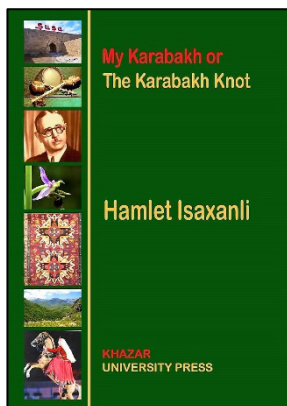


MY KARABAKH OR THE KARABAKH KNOT

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My Karabakh or The Karabakh Knot is a book written by Hamlet Isaxanli. It is not a history book, not a novella either, it is rather an exposé on the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh and the ensuing ethnic and territorial conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. It is published as a special issue in the *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*¹³³.

In the usual discourse between form and substance, this book is noted for the absence of the usual layout expected of a book. There is no classic form of

¹³³ Volume 24, Special Issue, Number 4, Khazar University Press, 2021. Available at <https://jhss-khazar.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/My-Karabakh-or-the-Karabakh-Knot.pdf> (accessed on 27 July 2023).

dividing the book in chapters and paragraphs, the former devoted to a major theme, the latter exploring separate ideas within that theme. Yet, there are many themes in this book. Instead, we see sub-titles assuming the role of new chapters on the same page, and each sub-title presenting a thematic discussion and within which there are sometimes new sections identified with three asterisks.

The book follows a clear thematic outline, chronicling the shared heritage of Armenians and Azerbaijanis, be it in literature and music, or Azerbaijani intellectual accomplishments acknowledged by Armenians. Then follows history as taught by people with conflicting ideologies culminating in the addition of Russia in the relationship between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the ensuing territorial disputes of the early 20th century.

The use of the possessive in the title should offer a clear hint to the reader. Hamlet Isaxanli is not reporting on the conflict from a distance, nor does he do so as a historian. Yet, there is no denying that he has a vested interest in the conflict. He is at the forefront of the story; at times he is the story. There will be neither hints nor mind-playing with the reader. It is explicit in the very first page. "I am an inhabitant of the Caucasus... I want the people of the Caucasus to live peacefully as neighbours..." That is the personal history of the author, adding a new dimension to the conflict, loud and unmistakable *cri de coeur*.

The development of strong themes is the forte of the book. Because the author's personal story is mixed with the narrative, it makes for a profound account of the conflict not only between two countries but between two ethnic groups that have shared a lot in the past.

Hamlet Isaxanli gives us a brief overview of the history of Armenia and Azerbaijan, and how the inhabitants of these two lands, interwoven over hundreds of years, have found themselves around a land called Karabakh.

The conflict has fabricated two enemies, borne out of an attempt to give it a political meaning; but beyond the enmity, the author argues the two people have more in common than they think. We quickly learn how there is a common literature that existed for a long time, we are told how artists that shared two cultures thrived in a land without animosity where the two peoples lived peacefully side by side. That was until the “Armenian Question”, the focal point where things started to degenerate into chaos followed by territorial disputes.

If the first Nagorno-Karabakh war, which Azerbaijan lost, brought humiliation to the nation, it provided the country with the impetus to develop its economy with its huge reserves of oil and gas, bidding its time until the second Nagorno-Karabakh war which it won handily this time. Hamlet Isaxanli stays clear of assigning blame explicitly although there are implicit hints of where the source of the conflict originated. This is where he distances himself from a historian in the scholarly sense.

Rather than celebrate the return of Karabakh into Azerbaijan territory, Hamlet Isaxanli allows his personal story to take over. He wonders loudly if Russia and Turkey would oppose peace between the two nations. In the end though he reckons that the true opposition to peace stems from Armenians and Azerbaijanis themselves.

The book is more than the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. On paper, the conflict is a territorial dispute that led directly to two wars. To the author however, it is at the centre of history depicting the relationship between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. His is a poignant and powerful voice from the heart exhorting the two peoples to embrace peace and co-existence. For they are closer than they think.

What the Back Cover says ...

“Beautiful Karabakh has long been a source of tensions and confrontations: it has long exacerbated hostilities, and as a result, it has given rise to wars between Azerbaijan and Armenia and between Azerbaijanis and Armenians. How did this happen? Why did this happen? What is the root of this issue? How did this difficult situation, this jumbled knot, arise? How can this knot come untangled? These and similar questions, as well as thoughts on the Second Karabakh War in the fall of 2020, compelled me to complete this work.

“There are numerous aspects of this publication that I feel might be of interest to readers, including the history of relations between the Azerbaijani and Armenian people. my own personal observations and experiences. passages from Azerbaijani and Armenian literature, articles in the media on the life and concerns of the Azerbaijani and Armenian people. possible solutions for the current situation, and possible outcomes for the future of Karabakh. First of all, I appeal to both Azerbaijani and, especially. Armenian readers. I think there is a strong need for such a conversation between our people...

“Armenians and Azerbaijanis! We need to make peace: has enough blood not been shed? In some hearts and minds, the war still goes on. It is time to change! Now there is a need to put aside the question of who is to blame. It is time to direct bilateral talks. Extremist nationalism gives the nation a myth and brings only misery. Imagination is a winged creature: it flies, but reality walks on the ground. It is good to dream but in life, a person does not fly they walk. Let us think about today and tomorrow. Emotional shock is understandable. There have been tragedies in the history of every nation. This is not supposed to result in everlasting hatred between nations. Hatred is building a wall in the present. which limits us. deprives us of seeing the other side of the wall. We need to build a bridge: a bridge of human relations. “Economic and cultural cooperation is better than the construction of the walls of hatred. History has shown that over time, animosity between nations

and states disappears because there is no point in perpetuating hostility; it harms both sides.”