

The Instrumentalization of Cultural Memory as the Factor in Armenian-Azerbaijani Rivalry over the Nagorno Karabakh

Mythologization and instrumentalization of the history and memory play a crucial role in the Armenian-Azerbaijani Rivalry over the Nagorno Karabakh⁴⁰. The paper touches upon the topic of instrumentalization of the cultural memory which drives the dynamism of the conflict. Nagorno-Karabakh is a conflict around which two ethnos in the Post-Soviet circumstances are reconstructing themselves. To describe contemporary identities in both Armenia and Azerbaijan and to understand the symbolic elements surrounding the conflict itself it is needed to reconsider the instrumentalization of cultural memory as a factor in the conflict. Also, the definitive impact of this factor on the contemporary developments in Nagorno-Karabakh is undeniable. Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska defines cultural memory as follows: “[...] cultural memory exists beyond the collective memory and its consolidated in media, institutions and cultural texts⁴¹. In his classical approach, Jan Assmann distinguished cultural memory from communicative memory associating it with particular features. Thus, cultural memory in content is based on the mythical prehistory and the events from the absolute past and the forms are based on founded ingenious ceremonies. The mediations are based on permanent objectivizations, traditional and symbolic coding, represented through ceremonies. Time frame refers to the absolute past of the mythical time. Cultural memory

⁴⁰ See among others: В. А. Шнирельман, *Войны памяти. мифы, идентичность и политика в Закавказье*, Москва 2003; O. Geukjian, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus: Nagorno-Karabakh and the Legacy of Soviet Nationalities Policy*, New York 2016; S. Radnitz, „Historical Narratives and Post-Conflict Reconciliation: An Experiment in Azerbaijan”, *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 35, no 2 (1st March 2018), p. 154–74, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894215618514>; S. H. Astourian, „In Search of Their Forefathers: National Identity and the Historiography and Politics of Armenian and Azerbaijani Ethnogeneses”, in *Nationalism and History: The Politics of Nation Building in Post-Soviet Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia*, ed. D. V. Schwartz and R. Panossian, Toronto 1994, p. 41–94; R. G. Suny, ed., *Transcaucasia, Nationalism, and Social Change: Essays in the History of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia*, Ann Arbor 1996.

⁴¹ M. Saryusz-Wolska, „Wprowadzenie”, in *Pamięć zbiorowa i kulturowa. Współczesna perspektywa niemiecka*, Kraków 2009, p. 34. Translation by author.

is transmitted by professional tradition carriers⁴². To build upon the presented definitions it is important to add, that construction of the cultural memory is realized through power/knowledge interrelations within discursive practises such as ideologization, instrumentalization and attempts to achieve hegemonic ability to shape the memory. The instrumentalization of the cultural memory is misuse and abuse of the past to achieve particular political goals. The word *rivalry* is used in the understanding given to this term in the particular context by Laurence Broers. I found it more applicable than the simple conflict as far as the Armenian-Azerbaijani discursive memory war reach far beyond the conflict around the Nagorno Karabakh⁴³. Additionally, undoubtedly the result of the 2020 Second Karabakh War which should be found as inconclusive for the conflict resolution did not influence the content and form of the cultural memory narratives. In the public discourse, the instrumentalization of the past still plays a major role.

The purpose of the paper is to present three elements of the instrumentalization of cultural memory which exist as the factor in Armenian-Azerbaijani rivalry over the Nagorno Karabakh. The research question which arose from it is how cultural memory is instrumentalized to achieve political goals? Additionally, the paper attempts to answer the question of how instrumentalization stands as the factor in rivalry over contested territory? The paper intends not to present the radical positions as the leading narratives in both Armenia and Azerbaijan, but to demonstrate the pattern of instrumentalization of cultural memory and the history to some extent. What is crucial, in the paper only one vision of the perception of the cultural memory within the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is presented. It has to be underlined that in both societies, and among intellectuals it is possible to find different approaches. However, the narratives presented below should be considered relevant. The paper presents three layers of cultural memory instrumentalization: instrumentalization of cultural memory of statehood origins, the instrumentalization of the narratives about the roots of the nation and instrumentalization of the narratives of Karabakh belonging. However, the presented layers are not fulfilling the list of instrumentalized narratives in the context of rivalry. In the discussion/conclusions section, other examples of the mechanism are presented in purpose to emphasize the possibilities of further research. The analysis is done through the presentation of the exemplary narratives related to the rivalry

