INTRODUCING TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE: DEALING WITH THE PAST IN ARMENIAN-AZERBAIJANI CONFLICT

Editors: Philip Gamaghelyan, Sevil Huseynova, Vadim Romashov, Christina Soloyan

Tbilisi 2022

Caucasus Edition is the publication of the Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation. The Imagine Center is an independent, non-political organization that is dedicated to positively transforming relations and laying foundations for lasting and sustainable peace in conflict-torn societies.

www.imaginedialogue.com

info@imaginedialogue.com

IMAGINE
Center for Conflict Transformation

In This Issue

Editorial Note

The First Karabakh War (1991-1994) claimed tens of thousands of lives, displaced hundreds of thousands of Armenians and Azerbaijanis, and involved numerous massacres and other mass atrocities. The 44-day-long Second Karabakh War in 2020 took thousands of more lives and displaced thousands of others. Countless more lives were claimed in escalations and ceasefire violations between the two wars and following the Second Karabakh War. Generations of Armenians and Azerbaijanis were raised witnessing those atrocities in media coverage and reproduced in textbooks vilifying and de-humanizing the other.

The negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan focus mainly on the political and security dimensions of the conflict and overlook considerations of human security and justice. In addition to the questionable ethics of negotiations that exclude questions of justice and human security, such an approach has also been ineffective. With negotiations and prospective agreements offering little to the populations affected by the conflict, the proposed solutions have been consistently unpopular with no framework agreement offered to the parties during the past 30 years enjoying even minimal support from the populations, thus making signing of a peace treaty virtually impossible.

With the new round of negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan ongoing, the inclusion of human security and transitional justice provisions addressing the needs and trauma of affected populations could add legitimacy to the process and be a step towards building support for peace within the war-torn societies.

In its classical form, Transitional Justice is a normative field that links transition from violence to peace with institutional reforms and transition toward liberal democracy. The later interdisciplinary reconceptualization of peace and reconciliation reshaped transitional justice mechanisms (Kostovicova 2019). The recent body of Transitional Justice literature focuses not only on direct violence but also on social and economic injustices that are key causes and consequences of conflicts and perpetual violence (Sharp 2014, Pasipadonya 2008). The local and everyday

approaches to peace, conceptualized as transformative justice, further enrich the concept (Gready and Robins 2014).

One of the key aspects of recent literature on Transitional Justice is the acknowledgment of the necessity of considering the specific conflict context and realities on the ground. Top-down replication of classical Transitional Justice mechanisms rarely lead to the establishment of peace. This has led some to refocus the approach on local needs and the causes of grievances to choose and implement the right mechanisms.

Whether it is the cause or the consequence of violent conflict, socio-economic issues are often identified as the most important by the victims of conflicts. Yet it is these issues that are most neglected in transitional justice processes (Kent 2012). Distributive justice mechanisms have a great potential to bring structural improvements to post-conflict settings. (Kalmanovitz 2010) This approach does not neglect the roots of conflict but rather looks into their socio-economic and socio-political origins; it is forward-looking in the sense that it has a direct impact on the quality of life of the vulnerable social groups affected by the conflict.

Currently, Transitional Justice, in its most inclusive understanding, includes mechanisms for addressing injustices caused both by direct and structural violence. Initially a retributive mechanism to address mass atrocities, Transitional Justice has expanded to become a crossroads of various disciplines and includes truth commissions, amnesties, reparations, lustration, vetting, traditional forms of justice, apologies, memorialization efforts, and other mechanisms to address the past and move forward (Kochanski 2019). Transitional Justice, the go-to approach in dozens of post-conflict contexts from the 1990s onward is yet, however, to make its way to the conflict contexts in South Caucasus.

In the current issue of Caucasus Edition, we invite you to consider some possible approaches to addressing the human security dimension and social justice questions underlying Armenian-Azerbaijani relations. While certainly not comprehensive, we see this as the start of a conversation about various aspects of transitional justice that can serve as a set of ideas in support of a comprehensive Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process that make the outcomes of that process more relevant for the societies affected by the conflict and help ensure the sustainability of those outcomes.

The group affected by this conflict include but are not limited to: the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijanis and Armenians displaced due to the First Karabakh war, Armenians displaced due to the Second Karabakh war, the populations of the bordering regions affected by continuous shootings, the families of deceased soldiers and civilians, the physically and mentally disabled victims of the three-decades long conflict, survivors of mass atrocities, and many other social and identity groups that carry the consequences of violence and justice. The above groups are also not homogenous and only micro-level research can help identify the multiple needs these populations have and which ones should take priority. It is also important to evaluate the impact of war beyond violent incidents and look at the structural inequalities it has brought or nurtured within societies that could be addressed through Transitional Justice mechanisms focused on memory of conflict, education, healthcare, and others.

In the first article of this edition titled "The Property Restitution Process After the Second Karabakh War," Eviya Hovhannisyan and Nika Musavi look into the challenges of housing, land, and property restitution in the aftermath of forced displacement, war damage, which is a topic at the core of many political debates on transitional justice, affecting the actions of local governments, civil society, and the international community.

In the second article, "Towards Psychosocial Peacebuilding: An Integrated Approach to Conflict Transformation in the Context of Nagorno-Karabakh," Marina Danoyan and Namiq Abdullayev examine the integration of mental health and psychosocial support with peacebuilding.

The next two articles look at the memorization and politicization of the conflict in history textbooks and official narratives. In "Armenian and Azerbaijani History Textbooks: Time for a Change," co-authors Flora Ghazaryan and Mirkamran Huseynli adopt transitional justice as a theoretical framework to examine history education as one of the areas where the conflict is perpetuated and where reconciliation between Armenian and Azerbaijani societies can be achieved. Turning from education to official narratives, Bahruz Samadov and Mane Grigoryan present a discursive analysis of the onset of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict from the beginning of the independence movements of Armenia

and Azerbaijan in the late 1980s through the presidencies of Heydar Aliyev and Robert Kocharyan in their article titled "Formation of Discourses of National Identity in Armenia and Azerbaijan: from the Path to Independence to Nationalist Hegemony." Their analysis traces the formation of new national identities in Armenia and Azerbaijan in opposition to each other, the consolidation of antagonism, and the importance of these developments for today's context.

In the final, conceptual piece, Namiq Abdullayev, Lala Darchinova, and Diana Yayloyan offer a decolonial lens of analysis of regional political processes, the emergence of conflict discourses, and the agency of local governments in the South Caucasus.

Bibliography

Kalmanovitz, Pablo. 2010. "Corrective justice versus social justice in the aftermath of war." *Distributive Justice in Transition*, edited by Morten Bergsmo, César Rodríguez-Garavito, Pablo Kalmanovitz and Maria Paula Saffon, 71-95, Oslo: Torkel Opsahl Academic EPublisher.

Kostovicova Denisa. 2019. "Transitional Justice and Conflict Studies: Bridging the Divide." *Journal of Global Security Studies* 4, no. 2: 273-278.

Kochanski, Adam. 2020 "The "Local Turn" in Transitional Justice: Curb the Enthusiasm." *International Studies Review* 22, no. 1: 26-50.

Pasipanodya, Tafadzwa. 2008. "A Deeper Justice: Economic and Social Justice as Transitional Justice in Nepal." *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 2, no. 3: 378-397.

Kent, Lia. 2012. *The Dynamics of Transitional Justice: International Models and Local Realities in East Timor*. London-New York: Routledge.

Sharp, Dustin. 2014. "Economic Violence in the Practice of African Truth Commissions and Beyond." In *Justice and Economic Violence in Transition*, edited by Dustin N. Sharp, New York: Springer.

Gready, Paul, and Simon Robins. 2014. "From Transitional to Transformative Justice: A New Agenda for Practice." The International Journal of Transitional Justice 8, no. 3: 339-361.

The Property Restitution Process after the Second Karabakh[1] War: Challenges and Opportunities

Eviya Hovhannisyan, Nika Musavi

(parallel articles with joint introduction and conclusion)

Immediately during and after the cessation of war, urgent problems arise from the destruction of property and the displacement of populations. The loss of one's property (home, land, and livestock) is often one of the most painful personal consequences of armed conflict. In vulnerable post-conflict societies, such a loss not only causes a flow of displaced people but can also cause a deep socio-political crisis and a resumption of hostilities (Fitzpatrick and Fishman 2014, 263-264). Restitution of housing, land, and property related to forced displacement; war damage; and destruction is at the core of many political debates on transitional justice, affecting the actions of local governments, civil society, and the international community (Williams 2007, 1-5).

This study focuses on the socio-legal aspects of property restitution after the Second Karabakh War. Firstly, the existence and content of the right to property restitution are examined through the lens of transitional justice. Second, specific problems in the institutional and bureaucratic spheres are

---

[1] In the text, the author uses the toponym "Nagorno-Karabakh" in the main text according to the Guidelines of Caucasus Edition, the term "Republic of Artsakh" when referring to the structures of the self-declared and unrecognized state, and the terms used in the original when citing an outside source.

addressed. Third, the study focuses on the application of property restitution in practice, using a case study as an example.

The study will attempt to answer the following questions. Does transitional justice provide a sufficient basis for understanding how best to respond to property claims following military conflict? Does a rights-based legal framework used in transitional justice provide adequate reparations for property damage in different socio-cultural and historical trajectories? What kind of reparation/assistance programs for lost property are applied in an unrecognized state experiencing wartime?

Transitional Justice and Property Rights in Karabakh

Eviya Hovhannisyan

As an area within transitional justice, victim restitution has become a dynamic area of social and academic research in recent years. The term "victim reparations" is often associated with property compensation and mediated reconciliation. In reality, contemporary debates on victim reparations encompass a much wider range of issues. The literature on reparations covers several academic disciplines, the most prominent of which are law and social sciences (Miller and Kumar 2007, 5).

The relationship between property rights and transitional justice is still evolving. The housing land and property norms, upon which restitution rights for refugees and displaced people are based, are found widely throughout international, regional, national, and local law as well as within the legal articles of human rights law, humanitarian law, refugee law, criminal law, constitutional law, and civil law. Some of the specific rights clearly enshrined within these articles include the right to voluntary return to one's country, the right to adequate housing, the right to be protected against forced eviction, the right to privacy and respect for the home, and the right to freedom of movement (Sharp 2014).

Large-scale restitution attempts can be particularly problematic in contexts of customary and other informal property rights, where documents are missing, opportunists abound, secondary occupation is common and some period of time has passed. The challenge is compounded in contexts where demographic change in support of political agendas has occurred, historical claims emerge, identity-based attachments to land exist, and grievances at not being able to return to

one's lands are acutely felt. Post-conflict property rights are increasingly addressed through the technical and bureaucratic process of mass claims restitution and state humanitarian aid programs. The technical process by itself cannot adequately deal with the effects of mass forced resettlement, which ranges from forms of ethnic cleansing to resettlement caused by war (Martin-Ortega 2013).

However, for transitional justice to make a significant contribution to the transition of property rights, a number of issues need to be addressed. At one end of the range are elements that are difficult to measure and manage: perceptions, impressions, feelings, and beliefs not only about justice but also about home, security of tenure, etc. Then come the more tangible physical realities of borders, infrastructures, and physical resources such as water, minerals, land, vegetation, and structures. These need to be engaged with elements of policy, legislation, and enforcement. Finally, there are the technical realities of titles, acts, registers, and cadasters, as well as the computational, bureaucratic, and financial systems required to manage them. It is the interaction of all these elements in a highly volatile country situation that constitutes the area of transitional justice in the field of property rights. Therefore, while there might exist a common normative ground in international law on the right to remedy and reparation, the sociopolitical context of each country attempting to establish a reparations program will play a decisive role in shaping the conceptual framework upon which the program is based—and this is a highly contested process.

Unfortunately, property rights do not usually return to their pre-conflict state and mode of functioning, which lay the foundations for economic and societal recovery. In fact, property ownership is the main reason for the onset of conflict in many contexts, such that a return to the pre-conflict situation can renew the conditions for conflict. Although the term 'transitional justice' implies that post-conflict societies go through an intermediate phase between the beginning of change (end of war, change in forms of governance) and a period of stability (post-war reconstruction, new form of governance), the process of property restitution in a transitional context is often delayed. Generally, post-conflict recovery and reconstruction scenarios assume that property rights either recover themselves or are merely artifacts of a legal system that can be easily (re-)constructed through development efforts, including securing and

enforcing registers, titles, deeds, demarcations, maps, and cadasters. However, property rights undergo a significant post-conflict transition along with the rest of society. Forced resettlement, expropriation, cleaning up of territories in various forms, return processes, issues of secondary occupation, and land grabbing all require considerable time for reconciliation (Unruh and Abdul-Jalil 2021, 2).

Property rights are not easily changeable, manageable, reconfigurable components of social interaction. On the contrary, property rights in the post-conflict period are complicated, contested, and often heavily burdened with historical baggage (Garcia-Godos 2008, 112-113). Property rights are deeply rooted in societal and political interactions. After the First Karabakh War, the properties left vacant by those who had perished, fled, and been forcibly displaced had been allocated mainly for the use of Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan and Karabakh Armenians. However, they were also given to those not necessarily displaced or local but simply politically well-connected: war veterans, the families of fallen soldiers, young families from Armenia, etc. This is particularly the case as conflict and property rights are confused spatial practices that produce a tangle of land-related grievances, dislocation, expropriation, damage, destruction, divisiveness, and fraud. It is therefore very difficult to unravel this tangled history of property rights after the First and Second Karabakh Wars, as it is intertwined with social ties, multiple relocations of people, nationalist discourses, and local understandings of the right to reparations for lost property.

Institutional and bureaucratic issues during property restitution in Karabakh

Following the First Karabakh War, the de jure unrecognized but de facto independent Nagorno Karabakh Republic began to establish its own institutional and bureaucratic systems, which were in many ways linked to the Armenian bureaucratic system. On December 10, 2006, the constitution was adopted by referendum, according to Chapter 2 of which the basic human and civil rights and freedoms in Karabakh were defined (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Artsakh 2006). Although the latter is not accepted under international law, of particular interest to our study are Chapter 2, Article 47 – "Right to Citizenship of the Republic of Artsakh", Article 60 – Right to Property, Article 62 – "Right to Compensation for Damage", and Article 76 – "Restrictions on Basic Rights

and Freedoms in Time of Emergency or Martial Law" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Artsakh 2006). It is still an open question to what extent international law is applicable in Karabakh and other unrecognized states.

The majority of the population of the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) and surrounding territories was affected by the conflict, which left both a trail of human rights violations and a high level of social destruction and distortion of public life. In the aftermath of the second war, it is evident that there are many institutional, legal, and bureaucratic problems relating to the reparation of property lost during the war. Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh continue to suffer from very low levels of social trust and confidence in public and political institutions.

One of the first and foremost important issues relates to the transfer of territory from one state entity to another. This raises the rhetorical question of who is obliged to pay compensation for the lost property to the displaced population from these territories: the losing side or the winning side (or maybe a third party)? The Second Karabakh War brought into focus the return of Azerbaijani displaced persons from the late 1980s and early 1990s, who, according to the statements by President Aliyev, should return to their homes in the recaptured territories (Rferl 2021). Thus, the tangle of problems around the issue of compensation for lost property is becoming increasingly complicated.

Compensation for lost property is linked to a number of other issues related to the status of Nagorno-Karabakh and the citizenship and constitutional rights of its population. As there are no diplomatic relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan—and the Republic of Artsakh, as well as its predecessor, the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, was never recognized—each state (recognized or not) resolves the issue of compensation for lost property in its own way, without any discussion or possible mutual assistance. The situation was different during the first war, with the Soviet state being to a lesser extent involved in the resettlement of Armenians and Azerbaijanis. In most cases, resettlement took place on an individual level. When it became clear that the conflict between the two Soviet republics was escalating, Armenians and Azerbaijanis started looking for houses and flats that could have been exchanged. Gradually, the phenomenon took on a considerable scale. Everywhere, Armenians and Azerbaijanis were exchanging houses,

signing agreements, and drawing up property exchange documents to sell and buy houses in relocation areas. The resettlement process was gradual; people from both sides traveled for almost four years (1988-1991), taking their property, arranging documents, selling their houses, and continuing to care for their relatives' graves, etc. (Huseynova, Hakobyan and Rumyantsev 2012). This continued until both republics, Armenia and Azerbaijan, were almost entirely rid of representatives of 'undesirable' ethnic groups. Thus, some Armenians from Azerbaijan were able to exchange dwellings with Azerbaijanis from Armenia (figure 1.). Others were able to sell their property in Azerbaijan and use the proceeds to buy a house in Armenia. Some, having lost everything, moved to Armenia or Nagorno-Karabakh hoping for help from relatives and then the Soviet state. Nevertheless, this took place when there were still relations between Soviet states and individual ties between populations within the USSR.

The second and no less important problem relates to the documentation of property. The Armenians residing in Nagorno-Karabakh are citizens of the Republic of Armenia and have passports indicating "Republic of Artsakh" residency (Hakobyan 2019;Nagorno-Karabakh Republic Government Resolution 1999). The Republic of Artsakh, a state with no international recognition, could not provide documents on property rights to its residents who have been de jure citizens (not full citizens) of the Republic of Armenia. The Republic of Artsakh, in turn, as a non-recognized state, could not issue its own passport or grant internationally recognized citizenship. The question of property ownership is more problematic because, under international law, ownership certificates for Nagorno-Karabakh residents had to be issued by the state entity on whose land the property de jure is located.

Finally, the third problem relates to the development of the Republic of Artsakh's state assistance programs in Nagorno-Karabakh for Armenians displaced as a result of the Second Karabakh War. Here the problem of defining these programs arises—that is, whether they are programs for the return of lost property, compensation for lost property, or humanitarian assistance programs. Although state assistance programs are rhetorically termed as 'restitution programs,' according to the interviews with Nagorno-Karabakh authorities, formally these are support programs aimed at helping the local population overcome the consequences of the war. Both assistance and restitution programs calculate the quantity and

value of lost property according to cadastral data and assessments, as well as information from village councils and city administrations.

After the first and second Karabakh wars, we could observe how the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan accused and sued each other before the European Court of Human Rights and the International Court of Justice (Secretariat of the Committee of Ministers, Council of Europe 2016). In its most recent lawsuit, filed on September 16, 2021 against Azerbaijan, the Republic of Armenia argues that the Republic of Azerbaijan must make reparation for the damage caused by the internationally wrongful acts, including: "by way of restitution, allowing the safe and dignified return of displaced Armenians to their homes and the restoration or return of any Armenian cultural and religious buildings and sites, artifacts or objects; providing additional forms of reparation for any harm, loss or injury suffered by Armenians that cannot be fully compensated through restitution, including by providing compensation to displaced Armenians until they are safe to return to their homes" (International Court of Justice 2021). Thus, we can see that neither of the conflicting sides has an interest in calling the humanitarian assistance provided to displaced people (DPs) 'compensation,' as compensation should be provided by the party that caused the damage, which could be used as an accusation that the other side is taking responsibility for starting the war. The announced programs are therefore victim assistance programs, not reparation programs for lost property. Moreover, the Armenian side has not granted any status to the DPs, which makes it impossible for them to receive any assistance outside of Nagorno-Karabakh. The main purpose of this is a policy of keeping the population in Nagorno-Karabakh, which is what the assistance programs aim for, so that as many Armenians as possible remain on this territory.

A state support program for the reparation of the lost property in Nagorno-Karabakh

Although state support programs are financially limited, they are relatively systematic and regularly updated according to the needs of the affected population. These programs are funded from the budgets of the Republic of Artsakh, the Republic of Armenia, and the All-Armenian Fund (Hayastan All Armenian Fund 2021). In general, the assistance program aims to help displaced persons with housing and to pay a certain amount of money for lost land plots, movable property, and livestock.

On March 10, 2021, a republican commission for recording and assessing war damage to property belonging to the state, communities, and legal and natural persons of the Republic of Artsakh was established by a decree of President Arayik Harutyunyan (The Government of the Republic of Artsakh. 2021a. 2021a). The process of purchasing and renovating flats and houses in the regions of Nagorno-Karabakh, except the city of Stepanakert, was initiated in April 2021 to provide housing for families left homeless and/or persons who died or were declared permanently disabled as a result of the Second Karabakh War. In order to provide housing for the latter, a housing fund is being formed, which includes the construction of apartment buildings in Stepanakert providing some 1,200 flats (Figure 2.) and the construction of at least 20 new residential districts (Figure 3.) in the rural areas of Nagorno-Karabakh. The project will provide more than 2,297 dwellings, which are estimated to benefit displaced persons from more than 36 communities. In addition, more than 1,100 flats in the primary market and more than 1,500 flats in the secondary market in Nagorno-Karabakh, including Stepanakert, will be purchased by the housing fund. The maximum purchase price of 1 square meter of housing from the primary market is set at 360 thousand Armenian Drams (about 750 USD) (The Government of the Republic of Artsakh 2021b), which is almost close to the cost of flats in Yerevan. Each member of the beneficiary family is given an area of about sixteen square meters in a renovated furnished flat or house with an adjacent plot of land. Assuming an average of 4-5 members in each family, the housing to be provided by the program would be around 65-80 square meters, at a cost of around 55,000 USD. Housing will be provided to the beneficiaries of the assistance program with the right of non-refundable use for ten years, after which the same housing will be granted to the beneficiary by the Government of the Republic of Artsakh. An exception is made for displaced persons, whose housing will be provided until they return to their permanent place of residence in the territories taken by Azerbaijan and, in case it is not possible, the aforementioned principle of ten-year rent-free tenure is applied.

The assessment and recording process of the rest of the lost property is mainly based on the collection of systematized information on the types and sizes of the latter and the socio-demographic data of the displaced families: "The first area of assistance is public buildings: warehouses,

shops, etc., the second is vehicles, the third is freight equipment (such as construction machinery), the fourth is property owned by legal entities (mostly businesses), the fifth is cattle, and the sixth is orchards" (Suren Galstyan, Chairman of the Cadastre and State Property Management Committee of the Republic of Artsakh, interview, 6 August, 2021). Determining lost registered immovable property by type and size is easier as the electronic data of the cadastral service of Nagorno-Karabakh has been preserved. Here the main problem arises in relation to unregistered land and constructions, which, due to tax evasion strategies by their owners, have no legal proof apart from the verbal assertions by local principals and fellow villagers. When assessing a land plot, for example, it is also important to evaluate the plants on it, which can affect the status of the land considerably—grassland, pasture, perennial gardens, arable land, homesteading land, etc.: "A recently planted orchard less than two years old is valued at two million drams per hectare by the state assistance/compensation program. The same orchard three years old or more is valued at three million drams per hectare. For a vineyard up to two years old - 2.5 million drams, for three and more years - 3.5 million drams. Trellis cultivation is more expensive and more complex. There is no assistance/compensation provided for pastures, homesteading and arable lands. But there is no complete documentation for all this. In many cases, people used to change the preliminary designation of the land, such as planting orchards on arable land, but they did not officially change the designation on the documents to avoid paying taxes, and it is now difficult to prove that a person had an orchard in Hadrut instead of an arable plot." (Aram Badalyan, Head of Plant Breeding and Plant Protection Department of the Ministry of Economy and Agriculture of the Republic of Artsakh, interview, 5 August, 2021). There is another problem regarding unregistered property: "In the nineties, in seven districts around Karabakh, mainly in the communities of Askeran, Martakert and Kashatagh, where Armenians were resettled, no land title documents were issued by the Artsakh government and the State Cadastre Service, but they were allowed to use the land for agricultural purposes without compensation and indefinitely. These people now faced the fact that they had no documented title to their property. This was primarily due to the fact that the Artsakh government did not want to allow these people to privatize their houses, so that they could not sell them and leave Artsakh" (Suren Galstyan, Chairman of the Cadastre and State Property

Management Committee of the Republic of Artsakh, interview, 6 August, 2021).

