

Power, place and knowledge: Intellectuals, scholars and epistemologies of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict

Wissenschaftskolleg,
Berlin, 9-11 July 2025



Call for Papers

The Second Karabakh War of 2020 exposed a vividly competing field of knowledge claims seeking to account for events on the ground. State-generated narratives, local civil societies, diasporic communities, international media, peacebuilding practitioners, international policy ‘experts’ in European, North American, Russian, Turkish and Iranian think-tanks drew on competing frames of reference, sources of data and discursive frameworks to explain the latest surge in Armenian-Azerbaijani violence. Debates during and after the war exposed the hierarchies within this heterogeneity: a prominent question was whether the Armenian or Azerbaijani ‘native’ could speak impartially, or whether ethnic belonging predetermined a nationalist – and by definition – partial perspective. A tendency in international forums to conclude the latter resulted in a dual silencing: the overlay of local by external knowledge whose own parochialism remains unexamined, and the obscuring of the heterogeneity within



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local perspectives. The framing of an over-arching Armenian-Azerbaijani antagonism in ethnic terms reduces myriad other contestations of legitimate local knowledge, among actors divided by social, professional, gender and other identities, and by their access and relationship to power.

Competing epistemologies of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict are not new. Intellectuals and scholars have always played a crucial role in the conflict, given its complex articulation to ideologies of national self-determination, of imperialism under the Russian Empire and Soviet Union, and to an array of cross-cutting discourses in different eras evoking religious, class-based, diasporic, post-colonial and gendered identities. Soviet intelligentsias played seminal roles in the nationalist mobilizations culminating in the restored independence of Armenia and Azerbaijan in 1991 and the First Karabakh War, and intellectuals led the early administrations of both republics in the early 1990s. Over the following decades, under conditions of sovereign statehood and unresolved conflict, state-sponsored narratives drew selectively on nationalist historiographies. State-sponsored narratives and their promoters admitted ever less space to alternative epistemologies through to the 2020 war, but were also challenged by other knowledge structures beyond the state: in civil society, in diasporic communities, in the digital space and in international scholarship. Each of these sites has been a battleground for claims to legitimate knowledge about the conflict. Internationally, the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict shares with other ‘peripheral’ settings a location dominated by lingering legacies of hegemonic knowledge, Eurocentric Western scholarship and orientalism, and their contestation by a variety of subaltern voices.

These issues will be explored at the next workshop convened by the Araz scholars’ initiative and hosted at the Wissenschaftskolleg on 9-11 July 2025 in Berlin. The workshop aims to bring together academics, PhD candidates, early career researchers and public intellectuals, from Armenia, Azerbaijan and international scholarship in the disciplines of history, political science, sociology, anthropology, social psychology and conflict and peace studies. Papers are accepted up to a non-negotiable maximum length of 10,000 words. The workshop will feature papers addressing questions such as, but not limited to:

- Within what social, political and cultural conditions has knowledge about the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict been generated? Under what conditions is it generated today?
- How can we understand the evolving role of intellectuals and their scholarship in different stages and eras of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict? What role have constraints on academic freedom played in different locations and eras?
- What parameters, discourses and agents define hierarchies among the knowledge structures about the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict? Is knowledge about the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict ‘colonized’, and can it be ‘decolonized’?
- Whose historiographic authority counts (and has counted in different eras), in narrating the history of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict? What are the hegemonic knowledge structures with regard to this conflict?
- How does symbolic power operate in the production and transmission of knowledge about the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, and other conflicts like it?



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- How are alternative knowledge structures created? How do they relate to hegemonic knowledge structures: complementarity, competition, substitution, infiltration?
- Can Armenian and Azerbaijani scholars escape the pigeon-holing of their knowledge on account of their ethnic identity? What kind of obstacles do they face in each country and in the international arena?
- What is the role of ‘Western knowledge’ in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, and how does this role compare with other ‘peripheral’ conflicts? What assumptions accompany perceptions of Western and other subjectivities and with what consequences?
- How have disciplinary and methodological differences (and inequalities) shaped knowledge of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict? Within the academe, which disciplines and methods predominate, and with what consequences?
- How has knowledge about the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict been shaped by access (or the lack of it) to key research sites, such as contested territory, interview respondents and national archives?
- How have key discursive frames and knowledge structures ‘travelled’ between the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict and other protracted conflicts, and with what consequences?
- What we can learn from the comparative study of knowledge production in Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict with knowledge production and its critical appraisal in other conflict settings?

Schedule

Prospective paper-givers are invited to submit abstracts of up to 500 words for their papers, together with a CV including previous publications where relevant, to arazberlin2025@gmail.com by 3 March 2025. Applications should be submitted in .doc, .docx or .pdf format. Successful applicants will be notified by 7 March. Papers must then be submitted by 30 June for review by discussants in advance of the workshop.

All sessions will be held in person. The working language of the workshop is English. All questions should be submitted to the above address.

Important dates

Deadline for abstract submissions: 3 March 2025

Notification on Committee’s decision: 7 March 2025

Deadline for paper submissions: 30 June 2025

Travel, visa, accommodation and subsistence costs for successful applicants will be covered in full, through the support of the European Union. Logistical support will be provided by Conciliation Resources, an international organization headquartered in London.



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