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Ali Askerov and Michael M. Gunter, *Forgotten Exile: The Deportations of Azerbaijanis by the Armenians in the Caucasus during the Twentieth Century* (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2025), 236 pp.

The monograph by Ali Askerov and Michael M. Gunter, published by Brill in 2025, purports to address the under-researched topic of Azerbaijani displacement in the South Caucasus during the twentieth century. However, the book fails to meet the basic requirements of academic rigour on multiple grounds: it is let down by the systematic misapplication of legal terminology, the selective and distorted use of historical evidence, a structural imbalance in the source base, and its politicisation of history. In several instances the text also raises questions of research integrity.

Chapter 1 provides a theoretical analysis of the concepts of "genocide", "ethnic cleansing", "deportation", and "crimes against humanity". **Chapter 2** offers a historical and historiographical overview of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations, examining demographic shifts, territorial disputes, the question of Nagorno-Karabakh, and the "four stages" of Azerbaijani displacement from the territory of present-day Armenia throughout the twentieth century. **Chapter 3** analyses the events of 1905–1906 as the first stage of interethnic violence

and forced population transfer, with particular attention given to the origins of the conflict, demographic transformations, and the role of the Russian Empire.

Chapter 4 examines the events of 1918–1920, including armed confrontation, competing territorial claims, and the violence that accompanied the formation of the independent republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan. **Chapter 5** is devoted to the deportations of 1948–1953 during the Soviet period, analysing the causes of the resettlement, Soviet policy, and the consequences for the Azerbaijani population. **Chapter 6** addresses the situation of Azerbaijanis in Armenia during the 1960s–1980s. **Chapter 7** examines the events of 1988–1989 and the final stage of the mass exodus of Azerbaijanis from Armenia. **Chapter 8** analyses the role of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in Armenian-Azerbaijani relations, encompassing military operations and external intervention. **Chapter 9** considers questions of cultural heritage and toponymy. **The Conclusion** brings together the book's principal arguments, situating the Azerbaijani exodus and interethnic conflict within a broader framework of interconnected historical processes that played out in the twentieth century.

The title itself signals the first serious issue. Deportation denotes the expulsion of individuals or groups by a state from its sovereign territory — a function that cannot be attributed to an ethnic group, since only a state exercises such authority. The "Caucasus", furthermore, is a broad historical-geographical category, not a state from whose territory a deportation could take place. The term exile similarly implies state-directed forced removal from a country of residence. The application of both concepts to the actions of "Armenians" is therefore legally incoherent from the outset. The authors are also imprecise in their use of genocide: although they invoke the 1948 Genocide Convention[571], the events they characterise as "genocidal" do not satisfy a single element of the Convention's definition. The use of the word *massacre* is equally problematic: an episode in which four individuals sustained injuries and no fatalities occurred is described as a "horrifying massacre" (p. 86). These terminological choices are not incidental: they form the rhetorical scaffolding of the book's central argument.

The authors offer a four-phase periodisation of Azerbaijani "deportation": 1905–1906, 1918–1920, 1948–1953, and 1987–1992. Each phase is subject to serious objection. During 1905–1906, no independent states existed in the region; the inter-communal clashes that began in Baku and spread across the Caucasus, including Tiflis, were manifestations of ethnic tension within the Russian Empire and cannot be construed as a deliberate Armenian deportation policy[572]. The events of 1918–1920 involved mutual violence in which Armenian losses substantially exceeded those of the Muslim/Azerbaijani population[573]. The monograph's own primary documents for the period 1948–1953 attest to the voluntary character of the resettlement of Azerbaijanis from the

571 United Nations General Assembly, ***Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide***, Resolution 260 A (III), 9 December 1948, ***United Nations Treaty Series***, vol. 78, p. 277.

572 T. Swietochowski, ***Russian Azerbaijan, 1905–1920: The Shaping of National Identity in a Muslim Community***, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985; R.G. Hovannisian, ***The Republic of Armenia***, vol. I, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971.

573 R.G. Hovannisian, ***The Republic of Armenia***, Berkeley: University of California Press, vol. I, 1971; vol. II, 1982.