Another problem is the insecurity of the borderlands for habitation and farming on the newly established line of contact. Many landowners argue that they should also receive the same support as DPs because they cannot farm their lands due to the fear of shelling (Caucasian Knot 2021): "This is also relative. A person may not want to cultivate his land; he wants to get money from the state for his plot. So he says he is afraid to farm there. And fear in such cases is an immeasurable and relative category because at the same time his neighbor is farming his land" (Suren Galstyan, Chairman of the Cadastre and State Property Management Committee of the Republic of Artsakh, interview, 6 August, 2021). To partially address this problem, although not officially mandated, Russian peacekeepers perform various security tasks in the region, including providing safety for civilians during agricultural, farming, and construction work (Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation. 2021).

More problematic is the question of the socio-demographic data of the displaced families and those who are entitled to the state support programs. In the case of families where the property has not been registered, only the husband (if he is alive) or, if it has been registered, the family member in whose name it is registered, may be entitled to a certificate of lost property. Here, many specific problems arise concerning registration of marriages in rural areas, joint ownership of land in large families and inheritance rights, participation or desertion from the war, etc. For example, in cases where a husband has gone missing during the war, wives must provide a reference note from the Human Rights Defender in the Republic of Artsakh in order to be able to receive financial support from the state. In another example, if a husband is prosecuted for desertion, his close relatives (spouse and children) are deprived of any state support for lost property. "After the collapse of the Soviet Union, when privatization started, villages were allocated 5-6 thousand square meters of land per person. In the land ownership certificates of one family, all the co-owners were marked. Everyone in the family was registered there, even the grandparents. This is why, for example, when people died 20-30 years ago, no one from the family in distant villages went to draw up inheritance documents, following the principle 'well, it's our land, we cultivate it.' And everyone in the village knows that it is their land and no

one has any claims. There have even been cases where only one owner of the land has already died, so his/her inheritance now needs to be proved through the court, all these cases need to be proved in court, and this is a long process. Many people therefore disinherit in order to avoid litigation" (Hayk Khanumyan, Minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructures of the Republic of Artsakh, interview, 7 August, 2021). Due to these various issues, many cases are now being investigated and are in the local court. It is not uncommon for people lacking the relevant knowledge and not wanting to get involved in legal proceedings to simply refuse any assistance. There are many examples of people trying to take advantage of the chaotic situation by creating fake property documents for themselves in order to take advantage of assistance programs: "I believe that the property rights of these people should be protected regardless of whether they have registered their property or not. But the government believes that this contains very big risks. To give you an example, the number of unregistered livestock at the moment is claimed to be 4,000 head, which is not in line with reality. Yes, many are taking advantage of this situation. The dilemma for us now is that we should either leave all the lost unregistered property unassisted, or ignore the number of fraudsters and provide assistance to all claimants." (Gegham Stepanyan, Human Rights Ombudsman of the Artsakh Republic, interview, 6 August, 2021)

A separate problem is assistance for lost movable property (farm animals, vehicles). In particular, the practice of avoiding the registration of farm animals in order to evade taxes is widespread. Another problem is that some types of animals, such as poultry, pigs, bees, and fish are not considered farm animals/movable property and their loss is not subject to state financial support. On the contrary, it is much easier to provide state assistance for lost vehicles, as this movable property is almost entirely registered with the Traffic Police and the data is maintained in an electronic archive.

Each unit of lost property, each family case requires its separate documentation, there are long queues of war-affected people at the registration and evaluation offices, and the judicial system is in a state of collapse due to the large number of lawsuits. All these problems in general make it very difficult and slow down the implementation of assistance

programs for the affected population, which has been living in difficult social and psychological conditions for more than a year.

Azerbaijan: "The Great Return" instead of the Return of Property

Nika Musavi

After the first Karabakh war, the total number of forcefully displaced persons (FDPs)[2] among the Azerbaijani population—according to the United Nations—amounted to about 750,000 people, including people from Karabakh itself and seven adjacent districts, as well as people from Armenia. At that time, the early 1990s, they were settled in tent cities, dormitories, administrative buildings, and even decommissioned train cars in Baku and other regions of Azerbaijan. The construction of social housing and the resettlement of these people in normal apartments and houses began much later and continued until the second Karabakh war. During this time, some of the FDPs managed to get housing on their own. At the moment, this process has been suspended and some of the FDPs who have been waiting for housing from the state will not receive it now. Instead, they, like other IDPs, are promised/offered to return to their native lands (or rather, the territories that came under the control of Azerbaijan following the Second Karabakh war; this is a significant part of the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region and seven adjacent districts).

According to Rovshan Rzayev, the chairman of the State Committee for Affairs of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons, a survey conducted among IDPs showed that about 70% of them want to return to their homeland (Akhmedov 2021). But it should be borne in mind that over the past 30 years, the original composition of FDPs has changed greatly both quantitatively and "qualitatively"—at least one generation has managed to change and a significant part of those who are now considered as FDPs left Karabakh in early childhood or were born after the war.

The authorities do not say anything specific about this, but, as far as we can understand, FDPs who have already managed to get housing from the

---

[2] The official structures of Azerbaijan use the term "internally displaced persons" (IDPs) when referring to people resettled from Karabakh and "refugees" about the Azerbaijani population displaced from Armenia.

state will keep it, even agreeing to move to Karabakh. But if they refuse to move, they will definitely lose their relevant status and all their benefits (Zerkalo.az. 2021).

Emin Aliyev is an internally displaced person from Aghdam. He is currently is over 50 and has lived in Baku for a long time working as a driver. But when asked by officials whether he wants to return, he answered positively. However, the man is not sure about his two elder sons, who were born in the capital: "They grew up in Baku, they have their own lives here. I don't think they will want to move. I won't insist, of course, I will let them decide for themselves" (interview, 28 May, 2021).

Back in February 2021, president Ilham Aliyev said that only those displaced persons who intend to live there permanently will be provided with housing in the returned territories. The president said, "People will have to sign a statement that I, such and such, am going to go to such and such district, such and such village, and live there. For that, we will address financial and all other issues. Otherwise, I do not want to predict, but I know what may happen. In fact, let me tell you more—the liberated lands are not summer cottages for those who live in Baku. This will not happen—that's for sure. We will exercise rigorous control over who lives there in general, so that those who want to go there could do that, and we will create all the conditions for them" (Azerbaijan State News Agency 2021a).

But the main thing is that it is still completely unclear when the return will begin, on what principle new houses and apartments will be given to the displaced people to replace the lost ones, and how the issue with the changed composition of families will be resolved, etc. There is a "Great Return" ("Böyük Qayıdış") program that was initiated by the Committee for Work with Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons long before the second Karabakh war, after the so-called "April clashes" in 2016. The program was engaged in planning the return of displaced persons to Karabakh and its environs when it becomes possible. But at the moment, even the government, apparently has no clear plan in place.

So far, mine clearance and restoration of infrastructure (primarily communications) are being carried out in the territories returned to Azerbaijani control. Most of the settlements have been destroyed, so they will have to be rebuilt almost from scratch and this is already the next

stage of the "Great Return" alongside the development of agriculture, production, and job creation in these territories, without which their settlement is meaningless and impossible. Taking all this into account, experts agree that, in reality, the process of returning displaced persons can only begin in the next five to ten years.

Another snag is that at the time of the first Karabakh war—that is, during the transitional period between the USSR and independence—other forms of land ownership were still operational in the territory of Azerbaijan. In 1996, land reform was carried out in Azerbaijan, as a result of which agricultural land was transferred to the private ownership of rural residents. For obvious reasons, this did not affect Karabakh and now it is necessary to carry out a similar reform there as well. For this, first, a unified cadastral registration of real estate (including settlements) and accurate land accounting (in quantity and quality, by categories and lands) must be carried out, a land cadastre must be created, a digital topographic map of the region developed.

In the meantime, the relevant authorities are simply interviewing internally displaced persons for their family composition and compiling a list of real estate and other property left by them. Quoting Article 6 of the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On the Status of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons", human rights activist Eldar Zeynalov says that this law allows IDPs to raise the issue of compensation for material and other damages, apply to the court for protection of violated rights, and return to their former place of residence. "The state is obliged to compensate for this damage," the human rights activist emphasizes.

At the same time, Article 14 of the same law states that IDPs lose their status "when they return to their usual place of residence or grant them another place of residence free of charge in the amount determined in this region; if this is not possible, they are provided with housing at the level determined by a special decision of the State." That is, either the person will "return to his usual place of residence" (having registered there) or he/she will be provided with housing in another place (and not necessarily in the same amount that he/she had). But, taking into account Article 6, the IDP may insist on returning to their old place of residence.

Zeynalov notes that the possibility of IDPs building or buying a house/apartment has nothing to do with returning and they are not

deprived of the status of an IDP. "However, it is clear from the public statements of the authorities that IDPs who already have comfortable housing in a new ("temporary") place will be resettled in the second place, and priority will be given to those who now live in dormitories and temporary shelters" (interview 4 April, 2022). However, at the moment, this law can generally be considered outdated, since no amendments and additions have been made to it so far that take into account the results of the second Karabakh war and the new realities created by it.

As noted above, a separate and unique category consists of Azerbaijanis who managed to exchange their housing with Armenians between 1988 and 1991. This happened both at the individual level and at the level of entire villages. Thus, they partially managed to compensate for the property they left behind when they relocated from Armenia to Azerbaijan. However, since their places of origin are on the territory of the Armenia, the "Great Return" program will not apply to them. Generally, this category of people and their stories rarely appear in the socio-political discourse about forcelly displaced persons (except as successful but non-representative examples of self-organization).

At the moment, it is somewhat safe to say that almost none of the settlers will be able to return to their native villages and reopen their old houses. During the restoration of settlements, smaller villages are likely to be merged with those larger. These villages themselves will be completely different from before the war. In particular, it is planned to build new "smart" cities and villages instead of the previous settlements (Azerbaijan State News Agency 2021b). "It will be impossible to refuse the provided housing, since the status of IDPs after the provision of housing by the state in the place of former residence or the same area will, in any case, be automatically lost and the person will lose the temporary housing and benefits that he/she has now," says Eldar Zeynalov.

In November 2021, it was reported that the building of the first such "smart village" was had been almost completed in the Zangilan district, consisting of 200 private houses, four social buildings, a school for 360 students, and a kindergarten for 60. The settlement of the smart village was announced for January 2022, but has not yet begun (Ali 2022).

Vafa Farajeva's family lived in the railway village of Minjivan in the Zangelan district. Vafa was 17 years old when they had to leave Minjivan,

becoming internally forcefully displaced persons. For the next 22 years, the family lived in a basement in Baku, until 2018 they were finally given housing. "We had a three-room apartment in Minjivan, which our parents received from the state as a teacher of a railway school. Now that house is destroyed—I saw its ruins myself when I went to Minjivan in January 2021" (interview 23 April, 2022). After the second Karabakh war, the Farajeva's family was summoned to the local executive authorities and asked to make a list of all the lost real estate, as well as other property, including furniture and household appliances. "We have not preserved the documents for the apartment, but they are in the archive since it was housing issued by the state. They promised us that they would compensate everything, although they did not explain in what form. And although enough time has passed, there is no news on this score yet. When I try to find out something, the officials answer: 'Wait, everything will be fine.'" In the relevant survey, the Farajeva's family indicated that they wanted to return and live in Minjivan and have not agreed to relocate to any other place in Karabakh.

Eldar Zeynalov says that, theoretically, FDPs can raise the issue of compensation for the difference between the value of the lost property and the one provided upon return, although it is difficult to say by what method this compensation can be calculated, taking into account the past 30 years. In any case, documents regarding lost property are required. If these documents are lost, they must be restored through the central archive or the court. Any other evidence that the court will accept can be used to confirm ownership: witness statements, photos against the background of the house, satellite images of the area, etc.

Conclusion

The vast majority of policy statements on conflict resolution and displacement fail to clarify (or else completely ignore) the complex issue of what is meant by reconciliation, the return of displaced people, and the restitution of lost property. Greater clarity must be provided by recognizing that biased definitions of reconciliation cannot simply be imposed on affected communities. Proponents of transitional justice and restitution should be clear and modest in their expectations, avoiding the idealization of return as a manifestation of reconciliation.

In the case of Azerbaijan, the question of property restitution to the Armenian population after the Second Karabakh War has not yet been raised at all since the status of Karabakh as such is not discussed by the Azerbaijani authorities and the very possibility of the return of the Armenian population to the territories taken over by Azerbaijan after the conflict is currently under question (as is the truce, for it is unclear when and on what terms it will be concluded). On the other hand, the Armenian authorities in Karabakh, due to the difficult political situation and unwillingness to fulfill their own responsibilities to protect the rights of the local Armenian population, are often unable to fully resolve issues of assistance and, in particular, compensation for the lost property.

As for the Azerbaijani population, the Azerbaijani authorities paint very bright and at the same time very dim prospects for them. For the IDPs from the first Karabakh war to return to Karabakh fully, not only the construction of settlements but also at least the creation of jobs, the restoration of agriculture and infrastructure, etc. are needed. So far all this exists only in the form of plans on paper and types of pilot projects. At the same time, given that in 30 years most IDPs have already settled in Baku, Sumgait, and other cities, they have had some kind of housing issued by the state or else bought/built it independently. The hypothetical return is therefore not so much practical as symbolic for them. It is not a pressing need but an opportunity (that came up rather unexpectedly) to start life anew in their "historic homeland." Accordingly, the authorities feel no need to rush and no one will hurry them.

The Second Karabakh war crisis has exposed the fact that the lack of a legal basis for documentation, the impossibility of applying international law, and the many shortcomings of the bureaucratic systems in both Armenia and Azerbaijan deeply complicate assistance and reparations programs for war victims. At the moment, there is no real solution to this problem; the situation is only exacerbated by Karabakh's unresolved status. At the same time, new houses and infrastructure are being built in Karabakh and the adjacent districts (part of which has come under Azerbaijani control). People are linking their future to the territory with no real guarantee that all may be lost again.

Bibliography

Akhmedov, R. 2021. "Порядка 70% вынужденных переселенцев вернутся в Карабах – Рзаев." [About 70% of IDPs will return to Karabakh - Rzayev.] May 31, 2021. Accessed November 2, 2022. http://interfax.az/view/836062/ru.

Ali, Kamal. 2022. ""Ağıllı kənd"in tikintisi planları və həqiqət arasındakı məsafə." [The distance between plans for the construction of a "smart village" and reality.] *Turan.az.* January 14, 2022. Accessed February 4, 2022. https://www.turan.az/ext/news/2022/1/free/Social/az/365.htm.

Azerbaijan State News Agency. 2021a. "President Ilham Aliyev gave press conference for local and foreign media representatives." February 26, 2021. Accessed March 13, 2022. https://azertag.az/en/xeber/1722657.

Azerbaijan State News Agency. 2021b. "Qarabağ "smart region"a çevriləcək." [Karabakh turned into a "smart region."] February 1, 2021. Accessed April 21, 2022. https://azertag.az/xeber/1701919.

Caucasian Knot. 2021. "Мирный житель погиб в Нагорном Карабахе Источник: https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/368909/ © Кавказский Узел" [Civilian killed in Nagorno-Karabakh.]. October 9, 2021. Accessed October 10, 2021. https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/368909/.

Fitzpatrick, Daniel and Akiva Fishman. 2014. "Land Policy and Transitional Justice after Armed Conflicts." In *Justice and Economic Violence in Transition*, edited by Dustin N. Sharp, 263-287. New York: Springer.

Garcia-Godos, Jemima. 2008. "Victim Reparations in Transitional Justice - What is at Stake and Why." *Nordic Journal of Human Rights* 26: 101-202.

Hakobyan , T. 2019. "Ինչ ասել է «Արցախի քաղաքացիություն»." [What does "Artsakh citizenship" mean?] *Civilnet.am.* February 26, 2019. Accessed August 9, 2021. https://www.civilnet.am/news/189397/%D5%AB%D5%B6%D5%B

9-%D5%A1%D5%BD%D5%A5%D5%AC-%D5%A7-
%D5%A1%D6%80%D6%81%D5%A1%D5%AD%D5%AB-
%D6%84%D5%A1%D5%B2%D5%A1%D6%84%D5%A1%D6%81
%D5%AB%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5.

Hayastan All Armenian Fund. 2021. "News report on the Fund's large-scale road construction and housing projects in Artsakh." September 29, 2021. Accessed October 2, 2021. https://www.himnadram.org/en/1632918851.

Huseynova , Sevil, Arsen Hakobyan, and Sergey. Rumyantsev. 2012. *Beyond the Karabakh Conflict: The Story of Village Exchange.* Tbilisi: HBS South Caucasus.

International Court of Justice. 2021. "Application Instituting Proceedings and Request for Provisional Measures Republic of Armenia v. Republic of Azerbaijan.". September 16, 2021. Accessed September 25, 2021. https://www.icj-cij.org/public/files/case-related/180/180-20210916-APP-01-00-EN.pdf.

Martin-Ortega, O. 2013. "Building Peace and Delivering Justice in Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Limits of Externally Driven Processes." In *Transitional Justice and Peacebuilding on the Ground: Victims and Ex-combatants*, edited by Chandra. Sriram , Jemima Garcia-Godos, Johanna Herman and Olga Martin-Ortega, 175-197. London-New York: Routledge.

Miller, Jon and Rahul. Kumar. 2007. *Reparations: Interdisciplinary Inquiries.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation. 2021. "Российские миротворцы приступили к обеспечению безопасности сельскохозяйственных работ в Мартунинском районе Нагорного Карабаха." [The Russian peacekeepers began securing agricultural work in Nagorno-Karabakh's Martuni district, the Russian peacekeeping contingent in Nagorno-Karabakh.] November 4, 2021. Accessed November 5, 2021. https://mil.ru/russian_peacekeeping_forces/news/more.htm?id=1 2392022@egNews.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Artsakh. 2006. "Constitution of the Republic of Artsakh." December 10, 2006. Accessed December 8, 2021. http://www.nkr.am/en/constitution-of-Artsakh.

Nagorno-Karabakh Republic Government Resolution. 1999. "Original title" "The Nagorno-Karabakh Republic Government decision on further improvement of the passport system in NKR.] March 23, 1999. Accessed September 11, 2021. http://arlexis.am/DocumentView.aspx?docid=18401.

Rferl. 2021. "Despite Official Promises, Displaced Azerbaijanis Are Skeptical About Returning To Territory Won In Karabakh War." *RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service.* October 30, 2021. Accessed November 5, 2021. https://www.rferl.org/a/displaced-azerbaijan-return-karabakh/31537101.html.

Secretariat of the Committee of Ministers, Council of Europe. 2016. "Sargsyan v. Azerbaijan (40167/06) & Chiragov and others v. Armenia (13216/05)." November 18, 2016. Accessed September 12, 2021. https://rm.coe.int/16806be515.

Sharp, Dustin N., ed. 2014. *Justice and Economic Violence in Transition.* New York: Springer.

The Government of the Republic of Artsakh. 2021a. " Original title" [On Establishment of a Republican Commission for Registration and Assessment of War Damages to State, Community, Legal and Individual Property of the Artsakh Republic, Approval of its Individual Staff and Procedures.] *The Government of the Republic of Artsakh.* March 10, 2021. Accessed September 17, 2021. http://arlexis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=22639.

The Government of the Republic of Artsakh. 2021b. "Original title" [Housing for the families of those perished (dead), missing persons, recognized as an indefinitely disabled of the 1st group or displaced persons as a result of the military actions unleashed against the Republic of Artsakh on 27 September 2020.] July 2, 2021. Accessed September 18, 2021. http://arlexis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=23900&fbclid=IwA R3IJsgPgeFMUMronfR66YFHv_RNXUpZ8FdijX9QRNlESWXyjV 9rV6PKNng.

Unruh , Jon and Musa Abdul-Jalil. 2021. "Housing, Land and Property Rights in Transitional Justice." *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 15, no. 1: 1-6.

Williams, R. 2007. *International Center for Transitional Justice Occasional Paper Series* 1-52.

Zerkalo.az. 2021."Отказывающихся возвращаться на освобожденные земли вынужденных переселенцев лишат статуса." [IDPs who refuse to return to liberated land will have their status revoked.[*Zerkalo.* January 8, 2021. Accessed March 15, 2022. https://zerkalo.az/otkazyvayushhihsya-vozvrashhatsya-na-osvobozhdennye-zemli-vynuzhdennyh-pereselentsev-lishat-statusa/?fbclid=IwAR1WzXi1QwXDtnrWmN9U6Qmar1LcLuZK3 FXo9jVQnlnG04PJIQMFvmp_3g8.

Towards Psychosocial Peacebuilding: An Integrated Approach to Conflict Transformation in the Context of Nagorno-Karabakh

Namiq Abdullayev, Marina Danoyan

> "The seeds of tomorrow's war grow in the soil of today's unhealed traumas. The seeds of tomorrow's peace grow in the soil of today's healing and reconciliation."
>
> (Vaughn 2021, 186)

The article explores the linkages between Mental Health and Psycho-social Support (MHPSS) and peacebuilding (PB) within the context of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict after the second Karabakh war. The importance of studying trauma and tragic experiences of war and their impact on societies has been recognized as essential among peacebuilders working in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict context. The article complements this deliberation and argues that the field of peacebuilding needs to consider the psychological effects that the conflict has on people and their mental health. Building on the existing literature that connects

MHPSS with peacebuilding (PB), as well as on the empirical studies conducted both in Armenia and Azerbaijan, the paper suggests broadening the peacebuilding approaches by including MHPSS perspective. The authors argue that both fields can complement each other by providing tools and knowledge to adequately address the post-war wounds and grievances in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict context and to pave the way towards sustainable peace. Finally, relying on the conceptual framework and findings from empirical studies, the article elaborates recommendations for the local and international organizations on how to further develop the framework for psycho-social peacebuilding, while also reflecting on the challenges and limitations for developing this approach in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Introduction

The human cost of the second Nagorno-Karabakh war of autumn 2020 has been very high. The fighting killed thousands of people from both sides and left thousands injured while tens of thousands have been displaced. Hundreds of local initiatives, volunteer groups, NGOs, and individuals have mobilized to help those affected by the war. This help has ranged from humanitarian assistance to various types of support provided to war veterans, injured soldiers, family members of those killed during the conflict, children, and other groups directly affected by the war. The efforts have been also made to address post-war trauma and stress. However, these efforts have been organized in a sporadic manner and have often lacked funding to support the activities. At the same time, there has been acknowledgment amongst peacebuilding professionals that previous peacebuilding interventions have not brought sufficient results and that new approaches and methods are needed to work with societies affected by the recent war (see, for instance, FriEnt 2021). Meanwhile, the political solution of the conflict, that is a precondition for successful peacebuilding activities and initiatives, has not been achieved yet. Resources that could have gone toward social and economic projects, education, or health care were diverted to an arms race serving particular political agendas. Opportunities and chances for democratization and regional integration have been squandered over the past thirty years (Gamaghelyan and Rumyantsev 2021).

