the Zionist goals of occupying the Palestinian territory, the struggle and occupation for the Palestinian territory began. In 1948, over a pe-

riod of a few months, the Nakba made possible the establishment of Israel as a sovereign state. Israel was therefore created on occupied land, as a colonial state, which enabled ethnic cleansing. Between 1947 and 1948, Palestinian villages were massively destroyed, illegally settled, and Palestinians were forbidden to enter.

Through the Dalet Plan, the Haganah instigated the violent takeover of areas that had been allocated to the Jewish community (by a United Nations resolution in 1947) and other areas that would allow the further expansion of the Jewish community (Awad and Bean, 2020). Today, the only remnants of the Palestinian territory are the West Bank and Gaza, which is a narrow strip in the southwest of Israel. About 2 million people lived there and the territory has been under Israeli occupation since 1967 (M. B., 2024).

Both events, the Nakba and the Armenian Genocide, are not completely concluded incidents. To quote Sumaya Awad and Brian Bean:

"The Palestinian Nakba is not situated fully in the past, nor is it fully present[...]. It is a continuous and complex struggle against occupation, against apartheid, against erasure, It is daily physical and abstract dispossession of land, identity, culture, and history. It has not ended. And for precisely this reason, the Israeli state has sought to penalize the remembrance of the Nakba"(Awad and Bean, 2020 p. 21).

The same can be said about the Armenian Genocide. As we will see below, Armenians continue to struggle for their existence and continue to be threatened

⁶The Balfour Declaration was a statement issued by the British government on November 2, 1917, during World War. The declaration stated the British government's support for the establishment of a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine. The declaration gave international legitimacy to the Zionist aspiration for a Jewish state in Palestine, which influenced the creation of the State of Israel in 1948.

by occupation by Turkey and Azerbaijan. They continue to fight to preserve their territory, culture, and history, while Turkey and Azerbaijan continue to deny the Armenian Genocide even today, more than 100 years later. In this sense, Palestinians and Armenians are fighting the same struggle for their own existence.

Since Nakba, global solidarity movements took place to support Palestine. These movements included the Armenian Diaspora, which has been widespread since the genocide in 1915, when many Armenians fled as refugees to Palestine as well.

The Armenian presence in Palestine began in the fourth century, when Armenian pilgrims came to Jerusalem, following the discovery of Christian holy sites. Since then, Armenians in Palestine became Arabized, speaking Arabic (and heavily accented Armenian) and sharing culture with Palestinians. Skipping years of this co-existence, with the start of the First World War and the Armenian Genocide in 1915, many Armenian refugees fled to Palestine, creating a demographic transformation. With time the Armenians who lived in Palestine before the genocide, also known as *kaghakatsi*, became outnumbered by the refugees, who did not speak Arabic and had different cultures.

They were called *zummar*, meaning “guests”. Despite seeing the *kaghakatsi* as more Arabic than Armenian, a gradual process of integration began as the locals (both Armenian and Palestinian) accepted them with generosity (Der Matossian, 2011).

Before the beginning of the First World War the number of Armenians in Palestine was between two and three

thousand, later the number of Armenians increased (Matossian, 2011). In 1920 Sir Ronald Storrs, the military governor of Jerusalem at the time, said:

“As if these things were not enough, there were added to our troubles thousands of refugees. Over two thousand desperate Armenians besieged the saintly but incompetent locum tenens of the Armenian Patriarchate.”

There were the Christian refugees from Salt, a city older than Genesis.[...] and OETA [Occupied Enemy Territory Administration] had to face feeding and housing Saltis as well as Armenians. Later I find 7000 refugees – Armenian, Syrian, Latin Orthodox, Protestant and Moslem – suddenly flung on my hands this week: a good deal of typhus, but malaria is not expected till autumn. No easy matter feeding and looking after them, and I have had to detail three members of my staff for the purpose (Storrs, 1937, p. 344-345).

The Armenian refugees saw this as a temporary situation and were hoping to soon return home. Most of them came to Palestine from Cilicia, which is today’s southwestern Turkey. However, in 1922, Mustafa Kemal Pasha, also known as Atatürk, dispatched an attack on Cilicia and more refugees came to Palestine: “By 1925, there were about 15,000 Armenians in Palestine, mainly in Jerusalem, with smaller numbers in Haifa and Jaffa” (Matossian, 2011).