Armenian SSR (Appendix 3); the process was organised and compensated by the Soviet state, which bore sole administrative authority, and is incomparable with the forced deportations of Chechens, Meskhetian Turks, or Crimean Tatars. As for 1987–1992, the outflow of Azerbaijanis from the Armenian SSR must be situated in the context of escalating anti-Armenian violence in the Azerbaijani SSR, including the Sumgait and Baku pogroms. Moreover, Azerbaijanis who left Armenia received 71 million rubles in compensation from the government of Armenian SSR in 1989. It is difficult to imagine a deportation accompanied by compensation[574]. The authors' further characterisation of this resettlement as "genocide" (p. 131) is a categorical misuse of the term.

The statistical record, which the authors claim to mobilise in support of their argument, in fact challenges it. According to the 1989 Soviet census, 84,860 Azerbaijanis resided in the Armenian SSR[575]; yet the authors assert that 300,000 were displaced, inflating the figure to 400,000 elsewhere in the same text (p. 117). Even the 1979 census figure of 160,841 Azerbaijanis in Armenia renders the authors' claims inflated by at least a factor of two. The demographic evidence for the period 1918–1920, by contrast, reveals a precipitous decline in the Armenian population that cannot be attributed to voluntary migration: Armenians fell from 40% of Nakhichevan's population in 1917 to 10.8% by 1926 — from 53,900 to 11,276 persons[576]. The Armenian population of Shushi declined from 21,926 in 1916 to 289 in 1921, following the March 1920 pogrom[577]. These figures, systematically absent from the authors' analysis, point to mass killings rather than displacement.

The authors' treatment of the Sumgait events of February 1988 exemplifies the work's broader analytical failures. Criminal case No. 18/55461-88[578] shows that of the 84 individuals prosecuted, 82 were ethnic Azerbaijanis; survivor testimonies, Soviet Politburo records, and contemporaneous reporting in the Chicago Tribune, The Guardian, the Los Angeles Times, and the Washington Post[579] all document the systematic, ethnically targeted character of the violence. The Politburo formally acknowledged on 29 February 1988 that the killings were carried out on ethnic grounds[580]. The authors' framing of the pogrom as an Armenian "provocation" organised by Armenian secret services (pp. 108, 111), and their focus on a single Armenian individual (Eduard

574 *Report on the Humanitarian Situation of the Refugees and Displaced Persons in Armenia and Azerbaijan*, 1995, URL: https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/X2H-Xref-ViewHTML.asp?FileID=6823&lang=EN, accessed 23.06.2026.

575 USSR Central Statistical Office, ***Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia 1989 goda*** [All-Union Population Census of 1989], Moscow: Goskomstat, 1989. (In Russian).

576 USSR Central Statistical Office, ***Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia 1926 goda*** [All-Union Population Census of 1926], Moscow: Goskomstat, 1926. (In Russian).

577 ***Zakavkaz'e. Statistiko-ekonomicheskii sbornik*** [Transcaucasia: A Statistical-Economic Compendium], Tiflis, 1925, pp. 152–153. (In Russian).

578 Prosecutor's Office of the USSR, ***Materialy sledstviya po sobytiyam v Sumgaite: Ugolovnoe delo No. 18/55461-88*** [Materials of the Investigation into the Sumgait Events: Criminal Case No. 18/55461-88], vols. 1–2, 1989. (In Russian).

579 See e.g. ***Chicago Tribune***, 5 March 1988; ***The Guardian***, 15 July 1988; ***Los Angeles Times***, 29 February 1988; ***The Washington Post***, 11 March and 3 September 1988.

580 Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU, ***Stenogramma zasedaniya Politbyuro TsK KPSS*** [Transcript of the Politburo Session of the CC CPSU], 29 February 1988, National Security Archive, URL: https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/rus/text_files/Perestroika/1988-02-29%20Politburo%20Nagorny%20Karabakh-1.pdf, accessed 23.06.2026. (In Russian).