The importance of studying trauma and the tragic experiences of war and their impact on societies has been recognized as essential among peacebuilders working in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Thus, through studying the impact of trauma and its role in the conflict context, Indie Peace (2021), a conflict transformation organization focused on the region, explores the impact of trauma on societies to find ways to heal both individuals and societies. Through personal and family stories of people from the Armenian and Azerbaijani sides, Indie Peace tries to understand how trauma develops and affects people both on the individual and societal levels. Mental health issues after the second Nagorno-Karabakh war have been also discussed at an online meeting organized in September 2021 by Bright Garden Voices, a project that aims to provide a platform for constructive dialogue between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. The discussions involved clinical psychologists from both Armenia and Azerbaijan concerning the status of mental health in their countries and the impact of the war and the conflict on local populations (Bright Garden Voices 2021).

Our article complements this line of thinking and argues that the field of peacebuilding needs to consider the psychological effects that the conflict has had on people and their mental health. Violent conflicts harm the relationships between people and their ability and willingness to participate in the social recovery processes. Violent conflicts weaken those traditional relations between people and communities that foster their coping mechanisms and resilience (Somasundaram and Sivayokan 2013). Therefore, efforts should be made to address mental health issues in order to reduce suffering, improve wellbeing, boost resilience, and empower conflict-affected populations to become agents of conflict transformation (Somasundaram and Sivayokan 2013).

Building on the existing research literature connecting Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) with peacebuilding (PB), as well as the original empirical studies conducted both in Armenia and Azerbaijan, we suggest broadening peacebuilding approaches by including the MHPSS perspective. We argue that the two fields can complement each other by providing tools and knowledge to adequately address the post-war wounds and grievances in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict context and pave the way towards sustainable peace.

We conducted ten interviews with Armenian and Azerbaijani experts to identify whether there are any overlapping areas between MHPSS and peacebuilding interventions in their work and how they themselves consider those interlinkages. We interviewed two professionals in the MHPSS field from Armenia and one from Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as one professional in the field of education and two in the field of peacebuilding from Armenia. Research findings from the Azerbaijani side also rely on first-hand information gathered through in-depth interviews conducted with the people engaged in psychosocial support for war-affected people, including veterans. Two interviews have been conducted with mental health specialists—clinical psychologists—who are working with conflict-affected people, while two more have been conducted with social workers who live near the former contact line. Additionally, secondary information, consisting of news reports published by different local media outlets and official sources, has also been analyzed to create a clearer view of the situation. Although the data gathered was thoroughly analyzed, we acknowledge that the reader may notice imbalances in terms of the provided inputs between the Azerbaijani and Armenian sides. These imbalances inextricably result from structural-political differences in these societies.

The paper is structured as follows: After introducing the conceptual framework of the article, we reflect on the findings from our empirical research. The sections and themes in the empirical section of the article have emerged from conversations with the aforementioned interviewees and represent the most salient topics highlighted by the practitioners in relation to MHPSS and its connection with other fields relevant for peacebuilding. We continue the article with the discussion section, in which we elaborate recommendations for local and international organizations on how to further develop the framework for psychosocial peacebuilding. We also reflect on the challenges and limitations to developing this approach in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The concluding section summarizes the main ideas of the article and relevant directions moving forward.

Conceptual Basis

Interlinkages between MHPSS and Peacebuilding

War and conflict weaken the social fabric and negatively affect societies by creating grave social problems including poverty, unemployment, social exclusion, housing issues, corruption, lack of security, gender-based violence, etc. As a result of war and conflict, emotional states such as trust, empathy, stress, and anger are negatively affected by violence-induced trauma (Kubai and Angi 2019). As Gutlove and Thompson (2004, 2) put it: "A process of social reconstruction is needed to rebuild the intangible but crucial fabric of human interactions that allow a society to function, while also meeting the immediate psychological and social needs of people who have been ravaged by violence." The abilities of individuals and societies to overcome the painful experiences of war are limited and the coping strategies are often related to psychosocial trauma (Tankink, Bubenzer and Van der Walt 2017). When those issues are not addressed, they can result in negative cognitive, emotional, physical, and behavioral feedbacks (Gutlove and Thompson 2004). Supporting people in restoring their relationships with the community and strengthening mechanisms to cope with post-war trauma is vital for building sustainable peace (Tankink, Bubenzer and Van der Walt 2017).

Traditionally, mental health has not been considered an essential topic in the field of peacebuilding. On a practical level, little attention is given to MHPSS as a fundamental element of sustainable peace. Also lacking is an acknowledgment by healthcare professionals that "if they want to improve the well-being of people, attention needs to be paid to the broader society and context in which individuals exist" (Tankink, Bubenzer and Van der Walt 2017, 8). On the other hand, a study conducted by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in 2017 showed that many professionals working in MHPSS and PB around the world think that connecting these two fields would be beneficial for interventions aiming at building sustainable peace (Tankink, Bubenzer and Van der Walt 2017).

Since the early 1990s, the interlinkages between mental health and peace began to be acknowledged by various multilateral organizations, such as the World Health Organization of the UN, which recognized that lasting health is essential to ensuring sustainable peace (WHO 2020). The UN

Secretary-General's Report on Sustaining Peace in 2020 recognizes the MHPSS as an integral part of Peacebuilding (UNSG 2020). As stated in the report (11): "The further development of the integration of mental health and psychosocial support into peacebuilding is envisaged with a view to increasing the resilience and agency of people and communities." The UNDP's Crisis Bureau/Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding and Responsive Institutions (CPPRI) has commissioned research to develop a guidance note, which is expected to be published in 2022, on how to integrate MHPSS into peacebuilding. In addition, the psychological dimension was identified as one of the priority themes in the guidelines of the European External Action Service's Peace Mediation (EEAS 2020).

Bubenzer and Tankink (2015) argue that because violent conflicts are complex and multi-layered, post-conflict reconstruction needs to be performed in an interdisciplinary manner that integrates the psychological, social, political, historical, cultural, and economic elements which constitute a society. Societal healing, in this case, becomes a process of social transformation that improves social relationships. Gutlove and Thompson (2004, 6) maintain that both MHPSS and PB have intertwined objectives related to "restoring healthy human relationships." Both disciplines aim at empowering people to use their full potential in order to build peaceful societies (Bubenzer, Van der Walt and Tankink 2017). According to Bubenzer et al. (2017), healing can decrease the sense of loneliness, isolation, anger, and feelings of hatred towards others while simultaneously improving mood and inner peace. They contend that this happens in a group context and not in isolation (Bubenzer, Van der Walt and Tankink 2017). The authors conclude: "Psychosocial and structural elements that are often interrelated and can provoke the continuation of violence and conflict are better addressed by combining MHPSS and PB" (Tankink, Bubenzer and Van der Walt 2017, 9).

Community-based Psychosocial Support within the Socio-ecological Paradigm

A literature review on theories connecting MHPSS and PB conducted by Tankink, Bubenzer and Van der Walt (2017) showed that these theories can be categorized under the holistic or socio-ecological paradigm, which places an individual in a social, cultural, historical context and a broader environment in which the person operates and interacts. This framework

needs to be considered when addressing issues of sustainable peace and psychosocial wellbeing on individual and community levels. When interventions are performed on an individual level, they also affect the relations of the approached individuals with their families and communities, and can lead to the changing of norms on the societal level. Thus, "the influence is circular; and the interactions between individuals, families, communities and larger society is a continuum" (Tankink, Bubenzer and Van der Walt 2017, 12).

Approaches that integrate MHPSS and the PB differ depending on various levels (individual, family, community, government, institutions, etc.) within the socio-ecological paradigm and have been used in different contexts. The common feature of these approaches is that they all look at the integration of the two fields from the intersectional and multi-disciplinary perspective, seeing local people as agents of social transformation and emphasizing local ownership and empowerment of conflict-affected populations in an inclusive way.

Within these different approaches, community-based psychosocial support (CBPSS) deserves special attention as one that links individual well-being and healing to community wellbeing and rehabilitation.[3] CBPSS has the potential to restore relationships while strengthening social bonds and mutual support, which increases the resilience of the community and allows it to become stronger in the long term (IASC 2007). According to Svenska Kyrkan (2021), "The CBPS approach focuses on involving affected populations in decisions and activities that concern their lives, as they themselves know best what needs exist and need to be addressed."

The MHPSS intervention pyramid illustrates four different levels and types of intervention that, ideally, should be implemented simultaneously (see Figure 1). **The first level** addresses the basic services and security of the conflict-affected groups (this can include advocacy for basic services that secure and protect dignity) and which are delivered in a way that promotes mental health and psychosocial well-being. **The second level** involves community and family support to help the conflicted-affected adjust to new circumstances. This can include family tracing and reunification, mass communication on effective coping methods,

---

[3] See Figure 1.

livelihood activities, and activation of social networks. **The third level** is focused support for the groups that need some extra care and assistance (such as by creating spaces where various groups can meet and share experiences or get engaged in common activities to recover more quickly with the support from community workers, including social workers or primary health providers). This level can include story-telling, truth-telling, art-based forms of expression, and so on. **The fourth level** involves specialized services, such as psychological and therapeutical, for those who might have significant difficulties in basic daily functioning. Although specialized services are needed for only a small percentage of the population, in cases of large emergencies, they can involve thousands of individuals.

Hence, CBPSS includes interventions in various sectors that all contribute to the wellbeing of the community. Those interventions can range from addressing the humanitarian needs of the conflict-affected population to strengthening the capacity of aid organizations to effectively address the needs of the population by including the community members in their programs as key agents for social transformation (Svenska Kyrkan 2021.). Moreover, as noted by Svenska Kyrkan (2021), "Mainstreaming CBPS into different sectors is also a cost-effective way to increase the well-being of a community, as opposed to creating separate programmes."

Figure 1. The MHPSS intervention pyramid

Findings from Empirical Research Conducted in Armenia and Azerbaijan

The MHPSS Field after the Second Karabakh War: Challenges, Opportunities, and Blind Spots

Developments on the Armenian side

During and immediately after the second Nagorno-Karabakh war, different organizations and individuals were mobilized in Armenia to provide primary psychological care to various groups affected by the war. There were about 190 specialists involved in the process who mainly worked on a volunteer basis (Khachatryan 2021). It is noteworthy that during the war and post-war period, state bodies such as the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Emergency Situations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs have been involved in the humanitarian aid and psychological assistance initiatives (Khachatryan 2021).

In the early post-war period, several Armenian organizations in the MHPSS field, including Intra Mental Health Center, Psychosocial Recovery Center, Ambra Center for Mental Wellbeing, and others jointly elaborated a roadmap for the government on how to organize work in the field of mental health and psychosocial support. Later, the Ministry of Emergency Situations launched a call for organizations to provide psychological assistance to combatants and their families. Eight organizations won the tender in February 2021. They received funding as a consortium for a program of six months which started in June 2021. This is the first-ever state-funded program for psychological help in Armenia, which shows that the need for MHPSS has been recognized and prioritized on a state level. According to Armen Soghoyan, President of the Armenian Psychiatric Association and one of the coordinators of Psychological Support Consortium, the field of MHPSS is not well coordinated in Armenia and the consortium, which includes eight leading Armenian non-governmental organizations in the field of the MHPSS, aims to fill this gap: it currently involves more than 60 professionals who work with a wide range of target groups, directly or indirectly affected by

the war, and covers the whole territory of the Republic of Armenia. In addition, the consortium is also operating a hotline to assist those who suffered from the war. There are different ways the consortium members provide psychological assistance, which include one-on-one meetings, group meetings, online meetings, as well as mobile groups deployed to remote areas. The specialists decide on the methods used based on specific cases and needs.

Besides the specialized MHPSS organizations, MHPSS needs in Armenia have been addressed by a variety of local and international humanitarian organizations, as well as Armenian communities abroad. These often short-term initiatives have aimed at providing support to various groups affected by the war, such as war veterans, displaced persons, children, and mothers and widows of fallen soldiers, etc. (Khachatryan 2021). The French humanitarian organization Première Urgence Internationale currently operating in Armenia seeks to bring a sectoral improvement to the field of MHPSS in the country.

According to Armen Soghoyan, the field of MHPSS, which has been traditionally under-prioritized in Armenia, is now in demand as more and more people seek psychological support. However, even if the number of people seeing mental health professionals is higher than before the war and the beneficiaries have been slowly overcoming their fears and mistrust towards psychological assistance, it is still challenging to encourage people in psychological need to ask for professional support. Lilit Mnatsakanyan, a member of the Armenian Association of Psychologists, noted that this problem is not merely a cultural norm specific to Armenian society but also reflects the depth of the trauma that people experienced during the war. As she puts it: "Trauma by itself is distorting interpersonal relations, and a person needs to be alone and is not willing to communicate with anyone; it is problematic to put the traumatized person[s] in contact with a specialist and to keep that contact with them. They [traumatized people] feel unwanted, useless, trying to overcome the problems by themselves. They have no strength to seek out specialists".

Arpi Hovsepyan[4], a psychologist from Stepanakert, noted that sometimes people do not even realize that they need psychological help. They think

---

[4] This name has been changed upon the interviewee's request.

that it is normal not to feel good emotionally and assume they have to deal with this issue without any support. Moreover, they do not prioritize psychological problems because they have too many other problems to deal with on a daily basis, such as financial struggles or conflict-related security concerns. One of the interviewees noted that people who lost their family members during the war are under permanent societal pressure, as the people around assume that they always need to mourn. For instance, it is expected that a widow always wear black clothing and whenever she wears any other color, she is criticized as someone who does not respect the memory of the deceased spouse. Therefore, there are many internal and external pressures that prevent people from seeking professional psychological help.

Psychologists use various means to reach the target groups, for example by awareness-raising through media, directly reaching out to potential beneficiaries, or finding beneficiaries through other social assistance programs. In some cases, psychologists decide themselves with which beneficiary group they want to work and reach out to those specific groups by, for instance, going to schools and working directly with teachers. However, this support cannot be imposed and can be applied only if the beneficiaries themselves are willing to engage with the psychologists.

Besides these challenges, all the interviewees believe that the work of psychologists is very much needed in Armenian society after the war and that this work should be done not only with war veterans, their families, and the family members of the fallen soldiers but society at large because, as Lilit Mnastsakanyan has highlighted, the war was by itself a very traumatic societal experience. She noted that everyone having experienced the war in one way or another, directly or indirectly, went through trauma and this trauma needs to be addressed and healed.

Developments on the Azerbaijani side

A few months after the end of the 44-day war, while almost all media channels in Azerbaijan were covering the celebrations of the results of the "Homeland War" (the official term used in Azerbaijan to refer to the recent war between the Azerbaijani and Armenian armed forces), the complaints

of war veterans related to various bureaucratic hindrances and economic problems they face began to appear on social media. Meanwhile, videos of traumatized ex-combatants began to circulate through various social media channels, prompting the government to respond by launching psychosocial support under its own tight control, allowing only a few non-governmental agencies to participate in this work. As a result of the war, a great number of people were and are experiencing the repercussions of the conflict, leading to heated debates on various social media platforms. These developments have raised many questions and discussions regarding the capacity and readiness of the state to deal with the expected socio-economic problems that have erupted after the war.

The heated online discussions began to involve more people, especially when news about the suicides of veterans of the Second Karabakh war were spotlighted in the country's mass media. On 24 February, the journalist Elshad Pashasoy publicized information about the suicide of a veteran living in Yardimli, a peripheral city in Azerbaijan. He noted that "if he could have gotten a few hours of psychological advice, it might have changed his mind" (Qafqazinfo 2021). The exact reason for the man's suicide remains unknown, however Pashasoy said that the veteran was regularly recalling severe memories and talking about them. Subsequently, other similar reports appeared in various media outlets and produced a strong impetus for popular complaints about the state-organized psychosocial support available for conflict-affected people.

Nevertheless, the press release issued by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Azerbaijan on 27 September 2021 maintained a positive tone and reiterated that a "wide range of social support activities is taking place" to benefit war-affected people, including psychosocial assistance activities. According to the official information provided by the ministry, approximately 10,000 people from about 3,000 conflict-affected families have benefited from state-led psychosocial support. These are family members of fallen soldiers, family members of veterans, veterans, and other people affected by the war. Furthermore, the press release mentioned an approximate number of war veterans, about 1,500, who have benefitted from the rehabilitation services without clarifying the precise type.

Namaz Karimov, a social worker and youth worker from a conflict-affected community living nearby the former contact line, discussed the "aid culture" that international organizations established in the 1990s and which persists today. People are unwilling, he believes, to participate in activities such as psychosocial support or social development because they are accustomed to receiving direct (mostly material) assistance from the state. Referring to the specific local traits of the persisting conflict, the activist, youth worker, and social worker Ayaz Huseinov[5] mentioned the inconsistency of the methodology of the social development programs presented by "the Western institutions" that cooperate with the government, which also includes psychological treatment.

Karimov has stressed the importance of changing the models of the psychosocial support services being conducted in Azerbaijan, stating that "vulnerabilities are not similar to what appears to be a vulnerability in Western societies" and that there should be a different "theory of change" for Azerbaijani conflict-affected people that takes into account the local reality in which people are living. Huseinov also mentioned that "Western approaches" are becoming increasingly inapplicable for and unclear to the vulnerable groups that emerged after the war, as particular programs do not take into consideration the local reality and the exact needs of the beneficiaries. He proposed a comprehensive needs assessment for a better application of the interdisciplinary approach and said social development programs should be adjusted to the concrete needs of the beneficiaries besides the mere need for increasing the number of the professionals (clinical psychologists and social workers) who are engaged in the psychosocial treatment.

Another important and relevant issue concerns gender sensitivities and patriarchal norms. Namaz Karimov, a youth worker, and Rovshan Suleymanov, a clinical psychologist, mentioned the difficulties in reaching conflict-affected women due to barriers emerging from cultural norms. Suleymanov emphasized that clinical psychologists working with families sometimes insistently try to reach particularly women, although they are more reluctant to receive psychosocial treatment than men due to prevalent social norms. Due to this issue, Karimov, for example, brings his

---

[5] This name has been changed upon the interviewee's request.

sister along for increased gender balance in the focus group discussions conducted as a part of psychosocial support activities.

Suleymanov has also raised concerns about the difficulties caused by COVID-19 regulations. These regulations made it difficult, if not impossible, for conflict-affected rural communities to hold grief ceremonies and this situation has had a devastating impact on people's mental health. As a result, there has been no opportunity to mourn for nearly a year. He strongly emphasized the need for psychosocial support for Azerbaijani conflict-affected communities, highlighting that at least during such consultations beneficiaries get the feeling that they are not forgotten. Maintaining this spirit can form solid ground for further steps towards trauma healing.

It is worth noting that both in Azerbaijan and Armenia there is a lack of MHPSS specialists as well as limited funding for the field (Ghazaryan and Isayev 2021). Although there is currently a state-funded consortium in the MHPSS field in Armenia, as well as other private national and international initiatives to support work in this field, all the Armenian interviewees agreed that there is a need for better coordination and more long-term engagement in the field, which would include the preparation of specialists, supervision, specialized trainings for professionals, coordination of the network of high-quality psychological services in the whole territory of the Republic of Armenia—that is, for a coordinating body that would make those services more efficient and provide regular psychological support also for psychologists themselves. Azerbaijan is also in need of such well-organized and coordinated psychosocial support for conflict-affected people. To this end, all the Azerbaijani interviewees mentioned that there should be more room for other stakeholders than governmental agencies to engage in the provision of psychosocial support in the country.

The Interdisciplinary Approach and Community-based Support as Keys to Societal Healing

As the aim of the present article is to identify the interlinkages between the field of MHPSS and peacebuilding, we asked both MHPSS and peacebuilding professionals, as well as professionals from other fields, whether and how they see their work as contributing to peace processes

and what the interlinkages they notice between the two fields when it comes to addressing the healing process of Armenian and Azerbaijani societies.

The Armenian perspective

For all the Armenian interviewees from the field of MHPSS, peace primarily means peace of mind, which can be achieved through psychological support. One of the interviewees noted that he and his colleagues clearly see improvements in the beneficiaries' mental health; their minds become more peaceful, their aggression is swept away, and they are ready to restore relations with people around them. As Armen Soghoyan noted:

> It is clear that if there are more peaceful people in the society, the society itself becomes more peaceful. Similarly, if there are more tensions and negative feelings in the society, the society looks like a boiling kettle, ready to explode at any moment. When people's minds are not settled and calm, it is easy for them to be influenced and any little spark can turn into a huge fire.

He added that it is very important to think about the peace "in our own society," as there is currently a lot of radicalization and polarization in Armenian society in general.

Arpi Hovsepyan noted that positive results from psychological treatment are clearly visible from people's faces, their gestures, and the increasing sense of calm in their communication. She is convinced that the psychological assistance can contribute to peace, because when people are healthy, calm, and in a harmony with themselves—when their mind is peaceful and they feel comfortable in their own space—they are willing to have good relations with the immediate social environment, including family and neighbors, and do not seek revenge, which would destroy this environment; instead, they direct their energy towards creating new and useful activities for themselves and the people around them.

At the same time, the MHPSS professionals noted that the psychological support by itself is probably insufficient when it comes to having a wider impact to positively transform a society. They noted that their efforts as specialists in the field should be complemented by other ways of reintegrating people affected by the war into society and, in general, of

restoring social connections. These additional approaches do not necessarily rely on professional psychological support alone but also other types of assistance, such as public policies aiming at providing employment opportunities to different war-affected groups or at creating a safe space where people can address their grievances with other members of their communities. As noted by Lilit Mnatsakanyan, many soldiers with whom she has worked appreciated merely the opportunity to have someone with whom to converse. They often said that they prefer to talk to someone outside their family circle, so as not to cause additional suffering to their loved ones. She also said that the feeling of empathy from friends, compassion, or feelings of being understood are very important and are probably the most effective in re-establishing relationships with the wider society.

The need for an interdisciplinary approach to address psychological wounds was also stressed in the interviews conducted with representatives of other fields. Lusine Kharatyan—a researcher, social anthropologist, and peacebuilding practitioner—is currently leading a media project that aims at collecting and highlighting human stories and people's experiences of the war. The aim of this project is to circulate the narratives about the war from the human perspective. The stories are made public by following the "do no harm" principle of cultural anthropology. While sharing their stories with a wider audience, the project participants feel understood and their self-assurance increases when someone else shares their concerns, worries, and pain. This initiative has not been designed as a healing intervention, but it certainly appeases the pain of those who share their stories and war experiences.

In addition, Lusine Kharatyan is currently working on an initiative to develop art therapy in Armenia, especially focusing on writing therapy and bibliotherapy as trauma healing methods. She also seeks to bring international experience in this field to Armenia. This program plans to involve researchers and psychologists so as to combine the theory and the practice of trauma healing. Kharatyan noted that currently, the government makes efforts to support the trauma healing programs mostly aimed at the people who have been directly affected by the war, but there is a need for approaches and initiatives that involve other groups, as well, because war trauma has affected the whole society. In her opinion, there

is a need for a more general healing process in which different disciplines can complement each other.

