

Dear Javidan,

I am Anna from neighboring Armenia. I'm 20 years old. I'm in my third year of study at the linguistic university.

I was so happy to receive your letter and was even more excited and surprised to read your thoughts on the Armenian – Azerbaijani conflict. This is the first time I'm writing a letter to an Azerbaijani, too. I'm from Northern Armenia by origin, from the town Vanadzor in the Lori region.

It's 3 a.m. now. Both my mother and brother are sound asleep. I'm the only one awake, sitting in front of the computer with my hands on the keyboard, ready to start my letter. As usual, I have my earphones on at this moment, listening to "Sari Aghjik", or "Sari Gelin" as you call it. I love it, be it Armenian or Azeri. But what does it matter who the author is? One thing is for sure: whoever it is, he is talented and has created a wonderful song.

In recent years, I've been very interested in the culture; particularly the music of the South Caucasian countries. We have so many similarities that we can't even imagine. Of course, each nation adds their own elements, enriching it with different instruments and melodies. Let me tell you that the half-musical but agreeable grandpas in my yard are still huge fans of your Zeyneb; Zeyneb Khanlarova, I mean. You can still see the black and white photo of that woman with a magical look, the master of Azerbaijani folk music hanging in shoemaker Grandpa Hamlet's shop on the opposite wall of his working area. And up until now, on Saturday evenings, you can still hear the majors and minor of the accordion, the rhythms of the fork on vodka glasses by Grandpa Mihran, and Grandpa Razmik's hoarse voice, hardly suppressing his laughter imitating Zeyneb's gentle voice.

Anyway, let me move on to the main topic. First of all, I'd like to answer your questions that seemed rhetorical to me. Yes, I sincerely agree with your opinion that there is nothing more painful than the loss of parents by their children, and nothing is more terrible than the longing for the place where you were born and raised. There will be many people among both of our nations who recall similar stories and bitter memories from their past. Both sides have suffered. There are no winners in war. There are villains in every nation to whom money is more valuable than blood.

I wish it was all in our hands. We'd certainly be able to reestablish friendship and trust between our nations. But putting aside romantic sincerity and forgiveness, it's actually very difficult to accomplish that. I'm sure you understand it, too. The mutual animosity, and the real or distorted history that has been instilled in us for years by our governments, has opened great wounds in the hearts of both nations. Apologizing – denying the facts that have become part of our identity, and accepting the one who's firing at you from the border – is not an easy thing to do, especially when those who should apologize are two populous, proud, and fiery nations.

Our journalism lecturers at the University always tell us, “If you’ve not seen or heard anything yourself, you can never be sure of its truthfulness. Therefore, you must verify the information you receive from at least three credible sources.” So, what do we have now? We have a huge real story with black and white pages, and two very different variations by the two nations, each presented with their preferable shade of black. Both you and I have been hearing many contradictory stories since our childhood. On the one hand: nations who are good neighbors and friends, and on the other hand: armies destroying one another and, most importantly, governments that take care of deadlocked and unyielding relations. It all comes from the top. But I believe that the direction of the wheel of reality and relations can be changed so that the nations take control of it. No matter how many volumes of loving and friendly letters the two of us write to each other, nothing will change between our countries. The change will be between us. And that will be the first step. As we are a part of our nations, aren’t we? Imagine how many individuals like me and you will communicate with each other over the years. And maybe one day that number will equal the number of our populations. I swear, I have nothing against you, nor your nation, nor the 18-year-old soldier who has put aside his flourishing youth and is executing destructive commands standing in the trench. Please, reply to my letter by some means. You’ll find my email address and Facebook page at the end of this letter. Be sure that you have a good friend in Armenia. I have a great desire to see you here and be able to show you all the places that you’ve heard about but never seen, as mentioned in your letter. You will come; we’ll travel across Armenia and make tolma together. We’ll see who makes it better. We’ll eat and laugh. We’ll listen to Sari Aghjik and then to Sari Gellin on our way and enjoy ourselves. Then we’ll go to a stranger’s wedding. We’ll raise our arms and dance with the same hand movements we both dance, under the sound of zurna – dhol. No surprise we’re neighbors.

When I borrow coffee from our neighbor Gyulo who came to Armenia with her Armenian husband from Baku years earlier, the taste and smell of coffee in our home resembles that of their home. We’re neighbors, so it’s ok to argue and reconcile, isn’t it?

Looking forward to your response.

Your Armenian friend,

Anna