Grigoryan) — documented by the KGB to have been registered as an Azerbaijani national and to have held pronounced anti-Armenian views[581] — contradicts the entire body of evidence.

The structural imbalance of the source base is quantitatively striking. Of the total of 158 titles, only 121 relate to academic research, of which 66 (around 54.5%) are by Azerbaijani and Turkish authors, including the authors of this monograph themselves and its reviewers, which may already indicate a lack of objectivity in the monograph.

When self-citations and reviewer citations are aggregated, approximately 75.6% of all in-text references derive from a single, ideologically coherent scholarly community. The Armenian-authored corpus amounts to 26 titles and is largely cited for the purpose of selective criticism rather than substantive engagement. In several cases, there are signs of incorrect usage of the Armenian-language literature (for example, errors in identifying authors, as in the case of Leo 'Antsyalich', where the authors do not even realise that Antsyalits is the title of the work, not the author's patronymic); another example, Zaven Korkotyan, a statistician, is described as a writer. Foundational works on the period — most notably Hovannisian's four-volume history of the First Republic of Armenia[582] — are conspicuously absent. Contemporary sources inconvenient to the argument, such as Senator Kuzminskii's report on the February 1905 Baku clashes (which records 192 Armenian, 36 Tatar, and 4 Russian fatalities), are silently passed over.

A textual comparison of the monograph with an unattributed Azerbaijani web source reveals a pattern of near-verbatim paraphrase without citation. Five parallel passages are reproduced below.

N	Source Text[583]	Text of the Monograph	Type of Overlap	Similarity	Commentary
1	in 20th century the operations of massive deportation of Azerbaijanis… includes 4 periods – 1905, 1918-1920, 1948-1956, 1987-1988	Throughout the 20th century… four periods of forced displacement… 1905–1906, 1918–1920, 1948–1953, 1988–1991	Structural paraphrase	≈95%	Identical structure; minor date variation
2	more than 1,5 [sic] million Azerbaijanis have been deported from their historical place	over 1.5 million Azerbaijanis were expelled from their ancestral land	Near-verbatim	≈95%	Same data, minimal lexical change
3	the names of 698 among 940 Azerbaijani settlements have been replaced by Armenian	the names of 698 out of 940 Azerbaijani settlements were replaced with Armenian names	Near-verbatim	≈95–100%	Full numerical and structural match
4	The former president… signed a degree [sic] (9 April, 1991) to change those last 91 names	Former Armenian President… signed a decree on April 9, 1991, changing the names of the last 91	Near-verbatim	≈95%	Identical content; corrects 'degree' → 'decree'
5	from 1828 to 1830 there have been 40.000 [sic] people moved from Iran and 84.600 from Turkey	around 40,000 Armenians from Persia and 84,000 from the Ottoman State were settled… in 1828–1830	Quantitative overlap	≈95%	Identical figures; lexical normalisation only

581 V. Kiporenko, 'Besporyadki v Baku prokhodili pod temi zhe lozungami, chto i v Sumgaite' [The Disturbances in Baku Took Place under the Same Slogans as Those in Sumgait], ***Analitika***, 13 January 2011, URL: https://analitika.at.ua/news/valeriy_kiporenko_besporyadki_v_baku_prokhodili_pod_temi_zhe_lozungami_chto_i_v_sumgaite/2011-01-13-38523, accessed 23.06.2026. (In Russian).

582 R.G. Hovannisian, ***The Republic of Armenia***, vols. I–IV, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971–1996.

583 https://1905.az/en/quoting-zaren-karkadyan-until-1820-azerbaijanis-lived-in-2000-of-2300-settlements-on-the-area-of-now-days-armenia/ accessed 23.03.2026, archived in pdf

In the absence of any citation to a prior source, these passages constitute lightly paraphrased plagiarism and do not meet the standards of academic transparency.