Gayane Abrahamyan, the founder of an NGO called For Equal Rights which leads various educational projects across Armenia, shared her experience of working with different war-affected groups before, during, and after the second Nagorno-Karabakh war. Although those interventions were not initially designed as a combination of peacebuilding and psychosocial support, elements from both fields have been strongly intertwined in her work. For example, after the war, the NGO designed art therapy classes for displaced children together with psychologists. The main objective of the classes was to overcome post-war stress and trauma through developing pottery art skills. Thanks to the collaboration with psychologists, it has been possible to better address children's emotions and help them overcome fears and grievances caused by the recent war. Another example of the interdisciplinary approach to address war trauma is a solo performance by an artist from Nagorno-Karabakh whose family suffered from the first war and who has shared her experience through this theatrical artistic expression. This event took place in Syuniq region of Armenia and was also organized by For Equal Rights. According to Abrahamyan, although the performed story itself was sad, it was also full of love, hope, humor, and positivity, and therefore this performance eventually had a healing effect on the audience.

For Equal Rights also supports different war-affected groups by connecting individuals with employers that provide training and job opportunities to war veterans and women who lost their husbands in the war. Here again, this type of support helps people overcome the psychological trauma caused by the war. For instance, the widowed women who now are concerned with the material needs of their families underwent enormous psychological trauma as they were not ready to assume this role. Thanks to the above-mentioned programs, they can overcome the trauma and start to believe in themselves and in their ability to acquire and use new skills to earn money and take care of their families. Similarly, veterans who participated in the project trainings and then received jobs in an IT company were able to re-establish their connections with society in a way that positively contributed to their mental health. As Abrahamyan mentioned the young generation, in particular, has a lot of negative feelings for revenge after the war. The educational programs

provided by the NGO has helped to appease those negative feelings, which was actually an unintended outcome of its interventions.

According to Anush Petrossian, a practitioner in youth work and peacebuilding, the importance of having MHPSS professionals in peacebuilding activities is undeniable. It is essential that participants have the required tools to address deeply situated mental health and psychological issues and reflect on memories of conflict constructively so as to not leave peacebuilding sites with perplexity or confusion. MHPSS professionals can provide the tools to cope with psychological issues during peacebuilding activities. Therefore, MHPSS can be considered not only as a framework of addressing the past through empathy and mutual acceptance, transforming the understanding of conflict within the societies affected by it, but also can ensure the sustainability of now fragile dialogue and peace processes in many post-conflict settings, even where some form of an agreement has been signed by previously conflicting sides. Petrossian also stressed the importance of engaging MHPSS professionals in supporting practitioners in the peacebuilding field, who can themselves internalize and become affected by the stories and experiences of conflict. According to Petrossian, giving proper attention to the mental health and psychology of practitioners will help strengthen the field of peacebuilding.

In the post-war period, numerous grassroots, community-based initiatives have also emerged to address the needs of various war-affected groups on the Armenian side. These initiatives have contributed to societal recovery because of the active participation of community members. As one example of such initiatives in Armenia, the mothers of fallen soldiers established a movement called Eternal to support, help each other, and share the grief and pain of their loss (CivilNet 2021). This contributes to their joint healing process. Armen Soghoyan noted that this group has been regularly provided with professional counseling and guidance from psychologists. Another example of grassroot community-based initiatives is the refugees from the Hadrout region who have created their own support group trying to assess their needs, make their voices heard, and support each other. According to Gayane Abrahamyan, in all of the previous examples, the communities have organized themselves and the mechanism of helping and supporting each other have contributed greatly to the healing process.

Moreover, various war-affected groups (e.g., widows, injured soldiers, youth) are in permanent contact with each other, and therefore the success of one person is motivating to others. Thus, this 'snowball effect' is a very important factor of community-based psychosocial support. For instance, people who were initially uninterested in support programs become attracted and engaged after hearing about the positive effects that those initiatives have had on their community members. According to Gayane Abrahamyan, rehabilitation takes time but people find coping mechanisms to overcome their traumas with the help of their community members. She noted that for some war-affected groups, the recovery process is a question of time but with necessary support from their community members, they are overcoming their stress. For other groups, such as veterans, especially those who have injuries, overcoming the trauma is more problematic and the need for professional psychological assistance is more apparent.

MHPSS professionals also highlight that through psychological treatment, especially group therapy, beneficiaries feel more empowered to serve their social circles because they understand and realize how they can be useful for their family members, their pupils (in the case of the teachers), etc. They overcome the feeling of hopelessness that they had previously and clearly realize both their capabilities to help others as well as their limits. Importantly, these positive results empower the psychologists themselves, who are a part of the overall social environment affected by the war; helping others is also a coping mechanism for them to overcome their own war trauma. Such community-based psychosocial support initiatives have been boosting trust, empathy, and cooperation among community members who have been heavily affected by the war.

The Azerbaijani perspective

The psychosocial support for veterans and other people affected by the conflict in Azerbaijan during the post-war period was primarily provided by ministries and other state-led institutions. Nevertheless, the Azerbaijani interviewees emphasized the need for more professionals in providing psychosocial assistance due to the abundance of cases; additionally, it is becoming clear that in order to integrate psychosocial support with peacebuilding, the participation of international and local peacebuilding-oriented organizations is needed. Overall, the Ministry of

Health of the Republic of Azerbaijan, a state-led health institution, named the Coordinator Union of the Health Area Departments (in Azerbaijani: TƏBİB) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) as be sole organizations providing such support continuously and systematically alongside sporadic and unstructured support provided by various civil society groups. Comparing the quality and interdisciplinarity of the provided support, the interviewees have mentioned that TƏBİB is more open to new approaches, encompasses all regions of Azerbaijan, attempts to engage with other professional fields in psychological treatment, and carries out its work in a less bureaucratic manner.

However, clinical psychologist Rovshan Suleymanov remarks that social and psychological treatment is almost absent in post-war Azerbaijan while there is a huge need for both. Compensating this, ICRC benefits from the work of its other departments, such as the General Health Department and the Economic Security Department, apart from providing direct psychological support. Thus, to some extent, it substitutes for the necessary social work on the ground.

Nonetheless, the demands are more complex than the assistance offered. According to Suleymanov, "personally facing the trouble or trauma" is the best technique for dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder, which is widespread among persons who have been directly touched by the war. However, the issue is complicated by the fact that diverse services and an interdisciplinary approach are required to reach the point where beneficiaries are ready to "directly confront the reality." Furthermore, because diagnoses and cases are so dissimilar, there is a necessity for diverse methodological approaches. For instance, as he said, if the beneficiary experiences the "complicated grief" diagnosis one cannot address such a particular diagnosis with the measures used for treating depression. Overall, it is becoming evident from this perspective that an interdisciplinary approach and the use of multiple approaches are in great demand for dealing with the implications of the aftermath of war on personal lives. Thus, based on his experience working with conflict-affected communities, Suleymanov also wishes to see a more holistic and interdisciplinary approach to healing, as contributions from various directions are required to address beneficiaries' trauma-based resistance to psychosocial support. According to the clinical psychologist, this could

open up new opportunities and change people's attitudes toward psychological treatment.

Another clinical psychologist, Rafael Mammadov[6] has highlighted the lack of time for having in-person therapy sessions with beneficiaries while mentioning that these sessions are indeed important as they provide a safe space for expressing suppressed emotions and in this sense, as a next step, are extremely fruitful for nourishing welcoming approaches to peace on the side of beneficiaries. At the same time, he would like to see a more conflict-sensitive approach by psychologists and other practitioners, as the healing process requires approaches from different perspectives and well-organized social work is also lacking. In addition, Mammadov mentioned that the evaluating pre-sessions should be conducted for developing a meaningful interdisciplinary approach (in a form of synergy between social work, economic, and psychological assistance) as "sometimes needs can stay unseen."

Based on these examples, it is possible to observe that psychological wounds can be addressed and healed not only through therapeutic interventions but also through various interdisciplinary approaches of psychosocial support, and subsequently may pave the way for the peacebuilding initiatives, as discussed in the conceptual part of this article.

Discussion and Recommendations

The aim of our research is to identify linkages between the fields of MHPSS and peacebuilding in the context of post-war interventions in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict context. We first elaborated on a conceptual framework based on the already existing research, arguing that the integration of MHPSS and peacebuilding fields can maximize the impact of interventions aimed at efficiently addressing post-war traumas and grievances and pave the way towards sustainable peace, first in Armenia and in Azerbaijan and then between the two societies. Our empirical research suggests that the current interventions addressing various post-war social needs in Armenia and Azerbaijan include numerous overlaps between both the MHPSS and the peacebuilding fields without them being necessarily designed as such. Such overlaps naturally stem from local needs. Our findings have also shown that although MHPSS itself is

---

[6] This name has been changed upon the interviewee's request.

currently very much needed to address the psychological wounds of those who suffered from the Karabakh war, MHPSS interventions alone are not enough to respond to the post-war needs of conflict-affected groups. Some concrete examples have shown that combining the MHPSS with peacebuilding, education, and art helps increase the efficiency of help addressing post-war grievances and allows people to restore social bonds and reintegrate into society. Our findings speak for the importance of community-based interventions and an interdisciplinary approach to societal healing and conflict transformation. Although the scope of our research is limited, it provides some food for thought on how to move towards *psychosocial peacebuilding*.

In order to highlight the overlapping points between MHPSS and peacebuilding and provoke further thinking on psychosocial peacebuilding in Armenia and Azerbaijan, we have elaborated a set of recommendations for local and international organizations to further develop this thinking and framework.

- Encouraging regular dialogue among the professionals and organizations in the MHPSS and peacebuilding fields to create efficient ways of addressing the needs of war-affected groups and society at large aiming at societal healing and conflict transformation. This could be done by engaging MHPSS professionals in peacebuilding activities, such as dialogue sessions between conflicting parties. The psychological needs of the peacebuilding professionals could be also addressed through regular interactions between the professionals and organizations in the fields of MHPSS and peacebuilding.

- Our findings show that points of correlation already exist between the MHPSS and peacebuilding fields, but, according to our interviewees, they require further mapping and coordination in a more systematic way combining elements from both fields.

- Moreover, comprehensive research should be carried out in order to determine the exact needs of the beneficiaries as well as their attitudes toward psychosocial support. This may improve the efficacy of the activities and attract more people to the offered services of psychosocial support and peacebuilding initiatives.

- Engaging donors by raising their awareness about the benefits of the integrated approach, encouraging them to look at peacebuilding through the MHPSS perspective and vice versa. For this, it is important to demonstrate the interconnection between the two fields by collecting success stories, as well as the stories that need further improvements and by making the local voices of those who advocate for such an approach heard on different levels.
- Following the debate on psychosocial peacebuilding as an emerging approach of leading international peacebuilding organizations and accommodating its latest developments into the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict context.
- Giving sufficient space for creative partnerships among local organizations in the fields of MHPSS and peacebuilding to support the integration of their activities. In other words, a co-creation process between local peacebuilders and MHPSS professionals on how to integrate psychosocial support into the dialogue/peace/reconciliation process(es) needs to be initiated.
- Initiating and conducting the in-country awareness-raising campaigns for MHPSS professionals and practitioners of conflict transformation and peacebuilding for further joint actions.

Indeed, we have noticed various obstacles to the integration of MHPSS and peacebuilding in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The conflict obviously polarizes the Armenian and Azerbaijani societies and this polarization, in turn, reduces the space for reconciliation and creates resilient grounds for *dehumanizing the other side*. Thus, the persisting polarized environment makes the space for peacebuilding interventions rather limited, which makes it difficult to explore the linkages between peacebuilding and other fields and, more specifically, MHPSS across the conflict divides.

Moreover, taking into consideration that the combination of MHPSS and peacebuilding is still a novel and rare occurrence in the regional context, we observe little to no advocacy and activism for developing the integrated approach, while the lack of understanding about peacebuilding and conflict transformation among many MHPSS professionals is also a real obstacle that needs to be tackled. At the same time, the knowledge of MHPSS is deficient on the side of peacebuilders, as well. Therefore, as an

initial step, in-country awareness-raising initiatives on peacebuilding should be promoted and implemented for mental health specialists and psychosocial support practitioners and vice versa. Subsequently, it would be pertinent to stimulate the joint actions of these professionals and practitioners from Armenia and Azerbaijan as part of cross-border peacebuilding processes.

Conclusion

Although the findings of our research clearly depict the need for the integrated approach to psychosocial support in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, as all interviewees highlighted the increased demand for it, our article opens up prospects for further discussions rather than giving precise answers and providing an exact action plan. Overall, we believe, this research article can be a good starting point for more investigations on interlinkages and complementarity between MHPSS and peacebuilding. The 44-day war resulted in personal and collective traumas among the affected communities on both the Azerbaijani and Armenian sides. Therefore, the potential of well-organized and need-based psychosocial support that would include community-based psychosocial support elements should be explored for the purposes of peacebuilding.

Such measures as organization and strengthening of holistic interdisciplinary cooperation to address the psychological, social, and economic needs of conflict-affected people and enhancing the awareness and capacities of MHPSS professionals and practitioners should be taken prior to the cross-border activities aimed at integrating MHPSS and peacebuilding. The application of the integrated approach requires comprehensive assessment of the needs of affected groups, more material and organizational support from stakeholders (IOs, NGOs, and donors), as well as bringing more expertise and experienced people to the field, as the demand for psychosocial support is of high urgency in the post-war context. All in all, based on the results of our research and the perspectives provided by the interviewed experts, we recognize the great need for uniting psychosocial support and peacebuilding efforts and expect positive outputs from this combination to a peaceful transformation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict context.

Bibliography

Bright Garden Voices. 2021. "Mental Health and War – Bright Garden Voices Meeting #8." *Bright Garden Voices YouTube channel*. September 13, 2021. Accessed January 24, 2022. https://youtu.be/nHdlXnd0vc4.

Bubenzer, Friederike and Marian Tankink 2015. *Healing communities, transforming society: Exploring the interconnectedness between psychosocial needs, practice and peacebuilding.* Conference Report. The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation & The War Trauma Foundation. Accessed January 24, 2022. http://www.ijr.org.za/home/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/IJR-Healing-communities-conference-WEB.pdf.

Bubenzer, Friederike, Sarah van der Walt, and Marian Tankink. 2017. *Mapping global practice: Healing communities, transforming society. Mental health, psychosocial support and peacebuilding.* Report. The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation & The War Trauma Foundation. Accessed January 24, 2022. http://www.ijr.org.za/home/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Mapping-MHPSS-and-PB_IJR-and-WTF_June-2017.pdf.

CivilNet. 2021. "Eternal: A place for the mothers of fallen soldiers." *CivilNet*. September 27, 2021. Accessed January 24, 2022. https://www.civilnet.am/news/634093/eternal-a-place-for-the-mothers-of-fallen-soldiers/?lang=en.

EEAS. 2020. *Peace Mediation Guidelines*. European External Action Service. Accessed January 24, 2022. https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eeas_mediation_guidelines_14122020.pdf

Gamaghelyan, Philip and Sergey Rumyantsev. 2021. "The road to the Second Karabakh War: the role of ethno-centric narratives in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict." *Caucasus Survey* 9, no. 3: 320-336.

Ghazaryan, Karine and Heydar Isayev. 2021. "Armenians and Azerbaijanis reckon with war's psychological toll." *Eurasianet*. September 8, 2021. Accessed January 23, 2022. https://eurasianet.org/armenians-and-azerbaijanis-reckon-with-wars-psychological-

toll?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=facebook&fbclid=IwAR2nn
5eXQJsaI7-VgG-
v8oqJ6zlFE8or1DmTmYqYZluUHeQEreR9f2Ep47c.

Gutlove, Paula and Gordon Thompson. 2004. "Psychosocial healing and post-conflict social reconstruction in the former Yugoslavia." *Medicine, Conflict and Survival* 20, no. 2: 136-150.

FriEnt. 2021. "Lessons learned from the Second Karabakh War: Interview with Stefan Meister on Current Challenges and Needs in the Region." *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Frieden und Entwicklung*. May 27, 2021. Accessed January 24, 2022. https://www.frient.de/en/artikel/lessons-learned-from-the-second-karabakh-war.

IASC. 2007. *Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings*. Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Accessed January 24, 2022. https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2020-11/IASC%20Guidelines%20on%20Mental%20Health%20and%20Psychosocial%20Support%20in%20Emergency%20Settings%20%28English%29.pdf.

Indie Peace. 2021. "Personal Histories of Collective Trauma after the Second Karabakh War." *Indie Peace.* August 25, 2021. Accessed January 24, 2022. https://indiepeace.org/personal-histories-of-collective-trauma-after-the-second-karabakh-war/?fbclid=IwAR1a5lObpn9NjqNODGv3yxFMdHWISl3l2yjtZSi0ps1AoFfJ4d9vHs6pnQ4.

Khachatryan, Anahit. 2021. *Psychological Help and Humanitarian Assistance Initiatives implemented in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) since September 27.* Eurasia Partnership Foundation.

Kubai, Anne and Kathleen, Angi. 2019. *"In the end, no winners, no losers:" Psychological support in peacebuilding and reconciliation for conflict affected societies*. Research Report. Felm. Accessed January 24, 2022. https://felm.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/felm_psychosocial-support-in-peacebuilding-and-reconciliation-for-conflict-affected-societies_final.pdf.

Labour and Social Protection Ministry of the Republic of Azerbaijan. 2021. "Postmüharibə dövründə şəhid ailələri üzvləri, qazilər və erməni terrorundan zərər çəkənlərdən ibarət 30 minədək şəxs sosial

dəstəklə əhatə olunub." *Azərbaycan Respublikası Əmək və Əhalinin Sosial Müdafiəsi Nazirliyi*, 27 September. Accessed January 24, 2022. https://sosial.gov.az/post_482929

Qafqazinfo. 2021. "Yardımlıda Vətən müharibəsi qazisi intihar edib." *Qafqazinfo.az*, 24 February. Accessed December 9, 2021. https://qafqazinfo.az/news/detail/yardimlida-qazi-intihar-etdi-315709.

Somasundaram, Daya, and Sambasivamoorthy Sivayokan. 2013. "Rebuilding community resilience in a post-war context: developing insight and recommendations- a qualitative study in Northern Sri Lanka." *International Journal of Mental Health Systems* 7, no. 3. doi.org/10.1186/1752-4458-7-3.

Svenska Kyrkan. 2021. "CBPS essentials." *Svenska Kyrkan*, July 13, 2021. Accessed December 6, 2021. https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/act/cbps/cbps-basics.

Tankink, Marian, Friederike Bubenzer, and Sarah van der Walt. 2017. *Achieving sustainable peace through an integrated approach to peacebuilding and mental health and psychosocial support: A review of current theory and practice*. Report. The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation & The War Trauma Foundation. Accessed January 24, 2022. http://www.ijr.org.za/home/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/IJR-Peacebuilding-Lit-Review.pdf .

UNSG. 2020. "Peacebuilding and sustaining peace." *Report of the UN Secretary General*. July 30, 2020. Accessed January 24, 2022. https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuildin g/files/documents/sg_report_on_peacebuilding_and_sustaining_pe ace.a.74.976-s.2020.773.200904.e_4.pdf

Vaughn, John 2021. "Supporting Trauma Recovery, Healing, and Peacebuilding with the Alternatives to Violence Project." *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 27, no. 2: 182-190.

WHO. 2020. "WHO Thematic Paper on Health and Peace." *WHO thematic paper contribution to the Report of the Secretary-General on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace*. Accessed January 24, 2022. https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/ un_pb_review-_who_health_peace_thematic_paper_final_0.pdf.

Armenian and Azerbaijani History Textbooks: Time for a Change[7]

Flora Ghazaryan, Mirkamran Huseynli

Despite the end of the second Nagorno-Karabakh war with a ceasefire agreement on November 9, 2020 and exchange of statements regarding unblocking relations, there has been no sight of rapprochement by the two respective states. This article casts national-history education as one of the areas where reconciliation between Armenian and Azerbaijani societies can be achieved. Furthermore, it adopts transitional justice as a theoretical framework while illustrating the practices and the impact of national-history writing in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Ultimately, the article reveals distorted narratives and ill-representation of neighboring communities in Armenian and Azerbaijani history-textbooks and gives recommendation for a policy change which would facilitate inter-communal reconciliation among the young generation in the foreseeable future.

Introduction

> Our images of other people, or of ourselves for that matter, reflect the history we are taught as children. This history marks us for life. Its representation, which is for each one of us a discovery of the world, of our past as societies, embraces all our passing or permanent opinions, so that the traces of our first questioning, our first emotions, remain indelible (Ferro2003, ix).

---

[7] We take the chance to thank the *CaucasusTalks* team for the initial idea and our inspiration for the topic.

Within the structure of any secondary school in any post-Soviet country the textbooks remain as the main basis for education. These textbooks help the teachers to organize their courses. Meanwhile, they also "regularize and control" the information children learn in the classroom. S. Mkrtchyan who is a researcher specialized in the school textbook analysis sees the textbooks as a tool used by the state more than by other institutions to control the information provided in them (Mkrtchyan 2011, 169). According to V. Voronkov, this tool is used as an ideological input where students acquire "legitimate" knowledge and concepts, the parameters of which are defined by the state apparatus through the national education standards (Voronkov 2008, 6). In that matter, Marc Ferro considers that when the state indoctrinates its "legitimate" ideological schemes through textbooks, it cements the *vox populi* of the students by bringing up particular perceptions of national values and understanding (Ferro 2003). Equally Schwartz rightfully denotes that writing politically motivated historical narrative is a policy instrument for managing ethnic relations and mobilizing ethnic and nationalist resources (Schwartz 1994). Overall, the textbook became the *raison d'etre* for the modern nation-states to indoctrinate its ideological schemes onto young generations guaranteeing their allegiance to its policies. Especially, there is a tendency in most of the young nation-states to typically present "history" as a discipline in a positivist way as a precise science. As French philosopher and Hermeneutics theorist Paul Ricoeur indicated, "history" has little to do with science and much to do with narrating a story and effectively creating a plot of which it is ideologically salient (Ricoeur 1981).

History Writing and its Paradigms

This is not to say that history has no factual basis. The factual evidence behind "historical" events might be quite profound. However, out of the abundance of documents and competing interpretations, historians select the evidence that best fits their narrative of *organic and natural* nationhood/statehood, omitting and effectively "silencing" other voices that defy this selectively constructed narrative, which is particularly the common exercise for the school textbooks. The paradigms that fit to this form of history-writing were termed by the nationalism studies expertize (Smith 1991) as Perennialism and Primordialism. Perennialists believe that nations have continuously existed in every period of history. The historians who subscribe to this paradigm lay their emphasis on

continuity while simultaneously ignoring or omitting certain ruptures and discontinuities within that particular national history. Other historians, who subscribe to and employ Primordialist tone to the national histories, lay their emphasis on the organic nature of the nationhood while simultaneously othering out-group societies through the lens of 'their own cultural and biological givens' (Smith 1991).