To this day the Armenian diaspora is still alive in Palestine; they are mostly located in the Armenian Quarter in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, they are facing hardships there as well. Nancy Kricorian (2017) published a few stories from the Armenian Quarter, which show how the

Armenians are treated differently from the Israelis as well as Armenian empathy towards Palestinians. Here are some examples:

B, a priest I meet at a church supper in Virginia during my book tour, tells me that when he was a seminarian in Jerusalem in the early 70s, the Haredi Jews spat on the Armenian priests on a daily basis – and on the seminary students. [...]. I say to B they still spit on the priests on a daily basis in the Armenian Quarter. Yes, he tells me, I know. I couldn't stay there. I might have risen higher in the church if I had stayed, and the spitting I could have learned to tolerate, but watching the way they degraded the Palestinians was too much for me.

The Patriarch signed a 99-year lease with an Israeli company that wanted to build a parking lot on Armenian Patriarchate land, she says. They built the parking lot, and we could park there – although we had to pay more than the Israelis did. And then one day they decided it was a “Jews Only” parking lot, and we could no longer park there because we're Armenian even though it was on land belonging to the Armenian Church.

[...] S, the owner of a ceramics shop, finally tells me what he thinks of the occupation. They are chopping us like salad, he says. Everyone who has any means is leaving. They are slicing us like salami. First Gaza, then the West Bank. We are only hoping the machine breaks down before they get to us.

Armenian Genocide

Just as the Nakba is still connected to

the current state of the Palestinians, the Armenian Genocide is also connected to the current state of the Armenians. In the Ottoman Empire, there was a religious hierarchy, as the government relied on Islamic law. This law distinguished between Muslims and non – Muslims who were subordinate, thereby institutionalizing discrimination against non-Muslims - which includes the Armenians, a nation (even today) strongly marked by Christianity. Therefore, Armenians in the Ottoman Empire were victims of attacks (e.g. the massacre in Adana in 1909), and eventually this turned into the execution of genocide in 1915.

During this time, the Young Turks ruled, claiming that the Russian Emperor Nicholas II had offered the Armenians a state in exchange for their support of Russia (Papazian, 2005). The exact number of victims of the Armenian Genocide is unknown, but it is said to be around 1.2 million (Dadrian, 2005).

For the Ottoman Empire, this era was marked by significant social and political upheaval as the empire struggled with territorial losses and internal dissent. Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), also known as Young Turks, spread and helped the rise of Turkish nationalism. In 1908 they came to power with the determination to restore the fading glory of the Ottoman Empire (Dadrian, 1995). The First World War provided them with the opportunity to implement their genocidal plans. As the war heightened already existing tensions, it gave them justifications for extreme measures under the guise of national security. As the Ottoman Empire

⁷April 24 is commemorated annually as Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day.

⁸By order of Talât, Minister of the Interior, authorities arrested the Armenian elites and executed them locally or temporarily interned them at Çangırın and Ayaş before murdering them (Kevorkian, 2020).

entered the war on the side of the Central Powers in 1914, the government began systematically targeting the Armenian population with arrests, deportations and executions (Balakian, 2003).

On April 24, 1915,⁷ hundreds of Armenian intellectuals and community leaders in Constantinople (Istanbul) were arrested and later executed.⁸ After these initial arrests, the authorities authorized measures aimed at the complete annihilation of the Armenian population. Men were often separated from their families and killed, while women, children, and



Picture 4: Starving and homeless Armenian children

the elderly were forced into death marches toward the Syrian Desert. During these marches, Armenians faced starvation, dehydration, frequent attacks by the Ottoman soldiers and paramilitary groups. etc. (Balakian, 2003).

The execution of this genocide involved various segments of the Ottoman state apparatus. Orders were issued from the central government and local officials were instructed to carry out the



Picture 5: Armenians hanged in the streets of Constantinople (Istanbul)

deportations and massacres. Paramilitary groups, such as the Special Organization (Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa), often employed released convicts from prison to help with the execution of the genocide.

Such groups were responsible for the most gruesome acts of violence, including mass shootings and burning of villages (Suny, 2015). To carry out the murders of Armenians, at the beginning, the perpetrators⁹ preferred to use daggers, axes, saws, etc., and only later did they start mass shootings (Dadrian, 2005).