The monograph is permeated by the political discourse of the Azerbaijani state. It deploys the concept of "Western Azerbaijan" (pp. 130, 155) — an irredentist political construct promoted by Azerbaijani state-funded institutions, in which M. Gunter is himself an active participant — as though it were a neutral historical category. The language applied to Armenians throughout the text is systematically derogatory: "nationalists" (pp. 44, 47, 81, 95, 96, 100, 102, 104, 110, 154, 165), "fanatical nationalists" (p. 47), "terrorists" (pp. 47, 50, 97), "Armenian propagandists" (p. 154), "radicals" (p. 99), etc. The phrase "a series of systematic crimes" (p. 130) and "brutal crimes committed by Armenian troops, with the support of the Russian army" (p. 166) are asserted without reference to any judicial or investigative record. This rhetoric is characteristic of state propaganda rather than scholarly analysis. The authors simultaneously employ the strategy of competitive victimhood[584], positioning Azerbaijanis as the primary and unrecognised victims while systematically minimising documented anti-Armenian violence.

The technical execution of the monograph fails to meet the basic editorial standards required by Brill. Toponyms are rendered inconsistently and predominantly in Azerbaijani forms: Aragats appears as Alayaz-Alagoz (p. 142), Ashtarak as Astarakh or Ashratak (p. 142), Kapan as Qafan or Gafan (pp. 58, 142), Vagharshapat as Vagarshapat (p. 136). The Russian administrative designation "Armenian Oblast" is mistranslated as "Armenian vilayet" — a category belonging to Ottoman administrative terminology. Despite this, the book has included claims such as the "founding" of Yerevan by Azerbaijanis and its portrayal as an "Azerbaijani city". However, early seventeenth-century European sources clearly identify Yerevan as an Armenian city: Petrus Bedik notes, "Tres vero in Armenia Majori, primus Erevan" ("Three [cities] in Greater Armenia, the first — Yerevan")[585].

The bibliography mixes Latin, Cyrillic, and Azerbaijani scripts without standardisation, and departs from APA guidelines without adopting any alternative style.

It is pertinent to note that M. Gunter's academic record has received prior scholarly criticism on the grounds of conflict of interest and denialism[586]. Watenpaugh[587] argued that Gunter's review of Lewy's volume on the Armenian massacres was compromised by his

584 L. Bloy, E. Halperin, N. Nir and N. Malovicki-Yaffe, 'Powerful Victims: A Dynamic Approach to Competitive Victimhood between High- and Low-Power Groups', ***Group Processes & Intergroup Relations***, vol. 28, no. 4, 2025, pp. 882–907; M. Noor, N. Shnabel, S. Halabi and A. Nadler, 'When Suffering Begets Suffering: The Psychology of Competitive Victimhood between Adversarial Groups in Violent Conflicts', ***Personality and Social Psychology Review***, vol. 16, no. 4, 2012, pp. 351–374.

585 P. Bedik, ***Cehil Sutun, seu Explicatio utriusque celeberrimi, ac pretiosissimi Theatri Quadraginta Columnarum in Perside Orientis***, Vienna: Universitatis typogr., 1678, p. 255.

586 I.W. Charny, review of M.M. Gunter, ***Armenian History and the Question of Genocide*** (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), ***International Journal of Armenian Genocide Studies***, 2011, URL: https://agmipublications.am/index.php/ijags/article/view/12/12, accessed 23.06.2026.

587 K.D. Watenpaugh, 'A Response to Michael Gunter's Review of The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey', ***International Journal of Middle East Studies***, vol. 39, no. 3, 2007, pp. 512–514, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743807070869.

prior involvement in its promotion. Dadrian[588] documented Gunter's "method of truncation through deletion" — the selective excision of quotations to misrepresent an opponent's argument. Sayı[589] characterised Gunter's response to critical review as "offensive" and intellectually evasive. The present volume extends this pattern.

Forgotten Exile fails to become a scholarly contribution to the history of population movements in the South Caucasus. It reproduces and amplifies Azerbaijani state narratives, misapplies fundamental legal and historical terminology, suppresses inconvenient evidence, inflates statistical data, and exhibits textual overlaps with unattributed sources. The question of why Brill chose to publish a work of this character — without adequate peer review and in manifest violation of its own editorial standards — is one that the publisher would do well to address.

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