⁴² J. Assmann, *Pamięć kulturowa: pismo, zapamiętywanie i polityczna tożsamość w cywilizacjach starożytnych*, trans. A. Kryczyńska-Pham, Warszawa 2008, p. 71. Translation by author.

⁴³ L. Broers, *Armenia and Azerbaijan: Anatomy of a Rivalry*, Edinburgh 2019.

in a broadly understood methodology of discourse analysis⁴⁴. The paper is also based on the preliminary findings from the fieldwork conducted in Armenia in April and May 2021. The materials used are the semi-structured expert interviews. It is combined with the results of the analysis of the content of public discourse and historiography held since the beginning of the Second Karabakh War. Through the juxtaposition of the contrary narratives within the framework of memory studies, the paper aims to describe the core cultural, discursive and mnemonic structures and mechanisms behind the Armenian-Azerbaijani rivalry.

Instrumentalization of Cultural Memory of Statehood Origins

The first layer is related to the instrumentalization of the cultural memory of state creation. The instrumentalization carried out through mythologization and abuse of ancient history is based on the creation of narratives that attest to the historical seniority of the idea of the state. At the same time, this instrumentalization affects the discourse on Nagorno Karabakh, since within the narrative of the ancient heritage of statehood, the disputed territory, occupies a central place. Those mythologizations of the historical discourse are supposed to claim the belonging of the Nagorno Karabakh.

Among the Armenian authors who represent the discourse instrumentalizing the ancient times the attention is paid by the authors to the question of the antique heritage of the Kingdom of Urartu as the basis for the rights of contemporary Armenia to the Nagorno Karabakh⁴⁵. The cultural memory instrumentalization of the Urartian heritage appears frequently even though that historical shreds of evidence remain under discussion for archaeologists and linguists researching the legacy of the Urartu kingdom and its connection with later Armenian statehoods⁴⁶. Even if the kingdom of Urartu can be considered as an ancient origin of later Armenian statehood, looking through the prism of geography it is just on the borders of the ancient Caucasian lands which currently contain the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh⁴⁷. Arsène Saparov mentions that after the Second World War: “[...]the revival of Soviet territorial claims against Turkey on behalf of Armenia resulted in the publication of a number of books that explored the history of the Armenian kingdoms

⁴⁴ See: M. W. Jorgensen, L. Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, London 2002; R. Wodak, M. Meyer, *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies*, New York 2015).

⁴⁵ See: В. А. Шнирельман, *Войны памяти. мифы, идентичность и политика в Закавказье*, Москва 2003, p. 77–100; P. Adamczewski, *Górski Karabach w polityce niepodległego Azerbejdżanu*, Warszawa 2012, 38–39.

⁴⁶ See: I. M. Diakonoff, „Hurro-Urartian Borrowings in Old Armenian”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 1985, p. 597–603; Anne Elizabeth Redgate, *The Armenians* Oxford; Malden, MA 2000, p. 4–8; P. E. Zimansky, *Ecology and empire—the structure of the Urartian state*, Chicago 1985, p. 95–97.

⁴⁷ A. E. Redgate, *The Armenians...*, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

located on the territory of modern Turkey, granting a sense of legitimacy to these territorial claims”⁴⁸. The revival of territorial claims was targeted against Turkey, however, at the same time, Armenian historians explored also the possibility to underline the rights to Nagorno Karabakh through historical argumentation. The less radical approach is dating back to the first Armenian statehood legacy which also includes the territory of nowadays Nagorno Karabakh in the 1st century BC and the kingdom of Tigranes the Great (95-56 BC)⁴⁹. It is strictly visible that this way of understanding is a reconstruction needed from the perspective of contemporary political goals in the war of narratives. In Armenian and Karabakhian narratives emotional approaches are replaced by recalling classical authorities and "scientific" knowledge.