The Armenian Genocide Museum-In-



Picture 6: Tortured Armenian children from Adana (Adana massacre, 1909)

⁹The perpetrators here include the Ottoman government and military officials, who planned and directed the genocide, high-ranking officials and military personnel were responsible for organizing and executing the mass deportations and killings; a paramilitary group Teşkilâtı Mahsusa, whose members were often tasked with carrying out the most brutal and direct forms of violence against the Armenian population; local authorities (police chiefs, and other administrators) which assisted in the implementation of genocidal policies within their regions, often facilitated the mass killings and ensured the local execution of central directives; as well as civilians (Dadrian, 2005 and Castellino, 2005).

¹⁰Tattoos, most commonly in the form of dots and “x”-s, were used as protecting signs.

stitute shows photos of some of the horrors that occurred before and during the genocide. These photographs depict mass burials of Armenians, torture of Armenian children during massacres (for example, they tortured the children by ripping off their bodies with sharp cotton hooks), hanged and beheaded Armenians, starved orphans, Armenian women kidnapped by officers of the Turkish Army and gendarmes and marked with tattoos on their bodies and faces, reducing them to property.¹⁰

The survivors of the genocide are scattered around the world, creating a widespread Armenian diaspora, which continues to preserve Armenian culture and memory, hoping for justice.

Artsakh

Artsakh has a long and important history for Armenians. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Artsakh was internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan, despite the fact that the majority population there (until 2023) was ethnic Armenian (Nalbadian, 2023).

Even during the time of the Soviet Union, there were efforts to unify Artsakh and Armenia (Papazian, 2005). The First Artsakh War took place between 1988 and 1994, which ended with the signing of a ceasefire. Nevertheless, Artsakh demands independence from Azerbaijan – in 1991, 99.89% of the voters voted for independence in the referendum. The Second Artsakh War, which was fought in 2020, lasted for 44 days and Azerbaijan won.

The truce was fraught with tension, which peaked on December 12, 2022,

when Azerbaijan established a blockade of the Lachin Corridor. As a result, one hundred and twenty thousand people were captured and their human rights were violated – they lacked food, medicine, and medical supplies, the supply of gas and electricity was interrupted; and at the same time, they were subjected to several attacks and shootings by Azerbaijan (Junkar, 2023).

This lasted until September 19, 2023, when Azerbaijan, in a blitz attack, forced the residents of Artsakh to choose between fleeing to Armenia or death (Avedian, 2023). In the following days, more than one hundred thousand ethnic Armenians from Artsakh fled to Armenia, where they now face new challenges as refugees (Kucera, 2023). In October, Aliyev already had plans to settle 140 000 Azerbaijani residents in Artsakh:

At the end of the first stage of our Great Return Program, by late 2026, 22,000 people will live in the Fuzuli district, and 140,000 people will live in Karabakh and East Zangezur. In other words, this is the minimum. A more significant number of people will be resettled because, firstly, we have power and determination; the Great Return Program has been adopted and is being successfully implemented (Ilham Aliyev, 2023a).

With this, Azerbaijan completed the ethnic cleansing of Armenians in Artsakh and according to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, we can even talk about genocide (Junkar, 2023). During the blockade Azerbaijan even prevented organizations like the Red Cross from entering the region, preventing food and

¹⁰120 000 Armenian people, of which 30 000 were children and 9000 people with disabilities.

medicine imports, turning off gas and electricity in the region, etc. They also filmed and shared videos of torturing and killing prisoners of war (POW), which was unsurprising since they've done this during the 2020 war as well. Missile, drone, and shooting attacks were also not missing during the blockade.

These actions caused great mental anguish to the 120 000 people¹¹ living there, who suffered from starvation and other traumas, which also tripled the numbers of miscarriages and heightened the number of children born with disabilities. The blockade created inhumane conditions (Junkar, 2023; Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Artsakh, 2023), until the Armenian population there was forced to choose between death and running away on September 19, 2023.

The self-proclaimed Republic of Arcah officially disbanded on January 1, 2024, after the President of Artsakh, Samvel Shahramanyan, signed a decree on September 28, 2023 agreeing to “1. Dissolution of all state institutions and organizations by January 1, 2024, whereby the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) will cease to exist”, and “2. After the entry into force of this decree, the population of Nagorno-Karabakh, including those outside the Republic, will familiarize themselves with the conditions of reintegration presented by the Republic of Azerbaijan in order to independently and individually decide on the possibility of staying in Nagorno-Karabakh” (Tashjian, 2023).