Despite, neither Perennialism, nor Primordialism is any longer a dominant orthodoxy of nationalism studies scholarship, it is oftentimes directly or indirectly employed in the secondary school history textbook writing up to date, aiming to fortify nation-state driven narration of national continuity and existence as well as national organicism and naturalism. An example of the first pages from history textbooks of both countries is very illustrative in this sense. As such, the Armenian and Azerbaijani textbooks start with prehistoric times defining the geographic region where so-called "Armenian" and "Azerbaijani" states/dynasties were endemic since the cradle of civilization, thereby nurturing Perennialist historicism. By the same token, both history textbooks crudely trace the origins of their people back to the prehistoric collectivities purely as such, thereby nurturing a Primordialist sense of nationhood.

However, another paradigm called Modernism can give a successful defiance to both Perennialist perspective of national history-writing by disenchanting the modern state histories from their pre-modern and claimed dynastic pasts, and Primordialist perspective of national-history writing by presenting the constructed nature of nationhood in opposition to the myth of predetermined cultural and natural organicism. The paradigm of Modernism asserts that nations, national states and national identities are the products of changing patterns in social, political, economic and cultural domains of early modern societies, resulting from certain material changes and ideological currents which had set out as of the age of enlightenment and print capitalism up to the contemporary period. Therefore, this paradigm claims that the presence of current nations as *imagined communities* is not only chronologically recent, but also qualitatively novel which eclipses the Perennialist claim of ever-existing continuous national history. It also claims that the presence of current nations *per se* is a typical result of social-construct that emerged resulting from the changes within the above-mentioned domains, equally dwarfing the Primordialist claim of predetermined fixity and naturalism of national

history. That being said, the use of the modernist paradigm while narrating particular national histories challenges the state-driven national ideologies that place societies against each other for the sake of their own existence at any cost. It also restores justice - that had been deprived from young generations - *vis a vis* one's own self and one's rival society that is narrated as "historical other" (We will expound our theoretical framework of justice thoroughly in the coming paragraphs).

Functionality of National History as a Discipline

In line with the interpretations given by the Modernist paradigm to the national formations and national constructedness, all the societies with varying ideological rulership - even those with radical left-wing agenda which is a rival to ethnic-nationalism - underwent similar transformations from dynastic statehood and religious-sectarian/confessional communality to the nation-state-hood and ethno-national communality throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. The best example is the Soviet Union, which was ideologically predisposed to suppress the idea of ethno-national institutionalization, but likewise applied these transformations to the Soviet member-states/societies and all the minority categories within these entities. (Brubaker 1998, 286). And it was this political era - epoch of nationalism - that brought young nation-states of Armenia and Azerbaijan into the idea of modern nationalisms, unintentionally serving as a mobilizing force for the genesis of the Karabakh conflict (Abbasov 2012, 25).

There is another aspect to note which is derivative of the fact that *modus vivendi* individuals witness only a small part of the history/national history at first hand. The rest of what the individuals know about their historical past is transmitted to them by ego-documents, written and oral narratives, and other means. Even the recent events, such as the First Nagorno Karabakh war, that the previous generation was a life-witness of, are likewise transmitted through media, second-hand oral stories, gossips, internet, and especially history textbooks (Gamaghelyan and Rumyantsev 2013, 169). Same is applicable for the Second Nagorno Karabakh war with us as a generation of life-witnesses.

Thus, history textbooks remain the most widely disseminated narrative, in which not only the most recent conflicts of post-Soviet period, but also those that took place centuries ago, are retrospectively interpreted

through the lens of the present situation (Rumyantsev 2012, 15). The version/s presented in the history textbooks are myths, constructed from carefully selected and even more carefully forgotten events which are - as discussed before - interpreted in line with Perennialist and Primordialist paradigms, which in their turn are interpreted in line with the ideology of either collective friendship or feud (Abbasov 2012, 41) or to put it in Mikhail Bakhtin's and Victor Shnirelman's words "relationships of dialogue" (Aymermakher 1999, 13) and "wars of memory" (Shnirelman 2003, 14).

As Ferro notes, regardless of its scientific vocation, history as a study exercises a double function: therapeutic and militant (Ferro 2003, xi). Hence, the choice of the function for history writing sums down to the politics of a certain nation-state towards its neighboring countries. For example, contrasting both the case of "Armenia versus Georgia" and the case of "Azerbaijan versus Georgia" in reference to their history textbooks would show that none has displayed any particular interest in making a patterned use of the militant function of history against each other. Contrary to this, Armenia and Azerbaijan use precisely this function while writing their national history and while dealing with the presence of one another in their national history. The same goes for Georgia *vis a vis* Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Mkrtchyan 2015, 170).

Historians and the Image of "Enemy" in National History Writing

It is also important to address the climate in which the *modus operandi* authors of these history textbooks operate; as writing history and especially a national one becomes difficult when the historical facts that the historian deals with occur not in a distant past but within the lifetime of the historian. Thus, Armenian and Azerbaijani historians of post-Soviet period and particularly the authors of history textbooks found themselves squeezed between two parallel forces:

a) the influence of dogmatic Soviet methodology of history-writing that affects not only the style but also the content of history writing,

b) the nationalist discourse (Zolyan 2012, 146) that heavily persisted its reliance on Perennialism and Primordialism.

In addition to this, one also has to acknowledge the existence of Armenian and Azerbaijani schools of historiography prior to the Soviet Union. The utilization of Perennialist and Primordialist paradigms for the construction of national nature of two "national" histories was pioneered years prior to their Sovietization - during the first republican period - which was materialized during Soviet times albeit its Marxist-Leninist ideology and was continued during the post-Soviet period. Therefore, different editions of secondary school history textbooks - including the latest versions - in both Armenia and Azerbaijan, still claim non-interrupted continuity and descendancy from the dynastic and imperial past, as well as organic and natural fixity with regard to their nationhood *per se*.

The main revisions that occured in these post-Soviet history textbooks of both countries are related mainly to the 19th and 20th centuries: the arrival of Russian Empire to the Caucasus, the 1918-20 period of nation-building and the establishment of the Soviet political regime. Additionally, as stated above, the beginning of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict followed by the First Nagorno Karabakh war caused a collective memory of a "historical rival/enemy" to be constructed. The discursive image of the "enemy" in general occupies a key role in the construction of 'continuous, non-interrupted and organic national history' narratives in both Armenia and Azerbaijan. The further back national history narratives went, the fewer changes occurred during the revision processes, whereas numerous conflicts and wars during the 19th and 20th centuries were retrospectively interpreted based on the Karabakh conflict (Gamaghelyan and Rumyantsev, 2013). Therefore, the events of the past are chosen, interpreted and sequenced in a way to serve and justify certain politics of these nation-states. As Gamaghelyan and Rumyantsev state, sometimes this is done as an explicit political order with a final goal and aim to create a historical memory, making history ahistorical (Gamaghelyan and Rumyantsev, 2013).

Theoretical Framework: *Transitional Justice* and *Justice in Transition*

It is rather naive to assume that the authors of history textbooks were/are not aware of "uncomfortable events" that they "forget" to mention regarding their shared historical past with one or another neighboring

country. To illustrate our point, Soviet and later post-Soviet Armenian and Azerbaijani educational systems construct different historical narratives and myths which share one common aspect: "we" are always the glorified ideal heroes, and "others" are always and forever predatory and treacherous enemies. Authors of different editions of Armenian and Azerbaijani school history textbooks selectively present certain sets of facts and/or myths, as well as their nationally driven ideological interpretation to construct one and only officially acknowledged version of a narrative that focuses on military and political events and leaves out the everyday life of coexistence.

In this context, the rival societies, i.e. Armenians and Azerbaijanis, who place themselves against each-other with the antagonistic national ideologies - transmitted to them through various means including history textbooks in our case - are in a need of a concept which could address the traumatic after-effects in the post-conflict situation. Therefore, a new concept was finally introduced to the international community in early 1990s, shortly after the rapid implosion of the communist regimes in eastern bloc countries, which was termed as "Transitional Justice" (Parmentier 2016, 55). Therefore, we will attempt to analyze the national history school textbooks by using *Transitional Justice* as our main theoretical framework. However, we are also aware that *Transitional Justice* processes and mechanisms are typically carried out through a top-down approach where the states are regarded as the main point of reference, while civil societies are taken as gap-fillers or intermediary actors between the state apparatus and the individuals. That had been the classical method of *Transitional Justice* to aid societies to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale traumatic after-effects of any conflict which in the long-run was projected to serve justice and achieve reconciliation between the rival societies. However, the experience of utilization of this classical method yielded narrow implications for the broader justice and reconciliation between the rival\hostile societies, be it between the communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the Israel-Palestinian conflict, in Lebanon, in Iraq and et al. Therefore, instead of applying this classical method of *Transitional Justice*, we will be using Gready and Robins' method of *Justice in Transition*. Unlike *Transitional Justice* which is defined in terms of a relationship between the state and individuals where the autonomy to initiate would be in the hands of a state, *Justice in Transition* is defined in terms of individuals and communities where the autonomy

to initiate alternatives, contest and challenge so called continuities of injustice would be in the hands of a civil society. The modes of organizations to combat state-end injustices for the civil society would be moving away from 'traditional, representative, recognized forms of citizen organizations to citizen-led, anti-hierarchical, horizontal networks and organizations' (Gready and Robins 2017, 966).

This is a more bottom-up approach in comparison to *Transitional Justice* that gives us an opportunity to not immediately but on a long run link our research not only to the state mechanisms, but also civil society. Moreover, Greedy and Robins outline several repertoires of action for *Justice in Transition* - such as raising awareness through assemblies and through social media, employing unruly action where citizens occupy public spaces and demand policy change, and undertaking independent action by presenting alternative models - for the civil society to combat the state-dominated discourses and policies (Gready and Robins 2017). These repertoires of action will render civil society to effectuate and enforce their alternative models before the state apparatus.

Additionally, Gready and Robins define *Justice in Transition* as one that emerges from a particular time and place (Gready and Robins 2017). For our research we consider this particular time for a *Justice in Transition* to emerge- the beginning of the modern Karabakh conflict in late 1980s and the First Nagorno Karabakh war. As a *place* where this *Justice in Transition* forms we consider the ministries of education in both countries. Hence, our analyses of history textbooks' editions starts after the period of the first Nagorno-Karabakh war. To have a comparative perspective it also looks at several Soviet period history textbooks. The aim while analyzing the history textbooks is to show in a comparative manner the examples of *Continuity of Injustice* in history textbooks of both countries and to explain the political ends they serve to. By saying *Continuity of Injustice* the authors of this article do not think of historical injustices but rather historiographical injustices which entail selective approach and cherry-picking of events from the past that fit the national ideology and nation-states' political ends in the process of history textbook writing which in itself is coordinated and directed by the ministries of Education, i.e. by the states. We divide this *Continuity of Injustice* (from now on-*injustice*) and apply it to the history textbooks on three levels:

a) injustice towards one's national history,

b) injustice towards neighboring countries' history,

c) injustice towards rival/hostile neighboring countries' history.

Examples of *injustice* are numerous in the history textbooks of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Not surprisingly, these *injustices* often mirror each other, *tout court*. Both countries' history textbooks choose the demographic data of a certain region/city in a certain period selectively. For example, Armenians would not point to data when Muslims were the majority in current Yerevan or any other city/region of Armenia, while Azerbaijanis would and vice versa.

One example of such injustice is described in Gamaghelyan's and Rumyantsev's article regarding data on demographic changes in the South Caucasus region. Armenian textbook from 2008 (Barkhudaryan 2008, 51-3) focuses on the census data that shows the Armenian population to be around 40 percent in the early 20th century Nakhchivan/Nakhichevan. Later in the century this number shrunk to 10.8%, to 1.4% by 1979, and to zero percent by the end of the century. The demographic data presented serves to Armenian historians as an ultimate proof for the argument that "we" (i.e. Armenians) are indigenous to Nakhchivan/Nakhichevan region and that "we" were forced out from the region by discriminatory politics of Turks and Azerbaijanis ("others"). The logical continuation of such a narrative is that Azerbaijan has a continuous ethnic cleansing policy towards Armenians and that it is going to do the same with Nagorno Karabakh's Armenian population.

The Azerbaijani narrative repeats the same pattern of *injustice* in regard to Armenia. For example, in Azerbaijani history textbooks in the early 20th century the Zangezur (Syunik) region is presented as having a majority Azerbaijani population that has been systematically ethnically cleansed by Armenians with the support of the Soviet Union (Gready and Robins 2017). This serves the same narrative of "us" (Azerbaijanis) being indigenous to the area and "others" (Armenians) coming from west and south, occupied Azerbaijani lands. As Gamaghelyan and Rumyantsev rightfully note, such selective use and historiographical abuse of demographic data is not limited to Zangezur and Nakhchivan/Nakhichevan regions. Similar narratives of *injustices* are composed also for the 17-18th century history of Nagorno-Karabakh, Yerevan/Irevan Khanate, more recent Baku pogroms, Khojaly massacre,

etc. (Gamaghelyan and Rumyantsev 2013, 171-3). Both countries' history textbooks are filled with such one-sided interpretations of selective data used and abused accordingly, each to legitimize their own versions of narrative.

The examples of *injustice* are not limited to demographic data only in the history writings of Armenia and Azerbaijan. The years 1905 and 1918 are regarded by both societies as the year of their massacre by the other side. As can be expected, the Armenian massacres are part of the Armenian narrative that regard the Azerbaijani massacres as "their state propaganda". Similarly, Azerbaijani massacres are commemorated as genocide in Azerbaijani history writing, whereas the Armenian one is completely omitted (Guliyeva 2010).

Methodological Approach

As one can see from these examples, compilers of both Armenian and Azerbaijani history textbooks committed acts of *injustice* on two levels: a) injustice towards their national histories, b) injustice towards the national history of their rival society. The picture is the same in regards to the history of Georgia or the latter's history towards Armenia and Azerbaijan, bringing the third (c) level of *injustice* towards the neighboring society's history into the picture. In the coming sections of this article the authors present in more detail the three-levels of *injustice* in Armenian and Azerbaijani history textbooks focusing on a specific period; the first Republics of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. For our research we consulted the Unesco Guidebook on Textbook Research and Revision, the national curriculums, national standards and criteria of school subjects, National Security Strategy, and last but not least history textbooks themselves.-

To begin with UNESCO's Guidebook methodology for textbook research and revision, it is a useful tool for peace-oriented approaches to textbook studies and projects which aims to rethink and modernize the content and methodologies applied during textbook re/writing. It also helps in overcoming biased representation of cultures, religions and issues of national pride. In the 2010 edition of the guidebook, a new emphasis is placed on the *quality education in conflict- and post-conflict conditions*. Pingel regards the *quality education for all* as a means to contribute to the stabilization processes in conflict-shattered societies (Pingel 2010, 5). In

this context, the *quality education* means developing critical thinking, ability to argue, form rational as well as reasonable opinion, and subjecting norms to critical examination. That is the only method for students to be able to introduce value judgment to the historical content. Yet, the prime obstacle lies with the individual nation-states as they have been hardly willing to incorporate and apply these qualities into their school textbooks. (Pingel 2010, 8). And it is not surprising that in the real-world practices, most of the nation-states prefer using history textbooks as a means to spread a nationalistic ideology and to mirror contemporary political trends which helps them to justify their historical legitimacy rather than achieving *transitional justice* between the societies. This creates narratives where the conflict for one party becomes a "war of liberation" and for the other, "revolt" against the legitimate power which is confrontational and uncompromising (Pingel 2010, 32). Therefore, the main goal behind textbook comparison and analysis for UNESCO Guidebook is to identify and eliminate factual mistakes, prejudices as well as distortions and omissions. Only afterwards, the authors of bi-textbook projects are to acknowledge the points they find in common vis a vis each other's national-histories. Sometimes, authors would also acknowledge in their projects the differences of opinion they might have vis a vis each other's national histories. Nonetheless, authors in sensitive societies like ours prefer not to mention their disagreements in their projects. This is meant to avoid sensitive issues where partners could disagree upon (Pingel 2010). Since we authors are currently in the same sensitive stage - due to the lingering wounds of the Second Nagorno Karabakh war - we will share only our compromised opinions and avoid potential disagreements we might have while studying Armenian and Azerbaijani history textbooks and while applying them to our proposed theory of three-leveled *justice in transition.* Hence, it is crucial for the readers of this field to be aware of such pitfalls and overcome our possible mistakes.

Last but not least, even though the UNESCO guidebook advises the authors of the textbooks and publishing houses to contact ministries before starting a project (Pingel 2010) at this stage of our research we did not contact any of the above-mentioned institutions given the intricate situation within both republics after the Second Nagorno Karabakh war. The passages analyzed from the textbooks are compared with those of academic research and debate to present the overall picture of the relations

of the first three South Caucasian Republics and contextualize the omissions.

Alongside this, we made ourselves familiar with the previous research done on the topic. This showed us that with minor exceptions such as Gamaghelyan's and Rumyantsev's analysis (Gamaghelyan and Rumyantsev 2013), the research which has been conducted on the issue of Armenian, Georgian and Azerbaijani history textbooks, even if in edited volumes, was critical, yet done from the perspective of each country separately. That being said, an overall umbrella theory and/or methodology was not developed that could have been applied to the analyses of the mentioned textbooks. This article aims to solve this issue. Using an interdisciplinary approach and paradigms from the fields of nationalism studies, comparative history, legal and political studies, we put forward the conceptual framework of three-leveled *injustice* in history textbook writing.

The First Azerbaijani Republic and its Relations with the First Republics of Armenia and Georgia (1918-1920)

An analysis of history textbooks provides us with the "official view" of any state, especially the young nation-states, where it aims to impose certain representation of "self" and "others" upon its citizens from the early period of their life (Shnirelman 2003). From this point of view, particular case studies on Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia had already been done in Lubos Vesely's (2008) edited volume as well as in many other studies about post-Soviet countries' history textbook narratives (Shnirelman 2003; Aymermaher K. & Bordyugov G., ed., 1999; CIMERA, 2007; Rumyantsev 2008; Rumyantsev 2012). Even though these studies mostly focus on teaching from the point of view of "us" and "others", neither has viewed such representations from the perspective of Transitional Justice or as termed in our theory *Justice in Transition*. Therefore, the novelty of our analysis will be marked by its normative approach where we will juxtapose a normative standpoint to that period of history of Azerbaijan by highlighting three-levels of historiographic injustices, all of which were marked by its selective salience and cherry-picking of events in order to fit it to the national ideology. The new edition of Azerbaijani history textbooks (Aghalarov et. al. 2018; Mahmudlu et. al. 2016) is also part of the focus to inquire whether there are any differences

from the earlier editions in terms of its narrative, methodology and its use of vocabulary.

Sources, National Curriculum Requirements and the National Strategy

Before delving into the case study, we will introduce certain methodological aspects which are characteristic to the case of Azerbaijan. While studying history textbooks of Soviet Azerbaijan, we have relied heavily on Ilham Abbasov's research (Abbasov 2012). When it comes to the history textbooks published during the post-Soviet period, we based the case study on various editions (as 2003, 2009 are the old editions and the one published in 2018 and 2016 are the new editions) of Azerbaijani history textbooks in order to unfold any change that occurred at that period. The main content to be evaluated within the framework of *Justice in Transition* will cover 1918-1920 where the representation of Armenians, Georgians and the self will be given a deliberate study. This study is expected to be centered on the 2018 and 2016 edition of 11th and 9th grade History of Azerbaijan textbooks.

As mentioned in earlier pages, we have also used the Azerbaijani national curriculum requirements and standards of general education for the history of Azerbaijan in order to understand the aim and purpose that it serves for its citizens. According to the national curriculum template for the History of Azerbaijan (Amirov 2011), the aim of the overall course is to develop an ability in students to objectively analyze the course of historical events, to juxtapose them with modern developments and come to an independent conclusion. Subsequently, such a deep and analytical grasp of national history is 'meant' to enable students to build up the spirit of patriotism, consciousness of active citizenship, respect for the other nations and universal values and devotion to the tradition of statehood as the Ministry of Education's national curriculum template states (Amirov 2011). It appears quite *non-sequitur* concluding that students' ability to objectively analyze national-history supplements to the patriotic spirit but this is a debate of another time. This aside, Azerbaijani national curriculum template does mention certain requirements as the aim of the overall course which are in accordance with UNESCO's guidebook for textbook revision, it is not entirely applied. On the contrary, they not only deprive any room for students to provide value judgment to historical facts and be able to evaluate them, but they convey it in a tainted manner by presenting historical events from the lens of contemporary political

developments, thus interpreting it anachronistically. And this is purposed to inculcate nationalist ideology and secure the country's historical legitimacy from its potential "adversaries".

What does it take for the editors to revise the history-textbooks in a way that would permit value judgment to the historical event? Firstly, the editors ought to center the textbooks on primary sources and use unbiased, neutral and bi/multi-dimensional narrative to interpret these sources. The existing narrative in Azerbaijani textbooks does nothing but navigate students to a pre-made, politically motivated direction by employing a one-sided perspective of history. Along with narrative, the selection of lexicon to describe so-called historic "Azerbaijani states'' interaction with its adjacent polities and societies has also served the same politically motivated goals. It is not surprising that the lexicon used in Azerbaijani history-textbooks to depict any experience with Armenia is identical with the lexicon used in the Republic of Azerbaijan's National Security Strategy which shows the extent to which the country's security strategy influences its historical narrative and language in the history-textbooks. Azerbaijan's Ministry of Defense documented a sizable text dedicated to the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict where it addressed Armenia several times either as *düşmən* or *təcavüzkar ölkə* which translates as adversary or as aggressor country (Ministry of Defense of Republic of Azerbaijan 2022). Similar text was issued by Presidential decree with regards to the country's national security strategy where Armenia was depicted as an aggressor country - the same trend used in history-textbooks (Azerbaijan's National Security Strategy 2007).

It also goes without saying that existing historical narratives embellished in the school textbooks usually dominate the *vox populi* of the young generation in all three nation-states in the South Caucasus. It seems there has been an identical policy towards the history-textbooks in Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan where all three sustain the tradition of teaching only one version of history, approved by the Ministries of Education of the respective states; hence many teachers base their classes solely on the history textbooks which eventually demonstrates how extensively it influences practically every resident of the country (Rumyantsev 2012). Concerning the allotted time to the History of Azerbaijan per week, the Ministry of Education allotted two weekly hours to 5th grade students,

one hour to 6th-7th grade students, two hours to 8th-11th grade students (Ministry of Education Republic of Azerbaijan 2021).

Considering the difference between various revisions of history textbooks, there have been two major revisions - Soviet version and post-Soviet version - in Azerbaijani History textbooks. Soviet version of history-textbooks has reduced itself primarily to class struggle influenced by Bolshevik ideology. In that manner, the narrative was constructed on the basis of Soviet memory politics which included commemoration of Bolshevik Internationalists, the 26 Baku Commissars, glorification of Communist heroes et al. This version of history writing served both Soviet nationality politics and Soviet socio-political necessity to construct the myth of "peoples' friendship". Additionally it also served to the attribution of enemy image in the example of either Musavatists and all those non-Bolshevik nationalist alikes who were labeled as "Bourgeois leaders", or Turkey and Iran who were labeled as "Capitalist Countries" (Abbasov 2012, 22). The dissolution of the Soviet Union, however, necessitated a new version of national history which implied a reverse effect in the post-Soviet version of history textbooks. Following the emergence of new Azerbaijani nation-state, all those historical figures who had been attributed to be the enemy of the nation were reversed into national heroes, the events of 1918-1920 were given a particular attention and the myth of ever-existing "peoples' friendship" was replaced by another myth of every-existing "incorrigible foes".

