

Supervisor Review of Zhazira Ongarova's Bachelor Dissertation titled:

“From nationalism to perpetual conflict:

The case of Nagorno-Karabakh”

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Zhazira Ongarova addresses an important and current topic:

The dissertation addresses one of most intractable ethno-political conflicts, the dispute over the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh, considered by UN to be part of the Republic of Azerbaijan, but since 1991 under *de facto* control of ethnic Armenian separatists. The author has provided a detailed account of the deep historical roots of the conflict, taking the narrative right up today.

Apart from analysing it with reference to standard theoretical nationalism, she also reviews the salient principles of international law relevant to this conflict, formulated in the context of de-colonization. The dissertation shows that great power rivalry was often a major factor in the fueling of ethnic hostility, not only in Nagorno-Karabakh but in the entire Trans-caucasia. It also discusses the prospects for possible peaceful resolution of the conflict. It concludes that the most promising approach would be the building of strong multi-ethnic states – and not ethno-states – in the region, with support of the international community. This is a powerful argument, not least because it would find resonance within the international community.

Structure of the dissertation and the treatment of the topic:

The dissertation is divided into four parts. Part I examines the historical roots of the conflict, describing the socio-historical and cultural processes in the ancient Caucasian Albania. These processes bear direct relevance to the hereditary land rights of a particular ethnicity, whether Armenians or Azerbaijanis. The discussion shows how historical justifications of the ethnic groups' claims and rights to the land have been an overarching factor in the demand for self-determination and hence the main driver of the conflict. The author merely lays out the respective positions of ethno-political rivals without engaging in any polemics.

Part II takes the narrative of the conflict through the periods of subjugation by the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union to the present time.

Part III delves into the theory of nationalism, focusing on the explanation of its persistent appeal despite the rise of modern globalism. This part of the dissertation also discusses the evolution of international in the context of the rise of the United Nations after WWII. It throws light on the international community's stance on conflicts such as that in Nagorno-Karabakh, along with the analysis of several points of inherent legal inconsistencies.

Finally, Part IV sets forth the respective positions of all parties involved – Armenia, the current authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan. That analysis suggests that the conflict will likely remain frozen in line with a "Cypriot" scenario, in which the parties have minimum mutual contacts at both the state level and in everyday life. However, in the Conclusions Zhazira Ongarova hints at the possibility of more optimistic scenarios, such as the rejection (in view of the sterile and very costly conflict) of ethno-state separation and gradual embrace of pragmatic ethnic co-existence under the conditions of strong and well integrated multi-ethnic states. Such scenarios could be realised in the long run, assuming propitious conditions for socio-economic development and sufficient international support.

Suggestions for improvement:

The dissertation would benefit from more detailed analysis of the positions of key regional players – Turkey, Russia and Iran – especially with the view of determining whether a workable common ground could be found. The work might have also benefited from an element of comparative approach, for example by looking at the situation in former Yugoslavia, in particular in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, since Zhazira Ongarova demonstrably has the ability and interest in further pursuing her research, she will likely address such issues in her Masters or PhD work.

Suggested grading:

I believe that the dissertation deserves grade 1