Despite the completed ethnic cleansing in the region, the threat of a second Armenian genocide has not yet ended. Indeed, Azerbaijan continues to threaten Armenia, as the Azerbaijani regime

demands the Zangezur Corridor, which would connect Azerbaijan with Nakhichevan (an Azerbaijani enclave between Armenia and Turkey, previously also inhabited by Armenians who were expelled). An open attack threat was also shown on one of Azerbaijan's television shows:

“We will witness the collapse of Armenia. In the near future, we will witness the implementation of the Zangezur corridor, because in addition to politics, the words of President Aliyev are also relevant here: “If they don't want to, we will open it by force.” (Infoteka, 2023)

In addition, the fact that between October 23 and 25, 2023, joint military exercises of the two countries that took place in Artsakh and Nakhichevan could also be a sign that Armenia is Azerbaijan and Turkey's next target. Conducting exercises in these specific areas is significant, since both regions have a history of conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Therefore, military activities in these regions highlight their strategic importance and suggest preparations for operations that might involve Armenia. Such exercises serve as a powerful message of the strong military alliance between Turkey and Azerbaijan. While these exercises do not necessarily guarantee that Armenia will be the next target, they suggest a state of preparedness and a possible strategic intention – it can be viewed as both a show of force and a practical preparation for any future military engagements.

After the end of the blockade of the Lachin Corridor, some (rightfully so) worry that Azerbaijan won't be satisfied with Artsakh (Nalbadian, 2023).

This fear was justified. Now Azerbaijan is demanding a change of the Arme-

nian constitution, the reason being that the current constitution mentions the 1990 declaration of independence, which explicitly rejects Azerbaijani sovereignty over Artsakh (Stamboltsian, 2024), as well as more villages in Tavush, which Pashinyan surrendered when he entered the preliminary agreement on the delimitation of their state border (301 p, 2024).

Attack by Hamas or Palestinian genocide

Since 2007, the territory of Gaza has been ruled by the Islamic movement Hamas, and on October 7, 2023, Hamas attacked Israel. It was immediately clear that Israel would react violently – today the Palestinian civilian population is paying for it. Israel supposedly wants to destroy Hamas, but they are punishing everyone. The situation has thus become represented, by the western imperial powers, as the greatest moral dilemma of our time – but in reality it is clear: the world is watching a genocide in real time.

Already on July 30, 2023, The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention published Update #3 of Red Flag Alert for Genocide - Israel. On October 13, 2023, they published an Active Genocide Alert - Israel/Palestine. Israel vehemently denies these accusations, framing its actions as necessary self-defense against Hamas, a recognized terrorist organization responsible for launching attacks targeting Israeli civilians. The complexities of the conflict, including historical grievances, political dynamics, and security concerns,

make it a deeply entrenched and multifaceted issue with no easy solutions (Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention, 2023a).

The Lemkin Institute's "Statement on" Why We Call the Israeli Attack on Gaza Genocide outlines the extensive casualties, including thousands of Palestinian deaths and injuries, particularly among children.

It emphasizes the need for a comprehensive understanding of the historical, political, and strategic context underlying the conflict to effectively address its root causes. Additionally, it calls for accountability for all parties responsible for violations of international humanitarian law and urges the international community to prioritize the protection of civilian lives and uphold human rights standards (Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention, 2023b).

A humanitarian crisis, which can be called the Palestinian Genocide, is currently taking place in Gaza. The Vice-President of the European Commission claims that Gaza is the "largest open-air cemetery" today (A. P. J., 2024a).

The current genocide in Palestine as well as the already finished ethnic cleansing¹² of Artsakh are examples of broader patterns of contested territories, ethnic displacement, and international diplomatic challenges. Both regions illustrate the complexities and longstanding conflicts arising from historical injustices and geopolitical interests.

For both situations, the central ques-

¹²I must add here that ethnic cleansing is a sanitation attempt when it comes to identifying genocide. Therefore, I refer to ethnic cleansing as genocide, because that is what ethnic cleansing is: genocide. The forced removal of a group of people from their home and any form of violence that results in serious injury or death of a group with the attempt of extermination, at any level, is the definition of genocide.

¹³The Minsk Group is co-chaired by the USA, France and Russia.

tion is territorial sovereignty. In the Caucasus, Armenians and Azeris both have claims over Artsakh: Armenians see Artsakh as part of their historical homeland (afterall, Armenians have lived in this region for thousands of years), while Azerbaijan holds onto Soviet-era administrative boundaries that gave Artsakh to Azerbaijan after the fall of Soviet Union (De Waal, 2003). Similarly, the conflict between Palestine and Israel centers around territorial claims as well as displacement of the Palestinian population, which was a result of the Nakba – nearly 750,000 Palestinians were displaced, resulting in a refugee crisis (Morris, 2004).