Another visible difference between the Soviet and post-Soviet history textbooks in Azerbaijan is the manifestation of Karabakh as historic *la patrie*. Karabakh conflict as the paramount national question has been given unwavering attention where authors do their best to present Karabakh as the land inhabited by the Turkic tribes since pre-historic era. Satenik Mktrchyan describes this tendency as "Karabakhization" of national history which was a similar narrative followed by the Armenian authors in Armenian history-textbooks (Mkrtchyan 2012, 50).

As mentioned in our theory, despite the fact that discourses concerning the "friend" and the "enemy" has been altered in line with the narrative of exclusive nationalism and "Karabakhization" in Post-Soviet Azerbaijani history-textbooks, utilization of essentialist paradigms such as Perennialism and Primordialism as well as the Soviet methodology of history-writing - rigid divisions of class struggle in line with dialectic

materialism - remains unchanged. For instance, the new edition still enjoys the perennialist tendency of calling Caucasian Albania, Atropatena, Shirvanshahs and regional Khanates as Azerbaijani states or those of the Turkic dynasties such as Sajids, Aghqoyunlu, Qaraqoyunlu, including Safavids and Afshars as Azerbaijani dynasties. Similarly, it preserves primordialist tendency of crudely tracing the origins of Azerbaijani people back to the Massagetian heroine Tomris, Oghuz hero Uruz, Agqoyunlu Uzun Hasan, Ismail Safavid and obliges the young generation to pledge themselves to its ascribed legacy (Mahmudlu and Jabbarov 2020, 6-7).

While comparing and contrasting the different editions of history-textbooks, we realized only minor revisions between different years of post-Soviet version of Azerbaijani history textbooks. It seems the latest edition (Aghalarov et. al. 2018; Mahmudlu 2016) entails only particular technical and structural changes. For instance, in the old edition of textbooks (Aliyev 2004; Mahmudlu 2003; Mahmudlu 2001, Mammadov 2008; Valiyev 2001; Mammadov and Qandilov 2009) everything from stone age till to antiquity, middle ages, modern era and contemporary period were allotted equally from 6th grade until 11th grade in a chronological order. In the new edition (Aliyev 2017a; Mahmudlu et. al. 2014a; Mahmudlu et. al. 2014b; Mahmudlu et. al. 2016), however, all this period was summed up from 6th till to 9th grade textbooks with certain reductions and 10th-11th grade textbooks cover the same period with much in-depth attention (Aliyev 2017b; Aghalarov et. al. 2018). The 2018 edition of 11th grade textbook has also been subject to only structural changes vis a vis 2009 edition where the presented facts remain almost same but are slightly restructured. The major change is in foreign policy section where the new edition (Aghalarov et. al. 2018) allotted one and half pages to the diplomatic relations with neighboring states and while the old edition (Mammadov and Qandilov, 2009) does not cover it. Besides, the 2009 edition uses the term Bolshevik-Dashnak alliance in Baku or Dashnak bandit forces in Karabakh, the 2018 edition has replaced the term Dashnak with Armenian. Except for these changes, the rest - methodology, content and language - has remained unchanged.

Regarding the topic of first Republic of Azerbaijan (1918-1920), the main issues covered on this period are March Days (1918), negotiations with Ottoman Empire in the aftermath of Brest-Litovsk treaty, Declaration of Independence in May 1918 and Ottoman-Azerbaijani cooperation for the

liberation of Baku from Bolsheviks in June-September 1918, periodic Armenian-Azerbaijani clashes in Karabakh, Zangezur and Nakhchivan/Nakhichevan regions over the two years of independence, peaceful settlement of territorial disputes with Armenia, Russia and Georgia, the role of Azerbaijan in the Paris Peace conference and eventual demise of the first Republic as a result of so called "Armenian betrayal" and Soviet invasion (Aghalarov et. al. 2018; Mahmudlu et. al. 2016).

Quantitative, qualitative measures, and linguistic dimension of Azerbaijani history textbooks

Concerning the quantitative dimension of Azerbaijani history textbooks, we calculated how much space is given to Armenia and Georgia in the textbooks. In the same manner, we qualitatively analyzed what message the textbooks convey and particular lexicon employed in these messages, not to mention how historical facts, events, individuals and processes are portrayed; all done in compliance with the UNESCO guidebook on textbook research (Pingel 2010).

In both 9th grade and 11th grade history textbooks, Armenia-Azerbaijan relations are discussed within the context of the March Days of 1918 to which four to five pages are dedicated out of 188 and 207 respectively (Mahmudlu et. al.,2016; Aghalarov et. al. 2018). Other chapters, on the other hand, discuss Armenia-Azerbaijan relations in the period between 1918-1920 which is covered in three to four pages. Especially, 11th grade textbook specifically titled the main tensions that took place in Karabakh, Zangezur and Nakhchivan/Nakhichevan regions between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in 1918-1920 within the framework of domestic policy. Moreover, while discussing the tensions between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in these regions (in the 9th grade textbooks the latter was referred to as Turco-Muslims and in the 11th grade as Azerbaijanis), Armenians are referred as *Qarabağda məskunlaşan erməni quldur dəstələri* which translates as Armenian bandit groups who are settled in Karabakh. As a reminder, this linguistic style is identical with the current national security strategy of the Republic of Azerbaijan concerning Armenians living in the former Autonomous Oblast of Nagorno-Karabakh. Concerning the inter-state level of relations between Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan, it is covered under the title of foreign policy separating it from above-mentioned affairs. It uses a precise language to avoid making any generalization towards Armenians in Karabakh and Armenians in

mainland Armenia as a whole body and targets only either paramilitary groups within Karabakh or Republic of Armenia as the source of confrontation. Georgia, on the other hand, is mentioned in both year (9th and 11th) textbooks rather intermittently within the contexts of Georgian-Armenian war, South Caucasus Conference, military alliance between Georgia and Azerbaijan along with Paris Peace Conference - all covered in two-three pages. While addressing Georgia, the editors of the textbook tend to employ either neutral language or portray it in a friendly tone (Mahmudlu et. al. 2016; Aghalarov et. al. 2018).

Examples of *Injustices:* Case Study of the Relations of the First Three Republics in South Caucasus

Inter-State relations and contested territories between Azerbaijan and Georgia

As mentioned in the previous section, Azerbaijan-Georgia relations between 1918-1920 have been covered intermittently in both new (Mahmudlu et. al. 2016; Aghalarov 2018) and old editions (Mammadov and Qandilov 2009), and only within the framework of diplomatic relations with neighboring states. The 2017 edition of 11th grade mentions Azerbaijan-Georgia relations within the Caucasus Conference of 1918-1920 - it was meant to solve territorial conflicts and establish trilateral cooperation between the three neighboring states. However, due to disagreement between Armenia and Georgia over the districts of Borchali, Akhalkalaki and Lori, the conference scheduled for November 1918 did not take place. Furthermore, the textbook indicates forthcoming conferences that took place in April-June 1919 in Tbilisi and in December 1919 in Baku. Despite Azerbaijani side's proposal for a trilateral military alliance and even establishing a Confederation of South Caucasus states, the trilateral cooperation was not forthcoming. Instead, Azerbaijan and Georgia signed a separate military alliance in June 1919. Both 2009 and 2018 editions shortly indicate the territorial dispute between Azerbaijan and Georgia over the district of Zaqatala (Mammadov and Qandilov 2009; Aghalarov et. al. 2018). Despite the nature of the solution being mentioned as "peaceful", there is not much space given to territorial disputes between the two neighbors. The most intriguing part of Azerbaijani history textbooks regarding neighboring Georgia is the presented map where it displays the southernmost municipalities of today's Kvemo-Kartli and

Kakheti regions of Georgia as territories disputed with Azerbaijan albeit having no *ad verbum* mention of these disputed territories within the text. In general there has been very limited space given to the Georgia-Azerbaijan relations between 1918-1920 (Aghalarov et. al. 2018). The same pattern is also followed by the editors of Georgian history textbooks where Georgia-Azerbaijan relations in that particular period is either presented in a neutral tone or only mentioned within the context of Armenia-Azerbaijan clashes (Chikovani 2012). Besides, the same level of map is also presented in history textbooks of Georgia from the latter's perspective by having no mention of the nature or solution of the territorial dispute (Akhmeteli, Lortkipanidze and Pirtskhalava 2020).

In compliance with our theory, we can observe that authors of Azerbaijani and Georgian history textbooks committed certain acts of *injustice* on two levels. a) injustice towards their own national histories, and b) injustice towards the national history of a neighboring nation. The major *injustice* in this context is the fact that little to no space is given to the Azerbaijan-Georgia relations *per se* in both country's history textbooks which is an act of injustice on both levels. The striking injustice, however, is committed with respect to the one-sided presentation of the maps where Azerbaijani side presented the Zaqatala region as uncontested and certain Georgian territories contested with Azerbaijan having no *ad verbum* explanation given to these territorial disagreements. The Georgian side, on the other hand, presented the contrary version of the map similarly having no mention of the nature of the dispute between the two neighboring entities.

Territorial disputes with Republic of Armenia and periodic clashes with Armenian (Dashnak) forces in Karabakh, Zangezur and Nakhchivan

Unlike Azerbaijan-Georgia relations, the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict has been given a sizable space in the textbook (Mahmudlu et. al. 2016; Aghalarov et. al. 2018). As mentioned above, Armenia-Azerbaijan relations have been covered within the framework of March days, domestic policy (Clashes in Nakhchivan, Zangezur and Karabakh regions) and foreign policy (state level relations between the two young polities).

The chapter which covers "March days" of 1918 preludes the event with certain epithets such as "Armenian bandit forces and their increasing scale of ethnic cleansing" and "the inherently hateful attitude of Armenians toward Azerbaijani people." Then the narrative presents the so-called

'Armenian desire to cleanse Azerbaijani people' - which resulted in the March massacre in Baku - with the reason for the so-called 'Armenian wish to forge an Armenian state in South Caucasus especially after having lost their invented plan of the Armenian Empire' (Mahmudlu et. al. 2016; Aghalarov et. al. 2018). This form of representation is intended to serve the essentialist nature of a so-called "Armenian virtue" in their relation toward Azerbaijanis. Besides, it also feeds to and reiterates the Azerbaijani belief that 'Armenians are not native to the region'. Despite the presence of Bolshevik forces with ethnic Russian background that were also partakers in the clashes which eventually turned into a four-day massacre, the main attention has been given substantially to the deeds of Armenians. Even the lines which criticize the deeds of Baku Bolsheviks, tend to highlight the Armenian members of the political establishment. Most importantly, the textbook particularly tends to address these events as "Genocide" albeit providing no legal definition of the term to the reader or giving no justification why "March Days" should be regarded as such. Overall, the whole chapter aims to deflect the reader from the genuine reasons for the clashes and to present it as pure *a priori* nature atrocity emanating from 'Armenian hatred'. The chapter finishes with the description of massacres that extended to the countryside of Baku governorate (guberniaa) where Muslim population had been subjected to the similar extermination (Mahmudlu et. al. 2016; Aghalarov et. al. 2018).

The forthcoming chapter of the textbook is dedicated to the early months of Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan (First republic) which was declared on 28th of May in Tbilisi. Even though the textbook does mention the Georgian declaration of independence that preceded two days earlier, it avoids mentioning anything regarding the Armenian declaration of independence. The story is continued with the young republic's desire to liberate its capital from Armenian-Bolshevik forces which followed its appeal to the Ottoman state for military aid. While Ottoman-Azerbaijani forces are on the move toward the liberation of Baku, the textbook refers to the repressive nature of Armenian-Bolshevik rule in Baku where free press is banned, the industry along with major infrastructure is nationalized and how Armenians are in majority in the Red army. Eventually, the chapter ends with the liberation of Baku on 15th of September by the Ottoman-Azerbaijani forces (Mahmudlu et. al. 2016; Aghalarov et. al. 2018), yet the editors of the textbook do not seem to bother mentioning the similar massacre undertaken, this time toward the

city's Armenian population right after it was taken by Ottoman-Azerbaijani forces.

The next chapter covers the new republic's domestic policy where clashes in Nakhchivan, Zangezur and Karabakh regions have been given attention. While presenting events in the Karabakh region, the textbook continues addressing the Armenian population as "Armenians settled in Karabakh" in order to delegitimize any territorial claim they could raise toward Azerbaijan. Finally, after the liberation of Baku, the Ottoman-Azerbaijani coalition forces established control over the region and instituted the Karabakh General Governorate headed by Khosrov Bey Sultanov. The textbook mentions the existence of "Armenian National Council" or "Congress of Armenians of Karabakh" only a few times but in a disapproving tone. As reminded in the earlier chapters, the editors of the textbook here again employ a precise language to distinguish the Armenian paramilitary forces from the non-combatant Armenians in order to draw a picture of the relationship of dialogue with the civilian population, whereas the combatants were presented as the sole intruders who constantly kept breaking the peace. Concerning the Nakhchivan General Governorate, the editors highlight mostly the massacres committed toward Muslim population until the Ottoman arrival in June 1918 that ended the crimes of so called "Armenian bandit forces" in the region. The editors tend to either omit or underrate the periods in which Armenian forces had control over Nakhchivan/Nakhichevan, Zangezur and Karabakh regions. In the rare occasions where it was acknowledged, the Armenian forces were addressed as illegitimate paramilitary groups, either detaching their direct institutional ties from the Republic of Armenia in order to further delegitimize the latter's claim to the area or presenting the periods of Armenian rule as a minor importance. Generally, both national histories depict these three regions as part of their full control, despite both of them having only periodic control throughout 1918-1920. Similar one-sided representation is manifested in the presentation of maps where the above-mentioned regions are displayed as uncontested territories with full Azerbaijani control having left only central and northern lands of mainland Armenia as its legitimate territory (Aghalarov et. al. 2018). In the same manner, Armenian history textbooks tend to visualize in their maps these territories as part of their own (Barkhudaryan 2008).

The last chapter of the 1918-1920 period covers the young Republic of Azerbaijan's foreign policy and its eventual demise in April 1920 where its relations with the Republic of Armenia were shortly indicated within the context of recognition of Armenia's independence and its selection of Irevan (referring to today's Yerevan) as its capital. However, this move on Azerbaijani side was particularly interpreted by the textbook as 'loss of part of fatherland'. The rest of the chapter is dedicated to the Paris Peace conference where the allied *de facto* recognition of Georgian and Azerbaijani independence was indicated. Even though the allied *de facto* recognized the young Republic of Armenia too, the editors of the textbook prefer to sideline this fact. Unfortunately, nothing much has been pointed out on the subject of Armenian-Azerbaijani diplomatic relations as two neighboring states. Ultimately, the loss of Azerbaijani independence was covered under the sub-title of "Dashnak-Bolshevik Alliance" where the editors put the blame for the Soviet Invasion on Armenians yet again as the Soviet invasion of Azerbaijan took place simultaneous with the Armenian uprising in Karabakh. The editors present the clashes between Azerbaijani forces and "Armenian separatist forces" aided by the Republic of Armenia from the Azerbaijani perspective and, no surprise they give no reference to the Shusha/Shushi pogrom where the city's Armenian population were subjected to mass slaughter and extermination. Finally, the textbook continues the rest of the narrative with the nature and result of the Soviet invasion (Aghalarov et. al. 2018).

Overall, there is a certain representation of oneself and representation of Armenia in the Azerbaijani history textbooks that deliberately serves for purposes other than historical justice and bi\multi-dimensional representation of "others". Therefore, the two level injustice - those injustices can also be counted as injustice for both levels simultaneously as it is double-edged - is likewise committed by each history narrative. Firstly, a) an act of injustice towards their own national histories, on the grounds that there is a deliberate distortion of one's own history which was aimed to draw an absolute favorable picture of "self", be it with illustrations of one-sided maps or with deliberate omissions to purify oneself from "non-desirable elements". Such an act of injustice deprives the young readers to be acquainted with not only the representation of different dimensions of their national history but also the influence of political, ethnic and cultural mosaic that their history was literally shaped by. Secondly b) an act of injustice towards the national history of a rival

nation - in this case Armenians - as the latter's history is presented with the similar deliberate distortion yet with a contrary motive - aiming to delegitimize and downplay the latter's importance as part of regional history. Most strikingly, there is a certain representation of Armenians who were portrayed as an incorrigible adversary of *a priori* nature, reinforcing an essentialist picture towards Armenians in the *vox populi* of young Azerbaijani students. Such an act of injustice critically rules out any potential of reconciliation for the whole young generation in post-*bellum* Azerbaijan.

The First Armenian Republic and its Relations with the First Republics of Georgia and Azerbaijan (1918-1920)

There have been various editions of Armenian history textbooks for schools over the last decades. The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports (MoESCS) of the Republic of Armenia approves only one version of history textbooks for each year. This case study is based on the analyses of certain passages regarding the relations between the first three South Caucasian republics as described in the history textbooks. While we personally checked the 2015, 2014, and 2008 editions, for earlier editions we relied on the extensive research conducted on the same topic by S. Mkrtchyan (Mkrtchyan 2015). In addition to the textbooks we analyze, Mkrtchyan focused on the post-Soviet editions of history textbooks from 2005 and 1996, as well as on the last editions of history textbooks from the Soviet period (1986 and 1987). These textbooks are divided into four periods (ancient times, Middle Ages, early modern period, modern period) with each grade book focusing on a particular period. Until the recent changes (2014 edition onwards), pupils started to learn history from the grade 5 to grade 8. Currently, it starts from grade 7 to grade 9 (Subject Standards 2021, 5). From the 10th grade onwards, there are different history textbooks which are supposed to give high school pupils more in-depth education on the same topics.

National Curriculum Requirements, National Security and Strategy

National curriculum requirements or state subject standards of general education for Armenian history (Subject Standards) claim that the aim of the overall course is to educate state-conscious and nationally self-conscious citizens. The program is built around the following four key concepts: state, identity, culture, coexistence (Subject Standards 2021, 1-3).

The first three South Caucasian republics are only studied in the 9th and 11th grades. The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports (MoESCS) allocates one and a half hour weekly for history subject for the 9th grade and two hours for the 10th to 12th grades. High schools with Humanities track have more hours allocated weekly for History subject- three, five, and eight hours respectively per grade. The main issues covered on the topic of the first Republic of Armenia are May Heroic battles (separate section); treaties of Brest-Litovsk, Trabzon, Batumi, Paris, Sevres, Aleksandrapol, and Yerevan; Turco-Armenian wars; Armenian-Georgian and Armenian-Azerbaijani territorial issues (Subject Standards 2021, 64-8).

As it was in the case of Azerbaijani textbooks, the language used in the Armenian textbooks to describe historical relations of Armenia with neighboring Georgia, Azerbaijan as well as Iran and Turkey reflect the state's current political stance towards these countries. Republic of Armenia's National Security Strategy (NSS) document penned by the Ministry of Defense (Armenia's National Security Strategy 2020) states Azerbaijan as *hakarakord* (հակառակորդ), which is translated as adversary or rival. However, given the context, which mainly discusses Azerbaijan's stance in the Nagorno Karabakh conflict as a side which prevents and endangers peaceful resolution of the conflict, it is fair enough to say that Azerbaijan is regarded as an enemy neighboring state. Turkey is regarded as Azerbaijan's military-political ally. Both states (Azerbaijan and Turkey) are regarded in this document as security threats to Nagorno Karabakh and Armenia (NSS, 2020, 11). Georgia and Iran are regarded as friendly neighbors (*baridratsiakan* - բարիդրացիական), and their relations with Armenia are termed as mutually beneficial (NSS 2020, 12).

The main difference between the last Soviet and post-Soviet history textbooks in Armenia is the 'Karabakhization' of the history, as well as revision of the idea and period of the First Republic. Mktrchyan describes this shift as idealization versus previous demonization (Mkrtchyan 2015, 176). Even though the histories of individual Soviet Republics became part of the school curriculums by the end of 1930s, they were presented on the basis of Soviet memory politics, putting a positive connotation on the Bolshevik revolution, sovietization of the republics, glorification of Communist heroes, etc. Similar to Azerbaijani case, this narrative served to the construction of the myth of 'people's friendship,' joint struggle for

communism, Soviet nationality politics, as well as to the attribution of enemy image to certain historical figures who in the post-Soviet narrative became national heroes (Garegin Nzhdeh, Andranik Ozanian, etc). Several chapters of history in the Soviet Armenian history textbooks were considered taboo. Among those were the relations of Armenia with its neighbors (Minasyan 2009, 11). Contrary to this, the idealization process of post-Soviet historiography led to a diametrically contradicting narrative about the first republics' period. Sovietization of Armenia was not glorified anymore, former Communist heroes are presented as anti-national actors, etc. The aim of the history textbooks from the 1990s onwards was to strengthen patriotic feelings. The 1987 edition of the history textbook contains a slight hint to the territorial issues between the first three South Caucasian Republics. However, Mkrtchyan notes that it is not presented as a separate issue, but rather as an indirect statement about "the fratricidal clashes organized by Dashnaks, Mussavats, and Mensheviks" in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia respectively (Mkrtchyan 2015, 177-8).

Quantitative, qualitative measures, and linguistic dimension of Armenian history textbooks

Quantitatively, we calculate how much space is given in the history textbooks to Azerbaijan and Georgia. Qualitatively, we analyze what message the textbooks transmit (Pingel 2010, 66). In addition, we will investigate the language of the mentioned messages, as well as how facts, events, persons, and processes are portrayed.

In the 9th grade history textbook (175 pages in total) Armenian-Georgian relations in the context of the first three republics are given half a page space, while Armenian-Azerbaijani ones are given one page. In the 11th grade history textbook (230 pages in total) again in the context of the first three republics Armenian-Georgian relations are given one and a half page space, while Armenian-Azerbaijani ones are given three pages. It is important to note that the narrative in the textbooks does not contain the terms 'Georgian' or 'Azerbaijani' in terms of ethnic group or people. Instead, it uses the words Georgia and Azerbaijan. Even though the narrative discusses both the Armenian-Georgian and the Armenian-Azerbaijani territorial conflicts, it has a precise linguistic style that is in harmony with the National Security Strategy's presentation of each country. As such, there are almost no negative adjectives attached to

Georgia. The text mentions Georgia's uncompromising position, occupation of territories, violation of an agreement, but eventually states that friendly neighboring relations were restored. Whereas, for Azerbaijan (as well as for Turkey) the adjectives range from slaughtering, blood-thirsty to hostile characterizing them as rival entities who had unsubstantiated claims over Armenian territories and who pose a potential threat of deportation and massacres for Armenians from lake Sevan to Baku. In terms of self-presentation all actions of Armenian historical figures, apart from pro-Bolsheviks within the Armenian Republic, are presented as national self-defense.

