

Neutrality as an effective myth: An analysis of Thomas de Waal's explicit and implicit positions on the Karabakh Conflict, published after the new edited version of *Black Garden*

English summary of the report¹

The book *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* is hailed as one of the best English books on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Author Thomas de Waal works at the Carnegie Foundation for International Peace. Whether the book is objective and neutral is analyzed in Christian Kolter's paper. Kolter asks:

1. Can de Waal's claims do justice to the examination of the (respective) truths that lie behind the relevant national myths?
2. If they can't, what does the author of *Black Garden* do instead?

Examples of the book's failure to remain neutral

1. Albania Theory: This theory states that Azerbaijanis are descendants of early Albanian people and labels most of the early Christian monuments as Azerbaijani, meaning the Armenians arrived much later (just before the 18th century), when the Azeris had already made claims on areas, including Nagorno-Karabakh, Zange Zur, Yerevan, Sevan, etc. The theory is spread throughout Azerbaijan, yet not outside the country. However, it ignores that Armenia and Georgia had already Christianized the Albanian people in the 4th Century.
2. The historical demographics of Nagorno-Karabakh are not laid out clearly in the book. De Waal labels Turkish-speaking Muslims (Salavites) in Yerevan to be Azerbaijani. He also says that Armenians only settled in Nagorno-Karabakh in the 1820s. He explains that in the 1830s, only 19.000 Armenians lived in Nagorno-Karabakh, but doesn't mention that epidemics, bad harvest and repressive politics under Ibrahim Khan made Armenians flee the region.
3. De Wall doesn't mention that the Azerbaijani State still tries to ethnically cleanse the country, including some of its territories.

Other inconsistencies in the book: Sumgait Pogrom

De Wall backs the Azeri opinion that the Sumgait escalation was a demonstration of self-defense from the Azerbaijani side, because of the already existing violence from Armenia.

¹ The original, 50-pages-long version of the paper was published in German. It is available at <http://www.eufoa.de/de/EuFoA-Veroeffentlichungen>

He is convinced that the expulsion of Azerbaijanis from Armenian territories happened in 1987; meaning before the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh escalated.

An opinion on Stepanakert and Khojaly

De Waal suspends the chronology of the Karabakh war, giving the impression that Armenia attacked Khojaly without reason.

While Azerbaijan accuses Armenia of Genocide when it comes to Khojaly, it is evident that this is not the case when we look at the definition of Genocide, which according to international genocide research is that:

- the Genocide has to be carefully planned;
- the goal is elimination of one ethnic group;
- an asymmetric vulnerability of the out-group must be a given
- a radical action must be present.

De Waal therefore states that:

1. Armenians have carried out violent civilian attacks in Khojaly and
2. Violence against civilians is an element of genocide.

To label Khojaly as genocide has become part of the Azerbaijani identity; it has defined the Azerbaijani people.

The “Hiroshima of the Caucasus”

De Waal compares the Azeri city of Aghdam with Hiroshima, saying “my eyes were drawn to what was a small Hiroshima lying below. Aghdam used to have fifty thousand inhabitants. Now it is completely empty. After the Armenians captured the town in 1993, they slowly stripped every street and house. Thistles and brambles swarmed over the wrecked houses. Looking out from the minaret onto the devastation, I puzzled again over the reasons for this apocalypse.” This has been used as propaganda in Azerbaijan’s schools.

De Waal’s portrayal of offenders and victims during the Karabakh Conflict

Black Garden’s author believes that the international community doesn’t portray the victim role of Azerbaijan enough, as well as the offender role of Armenia.

Examples:

1. Discrimination in the Soviet era: The author focuses on the socio-economic, cultural and political cadres and conditions of NKAO. He omits an evidence-based and fact-based analysis of the topic and the answers to the question whether the Karabakh-Armenians were discriminated against in the NKAO.
2. Reciprocal expulsions: The author emphasizes several times that Azerbaijanis were not forced to leave without the use of force from Armenia.

At the same time, he "forgets" to give a complete picture of the expulsion of the Armenians from Azerbaijan.

3. Weapons and methods: De Waal states that behind the Armenians' victory and Azerbaijan's defeat in 1994 lay three factors: Azerbaijan's political and military chaos, greater Russian support for the Armenians, and the Armenians' superior fighting skills.

Conclusions

De Waal perverts neutrality, although often unintentionally, as he bases his entire book on facts, some of which are taken out of context.

Due to this perverted neutrality, it is pointless and unnecessary to determine whether de Waal has personal political prejudices ("Armenians will usually be positive or falsely depicted as victims," etc), or if he selects certain truth-oriented information and knowledge.

Postmodern fragmentation of truth as a political strategy

De Waal denies any superiority of the historical, political, legal and ethical claims of the Armenian side on Artsakh and Karabakh and thus negates the claim of the Karabakh-Armenians for independence and escape from Azerbaijan's ethnic cleansing in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Azerbaijan's policy is one of marginalization, expulsion and extermination of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh. Yet de Waal denies this.

When it comes to the genocidal character of Azerbaijani politics, de Waal uses Charny's psychology to argue points for the denial of genocidal tendencies. Charny lays out five points:

1. *Innocence and-Self-Righteousness*
2. *Scientificism in the Service of Confusion*
3. *Practicality, Pragmatism and Realpolitik*
4. *Idea Linkage Distortion and Time-Sequence Confusion*
5. *Indirection, Definitionalism, and Maddening*

Other conclusions

Black Garden was published alongside an extensive marketing campaign. That is why everyone who disagrees with the author's statements and opinions is considered "blind". This then creates the appearance that the author's view is neutral and unbiased.

Final Conclusion

De Waal did not explore truth either in or beyond the national myths – no matter whether on the Azerbaijani or Armenian side. Nevertheless, he substituted or

compensated these national narratives of the conflicting parties with his own truth. He then selected and affirmed essential building blocks of Azerbaijani propaganda. However, on the Armenian side, he only “uncovered propaganda”.

In his final chapters, de Waal compares the difficulties of the Azerbaijani people with those of the Greek Cypriots and the Palestinians. De Waal is convinced that “Azerbaijan almost certainly has the muscle to keep the Armenian side in an insecure limbo and to prevent the recognition of the independence of Nagorny Karabakh.” He also emphasizes that “Turkey is the most vivid example of missed potential. No other power has such leverage over the conflict. Ankara has strong influence over Azerbaijan and much to offer to Armenia, once and if it re-opens their shared closed borders.”