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Humiliation fuels my fellow Azerbaijanis' hate of Armenia. We must oppose it

Monday 9 October 2023, by [AZIMOV Rauf](#) (Date first published: 5 October 2023).

I grew up in wartime Karabakh - I know the pain Armenians face. But I was attacked online for empathising with them

When I posted a recent Twitter thread about Azerbaijan's ethnic cleansing in [Nagorno-Karabakh](#), nothing could prepare me for the ruthless attacks I received from my fellow Azerbaijanis.

I am an Azerbaijani survivor of the same conflict. Writing on X (formerly Twitter), I told of my tragic childhood growing up in Karabakh in the [First Nagorno-Karabakh War](#) in the 1990s, and how my earliest memories are of fighting and devastation. How my 18-year-old uncle died after stepping on a landmine. How I slept to the sounds of gunshots and once choked on my food when a nearby bomb exploded as my mom was feeding me.

I also empathized with the Armenians in Karabakh who are now going through similar experiences. And I spoke of my exasperation at the endless cycle of hatred and violence and the repeated reliving of my early trauma, having barely healed from the retraumatization I lived through in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War just three years ago.

With only a handful of followers, mostly friends and colleagues, I did not expect many people to read what I wrote. Suddenly I found myself thrust into the spotlight, with my post getting hundreds of thousands of views. I was deeply touched by the empathy and acclaim I received from complete strangers, almost all of them Armenians and Westerners.

But the response from Azerbaijanis devastated me.

Obscene homophobic slurs were hurled at me and violent misogynistic ones at my mother. My real ethnicity was questioned. With a few notable exceptions, Azerbaijanis did not believe in my sincerity. They seemed to not care at all about my lived experiences as a victim of war. I was ridiculed and accused of only pretending to care about the Armenians to one or another cynical end.

On X, I [wrote](#) that I wished someone would have acknowledged all the pain my family went through at the time, affirmed it. Instead, our tragedy was laughed at, justified, ignored. The response showed me that nothing has changed.

After reflecting on this extreme reaction, I have come to the conclusion that Azerbaijani nationalists are not motivated by pain, but humiliation.

"A victim empathizes with another victim. But macho humiliation is not a place where empathy and self-reflection can ever be found"

Azerbaijan has a macho patriarchal culture. For many, when Armenia so overwhelmingly won the

First Nagorno-Karabakh War, it meant that Azerbaijan, and more specifically Azerbaijani *men*, were not 'strong' or 'man' enough to protect the motherland and that they had been proven 'weak'.

This thinking delivered us from the misery of the 1990s to the current ethnofascist strongman regime led by Ilham Aliyev. Hence symbols like 'the iron fist', the upside-down 'A' akin to the Russian 'Z', the heinous war crimes, and the renaming of the streets of Stepanakert, Karabakh's capital, after people like Enver Pasha, the Turkish military leader who oversaw the Armenian Genocide.

A victim empathizes with another victim. But macho humiliation is not a place where empathy and self-reflection can ever be found. That is a place of only rage and violence with a single goal – revenge. One almost feels sorry for the Azerbaijani propagandists who work so hard and look so ridiculous trying to conceal this.

With the ethnic cleansing of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan has doomed itself as a viable democratic and prosperous nation. That breaks my heart. How could anyone seriously believe Armenians can be integrated into Azerbaijan?

As I wrote on X, I watch in horror at what's happening to them – the months of starvation in an inhumane blockade followed by fierce shelling. For decades, Armenians have been painted as the enemy, used as villains responsible for all our failures. Their history has been systemically erased and their tragedies denied, along with Azerbaijanis' responsibility for them.

Any Azerbaijani who witnessed war and suffered ethnic cleansing must speak up against it, even if all our base instincts tell us otherwise. Or history will not forgive us.

To Armenians: I see your suffering and I'm sorry. You deserve to be free and you have a right to your identity. The response to your desire for self-determination should never have been pogroms and war.

I have no power to affect anything. But one day an Armenian child from Karabakh will wonder if any Azerbaijani spoke up for them or empathised with them when they lived through the unimaginable. Let them know that not all is lost.

Rauf Azimov

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