In both cases, territorial expansions and demands – Israel's and Azerbaijan's – continue to create ongoing disputes and violence, while Palestinians and Armenians seek justice and hope for their right to return home.

Regarding Artsakh, the Minsk Group¹³ has been unsuccessful at mediating the conflict. The ceasefire agreements have not held on for long and haven't resolved the underlying issues (Cornell, 2017). Likewise, numerous international efforts aiming to resolve the conflict in Palestine have been unsuccessful as well – these including UN resolutions and peace initiatives (eg. Oslo Accords), as they've been undermined by political realities on the ground (eg. continued settlement expansion by Israel) (Khalidi, 2020).

This resulted in not only demands for territorial control but also in military offensives, violence, and genocide that are threatening both nations; for Artsakh, it seems to have ended, although Azerbaijan continues to make demands to Armenia (e.g. they demanded four villages, claiming they are under occupation under

Armenia, as well as demands to change the Armenian constitution (Bedevian, 2024; Civilnet, 2024a)), while Palestinians are currently being annihilated by Israel.

Comparison and question of genocide

If we put the situations of Artsakh and Palestine side by side, we can see characteristics of genocide on both sides.

The definition of genocide under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which entered into force in 1951, is genocide as an attempt to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious community by any of the following means:

- a) Killing members of the group;
- b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. (United Nations, 1948, p. 1).

The physical characteristics of genocide can be determined, even in the case of Artsakh and Palestine, since the residents of Artsakh were placed in inhumane circumstances and a humanitarian crisis before fleeing to Armenia.

The residents of Gaza are also living in such circumstances at this moment. However, it is difficult to determine the purpose of destroying a certain group as such. Such goal is often determined by planned political violence aimed at the destruction of a group, which may be expressed explicitly or implicitly. The

Artsakh blockade has, e.g., caused deaths and inhumane conditions, it has prevented the birth of children by causing a lack of food, medical and hygienic supplies by cutting off the supply of gas and electricity, and, of course, by physical attacks (Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Artsakh, 2023). In addition to physical attacks, already during the Second Artsakh War (2020) there were many videos of torture of Armenians by Azerbaijanis – these videos were also proven to be real by the Human Rights Watch:

“The videos depict Azerbaijani captors variously slapping, kicking, and prodding Armenian POWs, and compelling them, under obvious duress and with the apparent intent to humiliate, to kiss the Azerbaijani flag, praise Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, swear at Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, and declare that Nagorno-Karabakh is Azerbaijan. In most of the videos, the captors’ faces are visible, suggesting that they did not fear being held accountable.” (Human Rights Watch, 2020)

Similar videos of inhumane treatment of Palestinian detainees were also released:

“Many videos of soldiers abusing Palestinian detainees have surfaced on social media. Some are extremely graphic. Here is one of the more moderate ones. “Good morning, whore” The soldier spits and calls the Pal detainee a “sheep f***er” (writer note: many videos surfaced were of Palestinians from the West Bank, but detainee abuse and torture was also of Gazan detainees the IDF took from Gaza, including women and children.” (Law for Palestine, 2024)

Furthermore, the visible effects of genocide are apparent in Gaza, where

civilian casualties and infrastructure destruction highlight the severity of the situation.

Israel does not even defend itself against attacks on hospitals and refugee camps where people are waiting for humanitarian aid. Israel carried out such attacks in the Al Shifa hospital, which is the largest hospital in Gaza (A. P. J., 2024b), in the Buriedj refugee camp, the Jabalija refugee camp and many others (B. V. and K. S., 2024a).

The media point out that Gaza is currently the deadliest for children, as more children were killed in Gaza in just 4 months than in all the wars in the world in four years – 12,300 children were killed in Gaza (according to data from March 13, 2024), while 12,193 children were killed in wars between 2019 and 2022. In general, the majority of those killed are women and children (B.V. and K.S., 2024b).

In both cases we can see government appeals that clearly demonstrate hatred and genocidal intent. Certain statements from Azerbaijani government officials, including President Ilham Aliyev, have been perceived as inflammatory:

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. Let them leave of their own accord! (Ilham Aliyev, 2020a).