Examples of *Injustices:* Case Study of the Relations of the First Three Republics in South Caucasus

Territorial disputes and short war between Armenian and Georgian Republics

The issue is presented under the title 'Armenian-Georgian relations' as a sub-chapter devoted to Armenia's foreign relations during the period of the First Republic. Before touching the issue, the text gives a very brief context regarding establishing friendly neighborly relations with its direct neighbors. Iran is already mentioned as a friendly-neighbor country. According to the text, Georgia's territorial claims over Akhalkalaki, Borchaly and Lori regions, which all are claimed to be Armenian in the book, were preventing the establishment of friendly-neighbor relations between Armenia and Georgia. Due to Georgia's uncompromising stance it was impossible to avoid the war, the history textbooks state, which started as a dispute and transformed into an armed conflict (Gevorgyan, Khachatryan, and Amatuni 2014, 17). The 2005 edition names Georgia's entry to the region as a starting point of the conflict. According to the 2008 edition, Armenian units entered Lori after Georgian authorities started to violate the rights of local Armenians. The most recent textbooks for 9th (2014) and 11th (2015) grades repeat the 2005 edition narrative: "In October-November of 1918 Georgia attacked the regions of Akhalkalaki, Akhaltsikhe and southern Lori. In December Armenia started the defense of its territories against Georgia and won over the course of a 20-day war. With the mediation of Triple Entente a ceasefire was signed on December 31st 1918. A Reconciliation Conference that took place in Tbilisi between January 9-17th, 1919 announced Lori a neutral zone and Javakheti a

debatable territory. Friendly-neighborly relations between Armenia and Georgia were restored" (Gevorgyan, Khachatryan, and Amatuni 2014, 18). The Georgian narrative presents Armenia as a side that attacked first and one that had claims over the Georgian regions up to Gori, including Tbilisi. The 2003 edition of Georgian history textbook even calls the Armenian side an *aggressor* that was pulled back with great losses. The 2008 edition repeats the same narrative but is more cautious with adjectives: "the Georgian troops succeeded in repelling the attack of the Armenian troops and launched a counter-attack soon after" (Mkrtchyan 2015, 180-1). It is clear that both sides present completely opposing narratives about the same period and on the matters of who attacked first and what territories were claimed. The narrative in the Armenian textbooks continues as follows: during the 1920s Turco-Armenian war Georgia entered its military forces into Lori with an excuse to protect it from Turkish forces. However, violating its agreement with Armenia, Georgia established its military state in the Lori region (Gevorgyan, Khachatryan, and Amatuni 2014, 19). Georgian-Armenian territorial disputes finally resolved after the complete sovietization of the region in 1921 when Akhalkalaki region was attached to Georgia and Lori region to Armenia. The two countries signed a separate treaty on the issue. Soviet Georgia recognized the Lori region's attachment to Armenia and Soviet Armenia gave its consent for the attachment of the Akhalkalaki region to Georgia. Georgian textbooks are silent on further development of the issue and its final resolution (Mkrtchyan 2015, 181).

As presented in the theoretical part of this article, the authors of all editions of both Armenian and Georgian history textbooks committed acts of *injustice* on two levels: towards their own national histories, and towards the national history of their friendly-neighboring nation. All the editions of these textbooks lack a bi/multi-perspective dimension. There are no explanations for the Georgian side's claims over the disputed territories in the Armenian textbooks. There are also no justifications for the Armenian side's claims apart from the historical legitimacy over the territories under question. This attitude is mirrored in the Georgian textbooks. However, apart from one mentioning of the term aggressor in the Georgian 2003 edition of the textbook neither of the sides present one other as a hostile country. Hence, one can assume that both countries' aim is to create an image of a friendly state- one that corresponds to the description provided in the state's national security strategy.

Territorial disputes between Armenian and Azerbaijani Republics

Similar to the Armenian-Georgian disputes, the issue is presented in sub-chapters devoted to Armenia's foreign relations during the period of the first republic. However, unlike the Georgian case, Armenian-Azerbaijani relations are discussed interconnectedly with Armenian-Turkish ones in sub-chapters titled 'Threats to the internal stability' and 'Armenian-Azerbaijani relations.' The discussion in all the editions starts with a 'disclaimer' that a day after Georgia announced its independence, on May 27th, East Caucasian Muslim Republic declared its independence: "for the first time the toponym of north-eastern province of Iran -Azerbaijan- was used as a name for the country" (Gevorgyan, Khachatryan, and Amatuni 2014; Melqonyan et. al. 2015, 5). As the narrative does change neither in language, nor in agenda from one edition to another in the post-Soviet history textbooks, in the following lines we will present a summarized version of these narratives.

After the 'disclaimer' the text then continues to Turkey's and newly established Azerbaijan's claims for several regions of the First Republic of Armenia (Kars, Nagorno-Karabakh, Nakhichevan, Zangezur). These claims put the country under a hostile siege that created a necessity for the creation of an army in the First Republic of Armenia. Threats to the internal stability are presented as the use of spies and the diplomatic representatives of Azerbaijan in Yerevan (Khan Tekinski) to weaken the country from within: "Turkey was supporting local Muslim population against Armenian government with weapons and Azerbaijan with money" (Gevorgyan, Khachatryan, and Amatuni 2014, 12-3).

The tense relations between the Armenian and Azerbaijani Republics are presented as a result of the latter one's unsubstantiated claims over several Armenian regions. Those claims as well as the Ottoman military campaign to Baku in June 1918 are presented as *possibilities* for new deportations and massacres of Armenians in Baku and Yelizavetpol (today's Ganja) that forced the local Armenians to organize a self-defense. Immediately afterwards the text mentions that 30000 Armenians were slaughtered in Baku in that June (Gevorgyan, Khachatryan, and Amatuni 2014, 19-20).

The text then jumps to the regions of Nagorno-Karabakh and Zangezur where an 'anti-Armenian' Khosrov Bek Sultanov was appointed as a general and to Nakhichevan which was given to Armenia in the spring of

1919. Due to the skirmishes of local Muslim population supported by Azerbaijan and Turkey, the majority of local Armenian population of the region migrated (Gevorgyan, Khachatryan, and Amatuni 2014, 20). In the end of 1919 and beginning of 1920 Armenian-Azerbaijani rivalry restarted in the regions of Nakhichevan and Zangezur. Garegin Nzhdeh managed to establish a stronghold in Zangezur. Whereas, in the March of 1920 Azerbaijan started a large-scale attack in Karabakh, the textbooks state. During these attacks, on March 22-23, 1920, by the order of blood thirsty Khosrov Sultanov, Shushi's Armenian population (over 3 thousand people) were slaughtered and the Armenian districts of the city were burnt (Melqonyan et. al. 2015, 196). The 9th Congress of the Armenians of Karabakh proclaimed the region as part of the Republic of Armenia. Situation in the region drastically changed after April with the sovietization of Azerbaijan (Gevorgyan, Khachatryan, and Amatuni 2014, 21).

One of the vital issues for the Armenian Republic, as the textbooks mention, was the establishment of cordial relations with Russia which was going through internal struggles for power. Russia was not keen on recognizing the independence of Armenia as it saw the latter as a Triple Entente ally. After the sovietization of Azerbaijan, Soviet Russia's Command of 11th Red Army presented an ultimatum to Armenia forcing the latter to remove its military forces from Karabakh and Zangezur (Gevorgyan, Khachatryan, and Amatuni 2014, 30). According to the textbooks, Soviet Russia's eastern politics complicated even more the situation for the First Armenian Republic as it signed secret agreements with Kemalist Turkey and Azerbaijan against Armenia (Melqonyan et. al. 2015, 185).

In the regions of the Armenian Republic that Turkey and Azerbaijan claimed (Kars, Karabakh, Nakhichevan, Zangezur, Sharur-Daralagyaz, Surmalu, etc) local Turkish military units established independent republics, so called *shuras* that rejected to obey the Armenian government (Melqonyan et. al. 2015, 181). These are the units that Turkey supported with weapons and Azerbaijan with money. On June 18th, 1920 not far away from the capital Yerevan in Zangibasar, Armenian government gave an ultimatum to the armed Turkish forces. The latter refused to recognize Armenian power which was followed by three-day struggles after which

the region was *completely pacified.* Same happened in the regions of Olti, Artashat, Nakhichevan and Sevan (Melqonyan et. al. 2015, 186).

With the Tbilisi treaty, signed on August 10, 1920, Russia recognized the Armenian Republic. In return Armenia agreed to allow *temporarily* for Soviet military forces to be positioned in Karabakh, Zangezur and Nakhichevan. The Turco-Armenian war of 1920 allowed Soviet Russia to establish more firm ground in Armenia for the latter's sovietization which happened on October 28th. Along with the sovietization of Armenian Republic a treaty was to be sign according to which Russia and Azerbaijan were supposed to recognized Armenia's rights over Nakhichevan and Zangezur, while Armenia was to give up its claims over Karabakh and allow Russia to mediate its territorial issues with Turkey. However, Russia's soviet rulership did not agree to the terms of the treaty (Gevorgyan, Khachatryan, and Amatuni 2014, 34).

According to the Batumi treaty, the Armenian side was supposed to dissolve its military units in Baku. Armenian National Assembly in Baku, however, disregarded this requirement and by cooperating with Democratic Commissars of Baku (headed by Stephan Shahumyan) started a self-defense. The book only talks about Armenian casualties (30 thousand) after the entrance of Turkish military forces into the city. 26 commissars of Baku among whom was also Shahumyan were shot (Melqonyan et. al. 2015, 194).

While the detailed Azerbaijani narrative of the same events is presented in the previous section of this article, we want to focus here on certain selective omissions of wording in the Armenian narrative. To start with, there is no mentioning of Armenian anti-Azerbaijani activities within the territories that were under the control of Azerbaijan's First Republic. As in the case with Georgia, there are no explanations for Azerbaijan's claims over the disputed territories in the Armenian textbooks, as well as justifications for the Armenian side's claims over these territories. While the violence by Azerbaijan is presented as massacres and slaughters, the Armenian violence in Zangibasar, Olti, Artashat, Nakhichevan and Sevan against its Muslim population is presented as 'pacification' of the region. This example is very illustrative to the point made in the theoretical section of this article: the creation of "we" as always, the glorified ideal heroes, and "others" as predatory and treacherous enemies. The nation which is presented from the self-defensive perspective, and which fights

for its right of existence as a glorified idea is pacifist in nature, incapable of slaughtering and massacre. However, the March events of 1918 in Baku which are omitted from the Armenian narrative of history textbooks say otherwise. The struggle for the control over the city between Bolsheviks (headed by Shahumyan), who managed to get support of local Armenian Dashnaks, and Musavatists resulted not only in the latter's loss but also around 6000 casualties who over the course of four days were massacred in the streets of Baku. These events played a significant role in the construction of an "enemy image" in post-Soviet Azerbaijan. Armenians were the enemy in 1918 and they are that enemy up to the modern conflict (Abbasov 2012, 33, 38).

As shown, in Armenian-Azerbaijani relations the authors of Armenian history textbooks again illustrate acts of *injustice* on two levels. However, this time the injustices are towards their own national history and national history of the 'enemy' neighbor. Unlike Georgia, which regardless of the conflict was presented as a friendly-neighboring country, Azerbaijan from the first statement in the textbooks is presented as a hostile state. In harmony with National Security Strategy's description of Azerbaijan as an adversary or enemy neighbor that prevents and endangers current conflict resolution, the national narrative in the history textbooks retrospectively crafted an equal image of an 'enemy' that has been present and endangered Armenia and Armenians since its proclamation in 1918.

Recommendations

The escalation of the Second Nagorno Karabakh war in 2020, the situation between the two countries on the borders after the second war, as well as the process of final demarcations illustrate that there is still a long way for these two states to change their approach to one another in terms of their national security strategy and its implications on dozen domestic policy outcomes, including education and national history textbook edition - the focus of this article. This implies that it is highly unlikely for these states to appear as *deus ex machina* and voluntarily change the national standards for textbook writing in the near future. Therefore, any proposed change will not make the cut in the Ministries of Education in both countries. Consequently, we suggest creating alternative textbooks as the most possible outcome along with those approved/published by the respective states.

By using civil society/NGOs and various social media initiatives (such as Bright Garden Voices, Caucasus Crossroads on Facebook, CaucasusTalks, et al.) as a starting platform, we aim to raise awareness among the young generation through podcast and/or webinars, to inform them about the ways history textbooks are instrumented, the ends they serve to, and the desperate need for the alternative history textbooks that is neither taught at schools, nor is expected in the foreseeable future due to uncompromising rivalry between the two neighbors which turned the history writing into a bare fabricated story-telling.

Conclusion

Teachers used history textbooks which in their turn were written by scholars who based their work on the requirements of the national curriculum. The state in its turn defines the curricular standards for textbook development (Mkrtchyan 2014, 152). Textbooks are not the only force that creates national stereotypes; hence their revision is not going to entirely eliminate an ethnocentric or nationalistic interpretation of the past (Koulouri 2001, 15). Textbooks cannot be innovative if the state ideology controls the system of their production. With the 'Karabakhization' of national histories of Armenia and Azerbaijan and after the First Nagorno Karabakh war none of these republics underwent the process of *transitional justice*. Moreover, for about three decades the frozen conflict that until now, a year after the Second Nagorno Karabakh war, sought its final resolution fueled more distorted representations of one's 'own' and 'others' national history. It is the hope of the authors that the current article with its theoretical approach will contribute to the processes of *transitional justice* of both republics.

Disclaimer

It is important to highlight that in this article we do not intend to express historical truth, nor do we want to consider events from the point of view of historical science in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Our prime aim rather will be to illustrate historiographic injustice that is committed by Armenian and Azerbaijani historical narratives. By the same token, there will be certain toponyms (city names) throughout the article which are potentially contested by either of the narratives. Therefore, when we critically analyze the national narratives, we will keep using both versions of the toponyms in order to give the reader a chance to be acquainted with both perspectives. However, when we simply

describe these narratives directly presented from the textbooks, we will keep only one version of the toponym (the one used by the textbook). This method will help the reader to see both bi\multi-dimensional perspective (the one we used) and the one-sided perspective (the one that is used in the history textbooks) of the narratives all at once.

Bibliography

Abbasov, Ilham. 2012. "The History of Azerbaijan: Deconstructing the 'Age-Old Friendship' and the Deadly 'Feud' Myths." In *The South Caucasus and Turkey: History Lessons of the 20th Century*, edited by Sergey Rumyantsev, 20-46, Tbilisi: Heinrich Boll Foundation.

Amirov, Mubariz, ed. 2011. Tam Orta Məktəbdə Tarixin Fəal/İnteraktiv Təlimi Metodikası. [Interactive training of History-teaching at Secondary schools.] Baku: Yeni Nashr. http://anl.az/el/alf7/em_tom.pdf

Armenia's National Security Strategy. 2020. "Հայաստանի Հանրապետության Ազգային անվտանգության ռազմավարություն." [*Armenia's National Security Strategy.*] https://www.primeminister.am/u_files/file/Different/AA-Razmavarutyun-Final.pdf

Azerbaijan's National Security Strategy. 2007. "Azərbaycan Respublikasının milli təhlükəsizlik konsepsiyası." [The national security concept of the Republic of Azerbaijan.] May 23, 2007. http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/13373

Brubaker, Rogers. 1998. "Myth and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationalism." In *The State of the Nation: Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism*, edited by John A. Hall, 272-306, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

CIMERA. 2007. *History Teaching in Georgia Representation of Minorities in Georgian History Textbooks.*. http://www.cimera.org/pdf/History_Teaching_in_Georgia.pdf

Ferro, Marc. 2003. *The Use and Abuse of History or How the Past is Thought to Children.* London-New York: Routledge.

Gready, Paul and Simon Robins. 2017. "Rethinking Civil Society and Transitional Justice: Lessons from Social Movements and 'New'

Civil Society." *The International Journal of Human Rights*21, no 7: 956-975.

Guliyeva, Humay. 2010. "Karabakh: A Long and Winding Road to Distant and Difficult Peace." *Caucasus Editions*. June 15, 2010. Accessed September 8, 2021. https://caucasusedition.net/karabakh-a-long-and-winding-road-to-distant-and-difficult-peace-2/

Koulouri, Christina. 2001. "The Tyranny of History." In *Teaching the History of Southeastern Europe*, edited by Christina Koulouri. Thessaloniki: Petros Th. Ballidis & Co. 15-25.

Minasyan, Sergey. 2009. "Armenia's Attitude Towards its Past: History and Politics//Writing National Histories: Coming to Terms with the Past." *Caucasus Analytical Digest* No. 8:10-13.

Ministry of Education Republic of Azerbaijan. 2021. "Study plan for I-XI grade groups during 2021-2022 academic years." August 20, 2021. Accessed November 11, 2021. https://edu.gov.az/uploads/emre-elave/2021/f415-emre-elave01-02.pdf

Ministry of Defense of Republic of Azerbaijan. 2022. Accessed January 28, 2022. https://mod.gov.az/az/ermenistan-azerbaycan-munaqisesi-599/

Mkrtchyan, Satenik. 2015. "Armenia-Georgia Relations (1918-1921), as Reflected in School Textbooks: "Wars" or "Dialogues" of Memories." Heinrich Böll Stiftung, Tbilisi: 169-184 . https://ge.boell.org/sites/default/files/uploads/2015/11/satenik_mkrtchyan.pdf

Mkrtchyan, Satenik. 2014. "Constructing National Identities through General Education: Religion in Armenian Schools." In *Religion, Nation and Democracy in the South Caucasus*, edited by Alexander Agadjanian, Ansgar Jödicke, Evert van der Zweerde, 149-162, London- New York: Routledge.

Mkrtchyan, Satenik. 2012. "The Republic of Armenia's Neighbors in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries in Contemporary World History Textbooks." In *The South Caucasus and Turkey: History Lessons of the 20th Century*, edited by Sergey Rumyantsev, 47-64, Tbilisi: Heinrich Boll Foundation.

Pingel, Falk. 2010. *UNESCO Guidebook on Textbook Research and Textbook Revision*, 2nd revised and updated edition. Paris-Braunschweig:UNESCO Georg Eckert Institut for International Textbook Research, .

Ricoeur, Paul. 1981 *Paul Ricoeur hermeneutics and the human sciences*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Rumyantsev, Sergey. 2008. ""Ethnic Territories" Presentation Practices in the Historical Textbooks in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan and Georgia." *Internationale Schulbuchforschung* 30, no. 4: 811-824

Rumyantsev, Sergey. 2012. "Introduction: 'History Lessons' in the year of 'Anniversay'." In *The South Caucasus and Turkey: History Lessons of the 20th Century*, edited by Sergey Rumyantsev, 9-18, Tbilisi: Heinrich Boll Foundation.

Schwartz, Donald W. 1994. "Introduction." In *Nationalism and History: The Politics of Nation Building in Post-Soviet Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia*, edited by Donald V. Schwartz and Razmik Panossian, 1-11 Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Smith, Anthony D. 2001. *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

State Subject Standards of General Education for Armenian History. Accessed November 8, 2021. https://escs.am/files/files/2020-07-17/a266911a693f809df0b4aa3175b0bcdb.pdf

Vesely, Lubos, ed. 2008. *Contemporary History Textbooks in the South Caucasus*. Prague: Association for International Affairs.

Zolyan, Mikayel. 2012. "Writing the History of the Present: The Post-Soviet Period in Armenian History Textbooks." In *The South Caucasus and Turkey: History Lessons of the 20th Century*, edited by Sergey Rumyantsev, 145-169. Tbilisi: Heinrich Boll Foundation.

Аймермахер, К., Бордюгов Г. Ред. 1999. *Национальные истории в советском и постсоветских государствах*, Москва, «АИРО-ХХ». [National Histories in Societ and Post-Soviet States. Moscow].

Воронков, В., Карпенко, О., and Осипова А. *Расизм в языке образования.* [Voronkov, V. Karpenko O. and Osipova A. Racism in the Language

of Education. St. Petersburg: Aleteia, 2008.]St. Petersburg: Aleteia, 2008.

Гамагелян Ф.; Румянцев С. "Армения и Азербайджан: Конфликт в Нагорном Карабахе и Новая Интерпретация Нарративов в Учебниках Истории." *Мифы и Конфликты на Южном Кавказе*, том 1, Инструментализация исторических нарративов. [Gamaghelyan Philip, Rumyantsev Sergey. Armenia and Azerbaijan: Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh and New Interpretations of History Textbook Narratives. In Myths and Conflicts in South Caucasus. International Alert, 2013]. International Alert, 2013, 168-192.

Шнирельман, Виктор. 2003. *Войны памяти: мифы, идентичность и политика в Закавказье.* [Shnirelman Viktor. 2003. Memory Fights. Myths, identities and politics in the South Caucasus].

Old Textbooks

Aliyev, Vali. 2004. *History of Azerbaijan: 6th grade textbook*, Baku: Aspoliqraf.

Barkhudaryan, V. 2008. *Armenian History: Modern Period. 9th grade textbook*, Macmillan Armenia.

Mahmudlu, Yaqub. 2003. *History of Azerbaijan: 7th grade textbook*, Baku: Tehsil.

Mahmudlu, Yaqub. 2001. *History of Azerbaijan: 8th grade textbook*, Baku: Aspoliqraf.

Mammadov, Isaq and Seyfaddin Qandilov,. 2009. *History of Azerbaijan: 11ᵗʰ grade textbook*, Baku: Chashioglu.

Mammadov, S. 2008. *History of Azerbaijan: 9th grade textbook*, Baku: Tehsil.

Valiyev, Tofiq. 2001. *History of Azerbaijan: 10th grade textbook*, Baku: Chashioglu.

New Textbooks

Aghalarov, Parviz.et. al. 2018. *History of Azerbaijan: 11th grade textbook*, Baku: Şərq-Qərb.

Akhmeteli, Nato, Besik Lortkipanidze, and Natia Pirtskhalava. 2020. *Georgian History 9th Grade.* Tbilisi.

Aliyev, Tevekkul, Perviz Agalarov et. al. 2017b. *History of Azerbaijan: 10th grade textbook*, Baku: Sherq-Qerb.

Aliyev, Vali, Ilyas Babayev, et. al. 2017a. *History of Azerbaijan: 6th grade textbook*, Baku: Tehsil.

Gevorgyan, Edik, Karen Khachatryan and Virabyan Amatuni. 2014. *Armenian History 9th Grade.* Yerevan: Zangak Publisher.

Mahmudlu, Yagub. et. al. 2014a. *History of Azerbaijan: 7th grade textbook*, Baku: Tehsil.

Mahmudlu, Yagub.et al. 2016. *History of Azerbaijan: 9th grade textbook*, Baku: Şərq-Qərb.

Mahmudlu, Yagub. et. al. 2014b. *History of Azerbaijan: 8th grade textbook*, Baku: Tehsil.

Mahmudlu, Yagub and Hafiz Jabbarov.. 2020. *History of Azerbaijan*: *5th grade textbook* Baku: Tehsil.

Melqonyan, Ashot, Pavel Chobanyan, Aram Simonyan. et. al. 2015. *Armenian History 11th Grade.* Yerevan: Zangak Publisher.

Formation of Discourses of National Identity in Armenia and Azerbaijan: From the Path to Independence to Nationalist Hegemony

Bahruz Samadov, Mane Grigoryan

The article presents a discursive analysis of the onset of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, from the beginning of the independence movements of Armenia and Azerbaijan in the late 1980s through the presidencies of Heydar Aliyev and Robert Kocharyan. The analysis traces the formation of new national identities in Armenia and Azerbaijan in opposition to each other, the consolidation of antagonism, and the importance of these developments for today's context.