Azerbaijani historians are often situating the origins of the Azerbaijani statehood in the history of Caucasian Albania, an indigenous state and ethnos living in the ancient Caucasus. The official narrative delivers a "more" antique interpretation as a response to the Armenian contradictory explanations. In this ideological discourse, this resort to history should work as proof of the continuity of statehood, but it is not based on science at all. Most of the scientists not involved in the conflict are stating that the Albanians were fully assimilated with Armenians, Georgians and other ethnicities of the Caucasus before the time the Turkic tribes arrived⁵⁰. Nevertheless, Caucasian Albania was located in the territory of contemporary Azerbaijan and included the Nagorno Karabakh. In consequence, using this narrative is crucial for the Azerbaijani perspective. As Przemysław Adamczewski underlines the most famous example of such interpretation can be found in the books written by Murad Agi who is combining Caucasian Albania with the open falsifications about Turkic presence and influence in the antique Caucasus⁵¹. Most of the sources are dating the appearance of proven settlements of Turkic people in the Caucasus to the XIth century. But the official Azerbaijani sources looking for the origins of the Azerbaijanis deeper and frequently are dating it earlier. This strategy seems to be obligatory as an opposition to the antique linguistic and ‘national heritage’ of Armenians. As an example – the official document prepared by the Embassy of Azerbaijan in Poland delivers a surprising interpretation from the perspective of historical research. The authorities who are used as the "sources" are the unnamed Assyrian historians.

⁴⁸ A. Saparov, „Re-negotiating the Boundaries of the Permissible: The National(ist) Revival in Soviet Armenia and Moscow’s Response”, *Europe-Asia Studies* 70, no 6, (3rd July 2018), p. 868, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2018.1487207>.

⁴⁹ See the map: R. H. Hewsen, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas*, Chicago 2000, p. 62.

⁵⁰ See among others: *Ibidem*, p. 73.

⁵¹ P. Adamczewski, *Górski Karabach...*, *op.cit.*, p. 36–37.

With this perspective on the territory of Azerbaijan, the state of "Gamir" is claimed to be created and populated by the Turkic tribe of Kimmers. Two indicators seem to be crucial for this standpoint. First, the name "Gamir" is on the verbal level almost like the name 'Gomer', the earlier mentioned name of Noah's grandchild. Moreover, Azerbaijani sources are counting Kimmers as a Turkic tribe whose location in the Caucasus was centred in Nagorno-Karabakh in the 14th century B.C.⁵².

Instrumentalization of the Narratives about the Roots of the Nation

The second layer of the cultural memory instrumentalization relates to the narratives about the roots of the nation. Contemporary scholarly consensus is based on the common agreement around the constructivist paradigm. Benedict Anderson brings the idea of "imagined community"⁵³, Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger of "invented traditions" necessary to consolidate the nation⁵⁴, Rogers Brubaker claims that the nation is the "category of practice"⁵⁵. Anthony D. Smith defined the 'ethnos' as "nothing different than historical communities built on shared memory", which is essential for the creation of a nation⁵⁶. All of those approaches in their diversity are similar in two dimensions. First, the nation construction is never finished and is not the "entity given once and for all"⁵⁷. Second, the nation has to be based on the shared myths and symbols, or in the other words, shared, cultural memory to cause the identity to solidify. Smith describes this role of referring to the past as follows: "[i]n other words historical sequences deliver 'forms' for the later experiences and ways of their interpretation. It is not important, that common sense of shared history, sense linked with events and personalities which designate the development of the group, often are not combined with involved science"⁵⁸.

The process of nation creation is no different in the analysed cases. The modern understanding of a nation appeared in Armenian discourse with the national awakening in the romantic period in the XIXth century with the life and activity of Khachatur Abovian (1804-

⁵² See: T. Musayev, *Kosowo a roszczenia Armenii wobec region Górskiego Karabachu Azerbejdżanu. Porównawcza analiza prawna*, Warszawa 2013.