We crushed the enemy and achieved a glorious victory in the Second Karabakh War. However, revengeful forces are rising in Armenia again, so we must be ready for any situation and create an army that would be exemplary on a global scale and be one of the strongest armies. The

Azerbaijani Army is already potent now. (Ilham Aliyev, 2023b).

In similar instances, both Armenians and Palestinians have been subjected to negative labels such as the “enemy” by opposing governmental factions. This is not surprising since the term “Palestinian” became synonymous with the term “terrorist” between 1947 and 1948, and with this, their humanity began to be erased (Awad and Bean, 2020, p. 16).

In the above-mentioned quotes from President Aliyev’s speeches, Armenians are referred to as “the enemy”, but they are also often described as some kind of barbarians – Aliyev describes them as predators, vultures and jackals (Aliyev, 2020a). Similarly, Minister Galit Distal Atbaryan, a member of Knesset for Likud (a far-right political party in Israel) describes the Palestinians as Nazis, e.g., in her statement on Facebook, February 29, 2024:

The law of the Palestinian Authority is the Law of Gaza.

The same religious war.

Those nazis.

The same incitement.

The same textbooks.

The same Allah that commands the murder.

The same thirst for Jewish blood.

(Atbaryan, 2024)

Law for Palestine created a comprehensive database of over 500 statements that show the Israeli state’s intent to commit genocide of Palestinians since October 7, 2023; here are a few examples:

1. On October 9 2023 the Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant stated:

“ I have ordered a complete siege on the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed.”[...] we are fighting human ani-

mals and we are acting accordingly” (Law for Palestine, 2024)

2. On November 29, War Cabinet Minister Benny Gantz stated:

“The fighting will continue to and expand to any place necessary in the Gaza strip. There will be no sanctuary cities .”(Law for Palestine, 2024)

3. President of Israel, Isaac Herzog, stated on October 15:

“We will uproot evil so that there will be good for the entire region and the world. “(Law for Palestine, 2024)

Such statements made by authorities – (the president, various ministers, senior army officers, journalists, legislators, etc. can also be found in the database – they reveal the commitment to genocidal destruction of Gaza.

In this sense, both Israel and Azerbaijan show the intentions of committing genocide by dehumanizing Palestinians or Armenians, portraying them as enemies of the state, and spreading hatred and propaganda. In addition, they also support each other, as Azerbaijan has repeatedly used weapons and drones from Israel in Artsakh, e.g., Harop Drone (The Times of Israel, 2020). This is how Israeli weapons kill Armenians and Palestinians.

Furthermore, genocide denial plays a crucial role in both cases. The Lemkin Institute posted on Instagram their explanation and application of DARVO (deny, attack, reverse victim and offender) to genocide denial, specifically in cases of Armenia and Palestine. The first to talk about DARVO was psychologist Dr. Jennifer Freyd. It is a three-step tactic used by perpetrators to deflect blame and discredit their victims (Lemkin Institute, 2024, a and b):

1. Deny: the perpetrator denies wrong-

doings and accusations made against them.

2. Attack: the perpetrator attacks the credibility of the victim and turns the blame to the abused person.

3. Reverse victim and offender: the perpetrator claims they are the real victim and accuses the actual victim of being an offender.

Let's look at Azerbaijan and Israel using the DARVO strategy, side by side (Lemkin Institute, 2024 a and b): Azerbaijan and Artsakh blockade:

Israel's claims in its argument at the ICJ:

1. Deny: The Azerbaijani government still refuses to acknowledge that the blockade of Artsakh was a component of a larger genocidal plan. Israel outright denied the accusations, claiming their military offenses are self-defense (despite the majority of victims being civilian women and children).

2. Attack: The Azerbaijani government is shifting the blame to Armenians by saying that the blockade and checkpoints were put in place to prevent unauthorized movements of weapons and manpower from Armenia. Israel's lawyers accused South Africa of undermining Israel's legitimacy and presenting a biased view.

They argued that South Africa's narrative disregards Jewish history and Palestinian accountability. Furthermore, they were focused on South Africa's ties with Hamas. 3. Reverse victim and offender Armenians have often been accused by Azerbaijan of harboring genocide intentions towards Azeris – an allegation for which there is no credible proof. They claim that Azeris were the victims of genocide committed by Armenians, particularly in Khojaly in 1992, while at the

same time strongly denying the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923.