⁵³ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, Revised Edition*, London ; New York 2006, p. 5-6.

⁵⁴ E. Hobsbawm, T. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge 1983, p. 6-7.

⁵⁵ R. Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, Cambridge 1996, p. 7.

⁵⁶ A. D. Smith, *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach*, New York 2009, p. 34.

⁵⁷ R. Panossian, „The Past as Nation: Three Dimensions of Armenian Identity”, *Geopolitics* 7, no 2 (1st September 2002), p. 123, <https://doi.org/10.1080/714000931>.

⁵⁸ A. D. Smith, *Ethno-Symbolism... op. cit.*, p. 35

1848) and authors who followed his work. Also, this period conceived the project of Greater Armenia commonly used by nationalistic movements, like Dashnaktsutyun, Armenakan or Hunchak. That was also the moment when the standard Armenian religious identity was replaced with the national. As Razmik Panossian underlines: “[u]ntil the age of secular nationalism in the second half of the nineteenth century, and the 1915 Genocide, it was indeed the cornerstone of what it meant to be Armenian: a member of St Gregory’s church”⁵⁹.

For most scholars the creation of the contemporary Azerbaijani nation is related to the crisis of the politics of the Russian Empire in the South Caucasus in the late XIX and early XX century⁶⁰. Analogically, the work of intellectuals like Mahammad Amin Rasulzade and early political parties like Musavat was of core importance. Additionally, it can be said, that the creation of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan and the Soviet policy of *korenizacya* (indigenization) was crucial for the implementation of the modern concept of nation in Azerbaijan⁶¹. Those processes caused the replacement of the religious identity. In the national awakening of Azerbaijanis, religious Islamic consideration of the terms ‘nation’ and ‘community’ has an essential role. In Arabic, those two terms are commonly described by the word *ummah* (أمة). The *ummah* has been a religious and, in consequence, a cultural barrier for Muslims to construct nationhood similar to the European understanding of it. The supra-national ‘community of believers’ has a priority over ethnic communities⁶². It would not be an exaggeration to say that before the late XIXth century an Azerbaijani identity did not exist for most of Muslim inhabitants of the South Caucasus⁶³. To illustrate the importance of the *ummah* concept the example of Southern Azerbaijanis could be used. Most of the Azerbaijanis in the northern part of Iran are well assimilated within the state Persian identity and tend to identify with the religious Shia community, rather than with the Panturkic ideology of the Greater Azerbaijan⁶⁴. Furthermore, the *ummah* forms part of a common Islamic philosophy, as opposed to the *sha’b* (شعب), which describes the ‘nation’ close to the

⁵⁹ R. Panossian, „The Past as Nation... *op. cit.*, p. 126.

⁶⁰ See: T. Świętochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920: The Shaping of a National Identity in a Muslim Community*, Cambridge 1985.

⁶¹ See: O. Geukjian, *Ethnicity... op. cit.*, p. 79–104.

⁶² M. Th. Houtsma, „Umma”, w *E.J. Brill’s First Encyclopaedia of Islam 1913-1936*, Leiden 1987, p. 125–26.

⁶³ P. Adamczewski, „Perspektywa rozwiązania problemu karabachskiego i jego geopolityczne aspekty”, in *Konflikty na obszarze byłego ZSRR*, ed. P. Adamczewski, Poznań 2009, p. 212–13.

⁶⁴ Misunderstanding of those circumstances seems to be one of the most important reasons which caused the failure of the Abulfaz Elchibey national project. The exception to the general agreement with staying within Iran is the activity of the South Azerbaijan National Liberation Movement. See: „Charter of South Azerbaijan National Liberation Movement” after: <http://guneyazerbaycan.com/en/nizamname.php> (3.05.2021).

European understanding⁶⁵. The usage of *sha'b* was an Islamic answer for the national awakenings of Christian communities. Hence, the Azerbaijani national consciousness appeared in the late XIXth century. For instance, Armenian-Azerbaijani conflicts from 1905 described in Russian sources and later works written in English are depicted as *Armenian-Tatar Massacres of 1905* or the *Armeno-Tatar War*⁶⁶. What seems to be crucial in the context of those events, the appearance of an enemy which was precisely 'physical' and geographically close became the impulse for the creation of a model of (national) identity based on ethnicity.

However, despite this rather consensual perspective of the modern nations, the late XIXth century was also the moment, when the primordial narratives of the origins of the Armenian and Azerbaijani nations have appeared. It has the continuation. The instrumentalization of the memory is based on the recalling of the historical heritage from way before the conflict was made into its current form. An example of such discourse in Azerbaijan was the works of Ziya Bunyadov, an orientalist and outstanding translator who turned into a nationalist "historian" working on the Albanian trace as the source of contemporary Azerbaijani identity and heritage. In the case of Armenia, similar activities were done by Suren Ayvazyan, the geologist, who in the later years became the promotor of the falsified theory of presenting Urartu as the first Armenian statehood. He did that through the unscientific attempt to read Urartian cuneiforms with the usage of the Armenian script. Both were harshly criticized by Viktor Shnirelman, author of the most thorough analysis of the mystifications, myths and falsifications in the historical discourse in the South Caucasus⁶⁷. These two examples are important in the context as far as both Bunyadov and Ayvazyan were deeply involved in the Nagorno Karabakh issue. Bunyadov authored the pamphlet "Why Sumgait", fulfilled with Armenophobic narratives⁶⁸. Ayvazyan rose to prominence as the author of several letters sent to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of USSR in the 1970s and 1980s. In them,

⁶⁵ Literally, it means 'people'. Even though this distinction is sufficient in the context of this article, the situation seems to be much more complicated in what is described by Suleiman who recalled Sharara. Also in Arabic important words which are confused when talking about the nation are watan means 'fatherland' and dawla means "state". It should be underlined that the influence of Arabic was not that strong in Azerbaijan (rather influence of Persian and other Turkic languages). Nevertheless it is possible to presume that in a time of a high level of illiteracy, the language of religious ceremonies impacted on social life and understanding. See: Y. Suleiman, *The Arabic language and national identity. A Study in ideology*, Washington DC 2003), p. 18.

⁶⁶ See: O. Geukjian, *Ethnicity... op. cit.*, p. 45; C. Mutafian, „The Karabagh in Twentieth Century”, in *Caucasian Knot: The History and Geopolitics of Nagorno-Karabagh*, ed. L. Chorbajian, P. Donabedian, C. Mutafian, London 1994, p. 112–13.

⁶⁷ В. А. Шнирельман, *Войны памяти... op. cit.*, p. 79, 158-159.

⁶⁸ 3. Бунуятов, *Почему Сумгаит? Ситуационный анализ*, after: https://web.archive.org/web/20070702093919/http://www.irs-az.com/gen/n5/n5_6.htm (3.05.2021).

he presented imaginary historical evidence to support the Armenian cause for Nagorno Karabakh⁶⁹.

These primordial approaches to the question of the origin of the nation should be considered as nothing more but a useful tool in the process of proving the own point in the context of the Karabakh conflict. The history of the contemporary construction of modern nations of Armenia and Azerbaijan is inevitably related to the question of Nagorno-Karabakh. The issue appeared simultaneously with the national awakening of both nations and the creation of national idea (late XIXth and beginning of XXth centuries). The problem with the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is so deep because the core of the Azerbaijani and Armenian national identities are based on the idea of the conflict existence. Shortly speaking, there is no contemporary Armenia without Karabakh, there is no contemporary Azerbaijan without it either.