While it is true that a war crime was committed in Khojaly, it is unclear who is accountable and there is no proof of genocide happening there. Despite this, Azerbaijan still uses this incident as justification for mistreatment of Armenians. Israel was portrayed as the only victim, under constant threat of external aggression from terrorist groups like Hamas. It is important to note that they focus only on Hamas (despite, as already mentioned, the majority of the victims being innocent civilians), portraying Palestinian resistance as terrorism and thus diverting attention from systematic violence imposed on Palestinians throughout the occupation.

Due to these common experiences throughout history and in the present, it is not surprising that Armenia recently recognized Palestine – on June 21st 2024, – after sending a 30 ton package of food and medicine to Palestinians in March 2024 (Civilnet, 2024b). In response, Israel summoned the Armenian ambassador for a “harsh reprimand conversation” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024).

However, the mutual understanding of their experiences between Palestinians and Armenians is not the only reason for this action - Azerbaijan and Israel have good relations with each other and Israel has been an important ally to Azerbaijan, together with Turkey, most importantly by providing military weapons to Azerbaijan, which they've used for their violent acts in Artsakh.

Still, the present situation is not the first time that Armenians have stood by Palestinians. Above I've already mentioned Monte Melkonian, one of the

most important leaders and martyrs of the Artsakh Liberation War, who said he considers the Palestinian cause to be the Armenian cause as well. He was not the only one though. For example, Harootyoon Takooshian, more known as Hagop Hagopian, founder of the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA), is believed to have joined the Palestinian cause already at the age of 16 by joining Abtal al-Auda (Heroes of the Return):

Hagopian's real name – or rather his original name – was Harootyoon Takooshian. He was born in the late 1940s in Mosul, Iraq, one of at least three children of Mugurdich and Siranoosh Takooshian. According to Secret Army hagiographers, the boy had run away from home at the age of fifteen, and by the age of sixteen he had joined a small Palestinian group called Abtal al-Auda, “Heroes of the Return,” which soon merged with Dr. George Habash's Arab Nationalist Movement and a couple of smaller groups to form the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the PFLP (Melkonian, 2008, p. 76).

Palestinians were looking for allies in Lebanon, but beyond this self-serving consideration, Abu Iyad and other Palestinian leaders sincerely considered themselves friends of Armenians: the two peoples had shared a bond of suffering at the hands of the Ottoman Turks, and in the twentieth century both had been deported en masse from their respective homelands (Melkonian, 2008, p. 77).

Conclusion

In this text, I have only illustrated some of the symmetry between Artsakh and Gaza. Above all, the issue of geno-

cide is important here, the characteristics of which are clearly evident in both cases. Both Armenians and Palestinians have a history of discrimination that has not yet ended. Both have lost their territory and their homes, both are victims of genocide, regular attacks and being trapped in a small territory. Both Armenians and Palestinians are threatened by a more powerful force that does not give in and has the support of several other countries. Azerbaijan has the support of Turkey and Israel, and we can see the help Israel has received in carrying out genocide from the USA, Germany and other countries as well.

Due to many parallels like common enemies (the good relationships between Azerbaijan and Israel), common experiences of genocide, displacement of people, lack of territorial sovereignty, constant threat and violence, etc. they've shown each other empathy, acceptance and solidarity.

The Palestinians, together with the Armenians living in Palestine since before the Armenian Genocide, welcomed the Armenian refugees during the Genocide and the Armenian diaspora there is still alive to this day, but struggles under Israel as well and stands with the Palestinian cause – not only the diaspora in Palestine, but in the whole world and in Armenia.

They've shown solidarity by working together on events, on protests, and finally with Armenia recognizing the State of Palestine. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan and Israel continue to support each other in their genocidal actions and even use the same strategies– e.g. the DARVO tactic to make themselves look like the victim and to justify the genocides they are committing.

Therefore, it is important to continue following the situations in both Palestine and Armenia, as many of them see it as the same cause, from the past to the present day. In both cases, the conflicts have not yet ended and people's rights continue to be under threat and violation.

As their common struggle has still not ended and they continue to show solidarity to each other, I will conclude this text with writer Sophie Armen's response to the poem *Who Remembers the Armenians?* by Palestinian writer Najwan Darwish:

*Who Remembers the Palestinians?
We do
and I ride the bus to the Nakba protest with
them
each day
and my soorj, this morning
We are drinking it with them*

*You, genocider—
Who remembers you?
(Sophia Armen, 2021)*

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