Instrumentalization of the Narratives of Karabakh Belonging

The third layer of instrumentalization of the cultural memory is related to narrative of the Karabakh belonging. As Svante E. Cornell emphasized, the space of ideological argument starts with the different interpretations of the name of the conflict area: „The name Karabakh is actually an amalgamation of Turkish and Persian. ‘Kara’ means Black in Turkish and ‘bağ’ means garden in Persian as well as vine in Turkish. The contemporary ending ‘bakh’ stems from the russification of the word ‘bağ’. The word ‘Nagorno’ simply means ‘mountainous’ in Russian”⁷⁰. Cornell’s interpretation is not the only one available. The word ‘bağ’ in the Azerbaijani (Turkic language) also means ‘garden’. The most probable reason for the identical form in Persian and Azerbaijani is the influence of the Persian language and culture on the Caucasus resulting from the long-lasting political hegemony of the years of the Safavid dynasty. Also, the translation of the Russian word *nagornyj* (нагорный) does not simply mean ‘mountainous’. This word seems to be the most privileged and appropriate, but a simple or direct translation is rather difficult. It seems that the most precise translation would be “lying on the tops of the mountains”. The translation could also use the word "upland". Moreover, the word ‘daglıq’ in Azerbaijani for the full name of the region means ‘mountainous’ or ‘upper’.

⁶⁹ National Archives of Armenia, fond 1159/15 „Levon Babayants Documents Collection on Artsakh Movement”, file 1159/15/3 Suren Ayvazyan Letter to Gorbachev”.

⁷⁰ S.E. Cornell, *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, Uppsala 1999, p. 3.

At first glance, this interpretation seems to support the Azerbaijani point of view about belonging, because of the lack of any literal roots in the name which could be linked to Armenian nationhood. However, after an analysis of the websites of Azerbaijani officials, the conclusion may be more confusing:

„Garabagh is one of the ancient regions of Azerbaijan. The name of this inseparable part of Azerbaijan consists of two different Azerbaijani words: ‘gara’ (black) and ‘bag’ (garden). The combination of these two words is as ancient as the nation of Azerbaijan. The association of these two combined words with the definite part of Azerbaijan in every part of the world is an oracle. The word Karabakh given by the Azerbaijan nation to a part of their native lands was used for the first time 1,300 years ago (in the 7th century)! (...) The history of the formation of Garabagh as a name of one particular region, provides a better scientific explanation for its etymology. Because the word ‘gara’ has other meanings in Azerbaijani language (also in other Turkic languages) (...) Thus, the word ‘Karabakh’ belongs to Azerbaijani people as Karabakh does itself’⁷¹.

Azerbaijani officials are using Cornell’s most accepted interpretation as the "voice of people", but without an entirely precise approach. Azerbaijanis are underlining the Turkic etymology of the names *Karabakh*, *Artsakh* and *Urtechini*⁷². This seems to be the crux of the argument for historians to create and reconstruct the linguistic paradigm to provide proof of the autochthonic character of Azerbaijanis in the Caucasus. Confirmation is provided also through geographical argument:

„There was a general definition of Karabakh, which was not used only for ‘Daghligh Garabagh’, but for both mountainous and plain parts. In other words, the word combination of ‘Daglig Garabag’ (Mountainous Karabakh) is a product of the subsequent periods, the name given to the one of the part of Karabakh as a result of separatist intentions. Even an ordinary logic proves this fact: If there is ‘Daghligh Garabag’ then there must be flat or low-lying Karabakh too! The reality is that there are both ‘Daghligh Garabagh’ and ‘Low-lying Karabakh’ (that is flat Karabakh) in Azerbaijan! And always both ‘low-lying (flat) and Daglig (mountainous) Karabakh’ during all historical periods were the motherland of one nation - the nation of Azerbaijan, the nation who has in its language the words ‘gara’ and ‘bag’!⁷³.

It is obvious that in this ideological writing any words with possible different origins (even if it is not Armenian) cannot be the element of an official statement. The most interesting point in this perspective is that linguistic argumentation is easily mixed with an

⁷¹ See: *Ancient History: Etymology, Territory and Borders*, after: <http://mfa.gov.az/?language=en&options=content&id=801> (3.05.2021).

⁷² H. Hasanov, ‘Wstep’ in *Kosowo... op. cit.*, p. 7-10.

⁷³ *Ancient History: Etymology... op. cit.*, after: <http://mfa.gov.az/?language=en&options=content&id=801> (3.05.2021).

open interpretation of geography. Also, the text is signed as the *Institute of History named after A. Bakykhanov of ANAS* to create the impression that the presented argument is scientific and based on sources proving the statements.

However, in the memory war abovementioned perspective does not stand as the only one available. At least two different names of the region endure in public discourse. Cornell refers to ‘Artsakh’ in Armenian and ‘Yuqarı’ or *Daglıq Qarabag* in Azerbaijani⁷⁴. Thus, in Armenian perspective:

„Artsakh (Karabakh) is an integral part of historic Armenia. During the Urartian era (9-6th cc. B.C.) Artsakh was known as Urtekhe-Urtekhini. As a part of Armenia Artsakh is mentioned in the works of Strabo, Pliny the Elder, Claudius Ptolemy, Plutarch, Dio Cassius, and other ancient authors. The evident testimony for it is the remained rich historic-cultural heritage. After the division of Greater Armenia (387 A.D.), Artsakh became part of the Eastern Armenian kingdom, which soon fell under the Persian rule. At that time, Artsakh was a part of the Armenian ‘marzpanutyun’ (province), then, in the period of Arabic rule, it was part of Armenia ‘kusakalutyun’ (region). Artsakh was part of the Armenian kingdom of Bagratids (9-11th cc.), then – part of Zakarid Armenia (12-13th cc.). In following centuries, Artsakh fell under the rule of various conquerors, remaining Armenian and having a semi-independent status. Since the mid-18th century the invasion of Turkic nomadic tribes to the north of Karabakh began, which led to clashes with local Armenians. During this period, the five Armenian melikdoms (Hams) are memorable which had reached the peak of their prosperity and power in the late 18th century. At the end of the Russian-Persian War of 1804-1813 and by the Gulistan treaty of 1813, Artsakh-Karabakh was annexed to Russia”⁷⁵.

And similar interpretation is delivered by the Nagorno-Karabakh side:

„Nagorno Karabakh (in Armenian - Artsakh) is located in the northeastern part of the Armenian Highlands. Since ancient times, it has been one of the provinces of historical Armenia, with Kura River, according to all ancient sources, as its northeastern border. Strabo, Pliny the Elder, Claudius Ptolemy, Plutarch, Dion Cassius, and other historians have noted in their accounts that the border between Armenia and Aghvank (Caucasian Albania, its most ancient Caucasian neighbor representing a mixture of mountainous peoples) was the Kura River. In the ancient Armenian state of Urartu (8th-5th centuries B.C.), Artsakh was referred to as Urtekhe-Urtekheni. The favorable geographic location determines the nature and climate of this mountainous region”⁷⁶.

⁷⁴ S.E. Cornell, *The Nagorno...*, p. 3.

⁷⁵ See: *Nagorno-Karabakh Issue*, “Republic of Armenia Ministry of Foreign Affairs Website”, after: <https://www.mfa.am/en/nagorno-karabakh-issue> (3.05.2021).

⁷⁶ See: *Nagorno Karabagh Republic: History and Current Realities*, “Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh Ministry of Foreign Affairs Website”, after: <http://www.nkr.am/en/history-and-current-realities/79/>, (25.10.2018). It is worth mentioning that after the 2020 war this content disappeared from the official website of the Nagorno

In this case, linguistic analysis of the name is strictly avoided and more attention is paid by the authors of propaganda to the question of antique connections of Urartu as the basis of contemporary Armenia and the land of Nagorno-Karabakh itself. It is strictly visible that this way of understanding is a reconstruction needed from the perspective of contemporary political goals in the war of narratives. In Armenian and Karabakhian discourses emotional approaches are replaced by recalling classical authorities and „scientific” knowledge.

These politically motivated versions of history are prepared for external observers, because of the language in which materials are produced (English and Russian). This shows that the discourses of war have a strictly political purpose - to convince the Western audience of the correctness of their version of events and disputed „facts”. History and its reinterpretation in historical policies among representatives of the interest groups mentioned above is the first phase of a long political strategy aimed to lead to the full implementation of a one-sided scenario for the future of Nagorno-Karabakh. Even though this objective for official historical policy stakeholders seems to be crucial for external public opinion, it also strongly shapes the popular or common opinion. Those views, supported by the cultural memory about the events of the armed phase of conflict among those still alive, create discourses of mutual animosity at the social level. These narrative hostilities are vital barriers to creating a space for conflict resolution and the peace-building process. As the 2020 war has proved this led gradually into a zero-sum game in which the solution was based on the physical conflict in which only one side can accomplish victory and the second one loses.

Discussion/Conclusions. Beyond the Instrumentalization of Cultural Memory

The analysis is not covering the entire discourse of instrumentalization of the past in the coverage of the Armenian-Azerbaijani rivalry. At least three other layers can be mentioned. First, it is the instrumentalization of suffering which is conducted through the production of narratives about one-sided suffering while the suffering of the adversary is not recognized and labelled as falsification. The second layer is the instrumentalization of historical injustice which is based on the assertion that only one side of rivalry is the victim of ongoing, repeating injustice. The third layer is related to the instrumentalization of space

which is represented in manipulated recreation of spatiality in Nagorno Karabakh. Those layers require further in-depth study.

This essay attempted to answer the question of how cultural memory is instrumentalized to achieve political goals? Additionally, the paper attempted to answer the question of how instrumentalization stands as the factor in rivalry over contested territory. In the essay, through the exemplary instrumentalized narratives, the importance of the past (in form of cultural memory) and its role as the factor in Armenian-Azerbaijani rivalry was presented. As a first conclusion it can be said, that definitely, the analysis proves the deeply-rooted antagonism that instrumentalizes the mythological past to accomplish political interests though undermining the position of the other. This antagonism, despite the newest war results still exist as a zero-sum game without the space for reconciliation and compromise. As the second conclusion, it can be said that instrumentalization of cultural memory of the statehood is based on the historical falsifications and presentation of narratives contrary to the scientific shreds of evidence. In consequence, it is expanding the differences. In effect, the possibility of overcoming the abuse of the past for building the peaceful present seems to be highly unlikely in the near future. As the third conclusion, it can be said that for building the conflict resolution platform it is necessary to minimize the impact of the primordial perceptions of a nation in politics of both Armenia and Azerbaijan. The political language of primordialism used in official propaganda crucially influences the creation and reconstruction of public opinion in both states. In consequence, the image of the enemy, contradictory positions and martial law discourses remain dominating. With passing time, the conflict is just deepening and increasing in mutual animosity. Finally, the history, and particularly its instrumentalized versions are not proving the real belonging of the Nagorno Karabakh. On contrary, only the rejection of perspectives emphasizing the importance of the past could potentially allow the appearance of the scenarios of peaceful resolution of the conflict, and in consequence, the Armenian-Azerbaijani toxic rivalry.

Streszczenie:

Mitologizacja i instrumentalizacja historii i pamięci to jeden z najważniejszych elementów rywalizacji ormiańsko-azerbejdżańskiej wokół konfliktu w Górskim Karabachu. Instrumentalizacja przeszłości służy nie tylko jako dyskursywna narracja potwierdzająca przynależność spornego terytorium. Jest także ważnym składnikiem wciąż konstruowanych i nieskonsolidowanych tożsamości narodowych w Armenii i Azerbejdżanie. Pamięć kulturowa jest również bardzo ważnym czynnikiem samego konfliktu w Górskim Karabachu, który ostatnio nasilił się jesienią 2020 roku. Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie trzech

najistotniejszych poziomów instrumentalizacji dyskursu prowadzonej przez obie strony rywalizacji aby osiągnąć określone cele polityczne. Metodologicznie artykuł opiera się na krytycznej analizie narracji publicznych i historiografii oraz wynikach wstępnych badań przeprowadzonych na Kaukazie Południowym.

Słowa kluczowe:

Górski Karabach, Kaukaz Południowy, pamięć kulturowa, rywalizacja ormiańsko-azerbejdżańska

Key words:

Nagorno Karabakh, South Caucasus, cultural memory, Armenian-Azerbaijani rivalry

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