Introduction

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia is one of the most long-lasting conflicts in post-Soviet space. The disputed Armenian-inhabited Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO), created in 1923 by Bolsheviks within the borders of Soviet Azerbaijan as an autonomous region had been an object of tension between the two republics already during Soviet times. In different periods, Armenian public intellectuals and party officials made appeals to the central

government in Moscow to attach the region to Armenia. The tensions had only intensified during the 1970s between the authorities in Baku and the oblast's leadership over political-economic issues (De Waal 2003, 138). From November 1987 to February 1988, representatives from NKAO visited Moscow three times to lobby for their cause. The increasingly weak central government in Moscow did not meet their demand, setting the groundwork for the outbreak of the first war in Nagorno-Karabakh, officially frozen in 1994.

The outbreak of the conflict in 1988 and inter-communal violence, mainly manifested in deadly pogroms, impacted the emergence of national movements and identities in both newly emerging independent countries. This article analyses the emergence of independence movements in Armenia and Azerbaijan in 1988, their further development, and their impact on both societies during the first years of independence. The object of our interest is the discourses of these movements and the reconstruction of national identities amidst the weakened socialist system. Our discursive reading of the independence movements focuses on events and their impacts, demands, subject positions, and ethical level. We explore their development and trace their antagonism, including the specific features of this process.

From Environmental Concerns to Popular Movements

On February 18, 1988, an environmental protest broke out in Yerevan. At the time, Yerevan was one of the most polluted cities in the Soviet Union. The initial demand of the protesters was the improvement of the condition of Lake Sevan, concerns about the risks associated with the Metsamor Nuclear Power Station and the Nairit Chemical Plant, and other environmental issues. According to Thomas De Waal, in the first few days of the protests, there were very few people present, but by February 24, the number of people had reached close to a million (2003, 23). The participation of large segments of society had transformed the demands of the protest. The people had started chanting "Karabakh" and "Miatsum", and soon the speakers and the political leaders were laying out the map they envisioned for uniting the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) with Soviet Armenia.

During the protests, the Soviet Union stood by its non-unification stance. Karen Demirchian, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Armenia, passed on Moscow's stance to the protestors, articulating by saying "the friendship of nations is our priceless wealth – the guarantee of the future developments of the Armenian people in the family of Soviet brotherly nations." (De Waal 2003, 25). The Soviet leadership attempted to rally people around the official ideology, diverting the protest discourse from becoming antagonistic. Amid these ongoing demonstrations, the ethnic Armenian minority in the Azerbaijani town of Sumgait faced pogroms that began on February 27 and lasted until the end of the month. The Sumgait pogrom predetermined the future of demonstrations in Armenia.

The protesters and political leaders of the movement were initially operating inside the Soviet system and its official discourse. Still, the re-articulation of national identity was starting to emerge. On June 11, 1988, the future first president of the Republic of Armenia, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, publicly presented the demands to be given to Moscow during the upcoming Supreme Soviet meeting (YouTube 2020e). He began his speech by listing injustices committed against the Armenian population in NKAO and articulated six demands. The primary demand was as illegal the recognition of the 1921 decision of the Caucasus Bureau to create the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) and place it under Soviet Azerbaijan's jurisdiction. Ter-Petrosyan added that this decision had made positive relations between the Armenian and Azerbaijani nations impossible. Ter-Petrosyan also spoke of the fate of the Armenians of Nakhichevan and injustices done to the Armenians in different parts of Azerbaijan, equalizing those injustices with the term "genocide." Additionally, he called on the Supreme Soviet to recognize the Armenian Genocide.

The first demonstrations in Azerbaijan occurred in November 1988, when the rumors about the upcoming plans to cut down the Topkhana forest and build an aluminum plant near the city of Shusha/Shushi in Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) had spread in Baku (De Waal 2003, 83). The rumors took place against a backdrop of protests in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, causing widespread anxieties and defining the future and ideological basis of the independence movement in Azerbaijan. Shusha/Shushi was of symbolic importance for Azerbaijanis, unlike other

parts of the Armenian-inhabited regions of Nagorno-Karabakh. The mostly Azerbaijani-inhabited Shusha/Shushi was perceived as "the birthplace of their musicians and poets" (De Waal 2003, 30) – a narrative supported by the Soviet ideologues in the construction process of Soviet Azerbaijani national identity.

The alleged plans to cut trees in the Topkhana forest were less about environmental concerns and more about the old ethnic tensions in Nagorno-Karabakh and the emerging nationalist imaginary. In nationalist discourse, ecological objects (e.g., forests, soil, mountains, seas, animals) in the territory of the national 'Self' are framed as 'the wealth of the nation.' Consequently, the damage to nature, if committed by members of the other communities, is conceived as an act of humiliation. In the case of the Topkhana forest, the alleged plans led to massive demonstrations in downtown Baku with the demand to stop the destruction.

In Laclau's theory of populism (2005), social demands play a vital role in forming collective identities and social movements. Social demands, be they claims or requests, are the fundamental units of analysis of social movements. When addressed to the locus of power while remaining unfulfilled, social movements can articulate these collective frustrations and form a discourse and identity centered around these unsatisfied demands. Laclau differentiates between democratic and popular demands. In the first case, a concrete, unfulfilled social demand creates a most likely small movement based on an isolated claim. In contrast, in the second case, numerous demands are united around a broader social subjectivity (Laclau 2005, 74) – such as with the re-articulation of the nation. In both Azerbaijan and Armenia, the first demands emerged from environmental and cultural-historical concerns. They were articulated as "democratic demands" within the existing system without constructing antagonistic frontiers between communities. However, these first demonstrations were enough to disrupt the social order that was not accustomed to mass protests: the accumulation of unsatisfied demands and social anxiety transformed the protests into nationalist populist movements. In both contexts, the movements produced affectively strong slogans that assured the mobilization of the masses.

In the newly forming re-articulation of Armenian national identity, the affectively laden signifier "Armenian Genocide" is seen as a red thread

moving through the narrative of the events leading up to the first war in
Nagorno-Karabakh. In the minds of many Armenians, Nagorno-Karabakh
and formerly Armenian-populated places in modern Turkey, which were
emptied of Armenians after the genocide, are connected because of a
similar fate. Poetry is a powerful tool for the re-articulation of such
signifiers that lead to the affective experience of collective memory. One
of the prominent writer-activists on the frontlines of the movement, Silva
Kaputikyan, wrote in her poem:

When they say "fifteen"
I remember a "year"
When they say "mountainous"
I remember "Karabakh"
They have their own flow in me,
Words are hidden from me,
They say "justice"
I remember my orphan, Van!

Kaputikyan's parents were Armenians who had escaped from Van
because of the genocide. For many, the removal of Armenians from many
towns of modern-day Turkey had a direct association with the events
surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh, constructing a horrific scenario: if the
Armenian nation did not protect Karabakh now, it would share the fate of
Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. Kaputikyan's poem represents the
associative series that represents the impacting trauma. In the poem,
"Karabakh" plays the role of the object of desire, while "Van" is associated
with the traumatic past.

Similarly, another author, Gurgen Gabrielyan, wrote in one of his poems:

Each of you is a new Gevorg Chaush,
[…]
Go forth to battle with the holy flag
So that the nation and homeland live freely
For the union of the brave son and mother
For the sake of Artsakh and all Armenians

In this poem, Gabrielyan sacralizes the movement and connects it to past
injustices, arguing that the nation once again needs heroes as it had before.
Comparing the participants to the historical national hero Gevorg Chaush,

the poet conceives the protesters as protagonists who would save Artsakh and all Armenians. Central to this narrative is that history is repeating itself and Armenians must be united in the face of the enemy that is not new but has come again from the past. In a popular song written and performed at the beginning of the 1988 Movement, the singer urges Armenians to unite for Artsakh because "[the] old enemy has not rested; he wants to massacre the Armenians again." Thus, national unity became the ethos of the movement. In addition to the Armenian Genocide, the song also mentions the example of Nakhichevan and mentions how its Armenian population has been forced out. With this narrative as the driving force, "Miatsum" became the central demand of the movement because it was seen as the only way to guarantee security for the ethnic Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The movement continued at such a pace that Moscow or even local political leadership could not keep up with it. The peaceful beginning of the movement quickly transformed into antagonism. As the collapse of the Soviet regime neared, the reshaping of the identities of its republics accelerated the process. Some political leaders were starting to see solutions outside of the Soviet system and a split occurred within the movement. In an interview given to Thomas De Waal, Ter-Petrosyan noted that at the beginning, the first leaders of the Karabakh Committee did not aim for the independence of Armenia and this is where the split among the leadership took place: "They thought that the Karabakh question had to be solved, by using the Soviet system. And we understood that this system would never solve the Karabakh issue and that the reverse was true: you had to change the system to resolve this problem." (2003, 57). In other words, the weakening of the Soviet state machine, which was not capable of meeting these political demands, had transformed the movement into an anti-systemic one.

While the events in the Topkhana forest were the catalyst of the mass demonstrations in Baku, the wave of ethnic Azerbaijani refugees from southern Armenia settling in Azerbaijan in early 1988 had already caused widespread anger and anxieties that damaged the Soviet Azerbaijani identity. According to their stories, in the Armenian cities of Meghri and Kapan, these refugees faced unprecedented violence and were forced to flee. Many settled in the industrial city of Sumgait (De Waal 2003, 18-19).

The case still raises many questions, but what is clear is that the outbreak of violence resulted in the first wave of Azerbaijani refugees. The first anti-Armenian pogrom that took place in February 1988, known as the Sumgait pogroms, lasted for three days and resulted in the death of dozens of ethnic Armenians. Later, Deputy General Procurator Katushev described the Sumgait events as "connected in the closest way with the events in Nagorno-Karabakh" (Beissinger 2002, 298). De Waal's description of the Sumgait tragedy as "the first violent fission of a 'Soviet' identity" (2003, 37) could also be described as the first widely known and shocking incident in the late 1980s in the Soviet Union that involved bloody inter-ethnic clashes that undermined the ongoing Perestroika policy. Later, almost 400 people were arrested and 84 active participants faced different criminal charges. In both societies, the Sumgait pogrom had enormously intensified nationalistic sentiments and mobilization. For many Azerbaijanis, as we will see later, the case was not that straightforward.

Counter-hegemonic movements offer their own narratives and myths that are meant to help people through the crisis and overcome instability. Thus, the set of material events in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh and the following Sumgait pogroms led to the emergence of the Meydan Movement ("Square" from the name of Lenin/Freedom Square, situated in the city center, where demonstrations took place) in Azerbaijan. Similar to Armenia's mass movement, at its first stages, the Meydan Movement did not demand independence from the Soviet Union but acted within the existing late socialist order. The movement was led by the mostly right-wing Popular Front of Azerbaijan (PFA). The leaders of the Meydan Movement, such as future president and pan-Turkist intellectual Abulfaz Elchibey, nationalist poet Khalil Rza Uluturk, and populist trade-unionist orator Nemat Panahov, effectively mobilized people around anti-Armenian sentiments.

In a video from late 1988, Abulfaz Elchibey (YouTube 2020c), surrounded by flags of both the Soviet and Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan, blamed the central government in Moscow for weakness regarding the pogrom of ethnic Azerbaijanis in Nagorno-Karabakh's capital, Stepanakert: "The problem is in the center, Moscow, who does not command in a proper way. [...] They should send an army to Stepanakert to bring order back. But they are not able to do that, and they do not want to do it." Later in

the same speech, Elchibey threatens the central government that Azerbaijani mothers will not "send their sons to the army service," adding that the three defendants of the Sumgait pogroms should be tried by the Azerbaijani authorities ("It is a matter of Azerbaijan", he argued) and not in Moscow.

Referring to the events in Sumgait, pan-Turkist poet Sabir Rustamkhanli, another leading figure of the Meydan Movement, claimed that the pogroms "were organized by powers from abroad, by Dashnaks, [as a part of] their cunning plans", articulating a conspiracy narrative that would prove that "[these events] should not smear our nation." (YouTube 2020d) Nationalist historian Ziya Buniatov promoted an even wilder conspiracy theory regarding the Sumgait tragedy. According to his version, which is widely accepted in Azerbaijani society, Armenians organized pogroms against themselves in order to discredit Azerbaijanis at the international level (De Waal 2003, 42).

Following Rustamkhanli, Azerbaijani intellectual and poet Bakhtiyar Vahabzade mentions "Lenin's national policy of brotherhood of nations" and demanded autonomy for ethnic Azerbaijanis from the authorities of the Armenian SSR considering their "current miserable condition." (YouTube 2020d). The rhetorical difference between the softer Vahabzade and hardline pan-Turkist orators proves that the Meydan Movement was not homogeneous: at least in the beginning, along with proponents of antagonistic nationalism, there were supporters of official Soviet ideology. Similar to Armenia, in Azerbaijan, too, the antagonistic interpretation of national identity was not hegemonic. Rather, the blamed 'Others' were either central Soviet or local governments or outside forces. Articulated in this way, the discourses of both movements did not reject the official discourse of internationalism and its relevant narratives, such as the friendship of nations. However, with the weakening of the central government, the antagonistic nationalist wings in both movements soon prevailed.

How can we trace these developments in Azerbaijan? In his seminal work, "Meydan Movement: 4 Years, 4 Months", Adalat Tahirzade recalls famous slogans of the movement. In the beginning, people used to chant "Long live Lenin's National Policy", "the USSR is one country, we will not allow its division", and "We are not nationalists, we are internationalists." With

the naturalization of nationalistic ideas, these socialist slogans were replaced by "Long live independent Azerbaijan", "We have two eyes – one is Baku, the second is Tabriz!" and "Long live democracy!" One of the most uniting and representative slogans was "We will die but will never give up Karabakh." (Tahirzadə 2021).

The nationalist social imaginary sacralized the meaning of Karabakh as an object of national desire. In a typically emotional speech, populist poet Khalil Rza Uluturk described Karabakh as "Azerbaijan's temple, Azerbaijan's artery, Azerbaijan's heart", (YouTube 2019) thereby essentializing it as naturally and spiritually belonging to Azerbaijan, thereby opposing Armenia's claims and giving to Karabakh an objective value. Sabir Rustamkhanli, in a rally in 1988, called for an urgent international symposium to "prove that Karabakh historically belongs to Azerbaijan." (YouTube 2021).

Claims, structurally similar to the discourse of Miatsum, were also articulated in Azerbaijan though these ideas were rather anecdotical and not consistent, unlike Elchibey's later irredentist "Whole Azerbaijan" that targeted Iranian Azerbaijan. In Tahirzade's book, we can find some evidence. In an early, pre-square demonstration in May 1988, Khalil Rza declared: "Treason against Azerbaijan has been going on for almost two hundred years. Azerbaijan is not divided into two, but into two hundred places. [...] Derbend, Borchali, Goycha, Zangezur... were torn from Azerbaijan. We demand autonomy for Azerbaijani Turks living in RSFSR, Armenia, Georgia!", (Tahirzadə 2021). Thus, the chain of equivalence of "lost lands" included not only the territory in Western Armenia (Zangezur and Goycha) but also Azerbaijani-inhabited areas in Georgia and Derbend. The loss of these territories was conceived as an historical injustice and the result of treason.

Through different discursive means (pseudo-historical narratives, populist rhetorical devices, and poetry) the early discourse of antagonistic Azerbaijani nationalism established a discursive relation of representation between the signifiers 'Azerbaijani Turks' (the nodal point of the national 'Self'", or the representative) and 'Karabakh' (the signifier of desire, the represented). In such a domain, the Armenian discursive-material presence in Nagorno-Karabakh was excluded and silenced.

The following events accelerated the antagonization of discourses and
created fertile soil for its naturalization in Azerbaijan. Between January 13-
15, 1990, radical nationalists committed even bloodier pogroms,
assassinating approximately 90 ethnic Armenians in Baku. After that, the
Soviet Interior Ministry invaded the city on January 20 and more than 130
ethnic Azerbaijanis were killed (De Waal 2003, 89). The events of "Black
January" re-territorialized material violence from Karabakh to Baku and
changed the status of the central Soviet government in Moscow from the
'distrusted' Other to the 'enemy' Other. Consequently, "Black January"
strengthened the idea of independence from Moscow. The cultural trauma
of "Black January", distributed through the horrific photographic and
video materials among members of the national community, also changed
the perception of the Self: while in antagonism with the Armenian Other
(other-perpetrator) only the ethnic Azerbaijanis in Armenia and Nagorno-
Karabakh were victims, in the case of the intervention of Moscow, all the
'honest citizens' of the nation were articulated as victims. For many
Azerbaijanis, "Black January" has become the beginning of independence
and "the most important national mourning day", the source of "grief and
pride" (Militz and Schurr 2016, 58).

The newborn political leadership of Armenia went on to deepen the divide
between the 'Us' (Armenia) and 'Them' (the Soviet leadership). A new
political party was born, aptly named the Armenian Pan-National
Movement. Ter-Petrosyan declared that the Sumgait and Baku pogroms
showed that Moscow was not interested in protecting Armenians
(Barseghyan 2003, 12), concluding that Armenia had to gain its national
independence. On September 21, 1991, Armenians voted to secede from
the Soviet Union. In the absence of the locus of power in Moscow, this
distrusted Other, another Other, was developed: the newly independent
Republic of Azerbaijan.

Thus, we are confronted with a set of subject positions in the dominant
discourses of the Meydan and 88 Movements: clearly, there is the
homogenized national Self – those who identify with the nodal point of
the nation – and the subject position of the other-victim: the ethnic
Azerbaijani minority in Armenia and ethnic Armenian minority in
Azerbaijan. These Others, despite differences, are closely related to the so-
called national selves. There are different Others: the distrusted central

government in Moscow and incompetent local governments; and Armenia and Azerbaijan, each increasingly turning from an entity distrusted into an enemy.

The ethical basis of both movements was constructed around a set of nationalist empty signifiers and the object of desire. In both cases 'Karabakh' was the primary object, which had been essentialized as an organic part of the national communities. The commonly shared spaces and the very possibility of future togetherness were excluded from nationalist imaginaries. This exclusion had resulted in horrifying pogroms and their de-facto negation through conspiracy theories. It is also worth understanding the ethos of movements: neither side glorified offensive violence or explicitly called for it. Instead, both sides expressed themselves as victims of the perpetuator-other. In the case of Azerbaijan, the pan-Turkist imaginary re-articulated the signifier of the Self as Azerbaijani Turks. In Armenia, the homogenized Self included the Armenians of Armenia and NKAO.

The war in Karabakh not only caused the emergence but also ended the political careers of many Meydan Movement leaders, including the short presidency of Abulfaz Elchibey, who came to power in 1992. In early April 1993, Azerbaijani-inhabited Kelbajar, a town outside Nagorno-Karabakh, was captured by Armenian forces, causing shock and accelerating the collapse of the government in Baku.

After the First Nagorno-Karabakh War

After the war, the national identity formation process continued similarly in Armenia. The more liberal Levon Ter-Petrosyan was forced to resign and in his place came the former president of Nagorno-Karabakh, Robert Kocharyan. Under Kocharyan's leadership, Armenian identity expanded to contain the diaspora and Nagorno-Karabakh. As Kocharyan himself put it, "It is obvious that at present Armenia, Karabagh, and the Diaspora are facing significant national issues that require urgent solutions. And it is much more obvious that these problems can be solved only if our three national attributes cooperate closely and permanently, led by national unity as the criteria." (Barseghyan 2003, 15). In this discourse, Armenia becomes the "Motherland of all Armenians" with each point of the trinity feeding off the others in the service of unity (Barseghyan 2003, 17).

During Heydar Aliyev's presidency (1993-2003) in Azerbaijan, the loss of Nagorno-Karabakh was a major issue in society. The war ended in 1994 when both sides signed the Bishkek protocols and achieved a ceasefire, leaving the Azerbaijani side wounded. For many Azerbaijanis, the truce was humiliating.

In his 1999 speech, Heydar Aliyev mentioned that the 1923 decision to establish autonomy in Nagorno-Karabakh even within the borders of the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic was unjust: "I have led Azerbaijan for 14 years. I know very well the history of the establishment of the Nagorno-Karabakh oblast in 1923. The granting of autonomy to Nagorno-Karabakh in 1923 was a disaster for Azerbaijan. … That autonomy granted in 1923 is a bomb planted inside Azerbaijan. It should have exploded at some point." (YouTube 2020b). Importantly, Heydar Aliyev's regime, despite its semi-authoritarian tendencies, did not rely on pan-Turkism and fierce nationalism as the previous Popular Front government did. However, the government remained ambiguous about the rights of Armenians over Nagorno-Karabakh following the societal consensus and articulated the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan as the only solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, though Aliyev accepted the need for "mutual compromises" (Brown 2004, 583).

In this regard, the friendly meeting between Heydar Aliyev and Robert Kocharyan in the Nakhchivan exclave of Azerbaijan is noteworthy. Both presidents agreed on the importance of compromises and the necessity of communication. Simultaneously, direct contact between the two countries' civil societies and intelligentsia was possible and not prohibited, continuing until the 2010s (Ghaplanyan 2010), when Azerbaijan drifted to full-blown authoritarianism.

The picture was quite different in Azerbaijani popular discourses. On the level of pop culture, the nationalistic rap song "Either Karabakh or Death" (1999) by the iconic band Dayirman is representative: "Young, elder, women, girls perish endless / Arms cut, eyes gouged out / Their cries spreading around like waves / The grave of a martyr is now more than one." The rap calls for "jihad" and stresses the Turkic identity of the nation. The video footage from the Khojaly massacre is used in the song's music video and was frequently shown on the populist-nationalist ANS TV channel, thus having an enormous impact on viewers. A 2001 poem by

Baba Punhan, a conservative Shia poet from the outskirts of Baku, similarly demonstrates how sacralized Nagorno-Karabakh has become and how its loss has been painful. Looking backward from an imaginary future, Punhan wrote:

Let the black land swallow me if Karabakh goes
I have no right to be alive if Karabakh goes
How many girls and wives fell into captivity?
Write a defector to my grave if Karabakh goes.
[…]
If we play with Armenians again,
They will demand more if Karabakh goes.(YouTube 2013).

It is clear to the reader of the poem that Nagorno-Karabakh and adjacent territories are already "gone", which means the nation has already experienced the loss. By mentioning "girls and wives" and "young, elder, women, girls", Punhan and Dayirman strengthen the feeling of disgrace and victimhood, pushing the Azerbaijani reader to re-experience the trauma of loss and booster the demand for ressentiment. During Heydar Aliyev's reign, Karabakh had become a sacred land and the need for revenge had intensified through the demonstration of various war crimes allegedly committed by Armenians during the war. Simultaneously, alternative discussions (such as the pogroms committed by Azerbaijanis) were excluded from public discourses while conspiracy theories about pogroms were normalized and accepted.

In popular discourse, the image of the enemy was constructed as evil, cunning, and non-negotiable. The latter questioned the attempts to solve the conflict by employing diplomacy. In the popular TV show *Qulp*, the sarcastic ashik Yadigar sings and dances:

The Lisbon summit deceives us,
We do not deserve to be reconciled with the enemy,
Future generations will spit in our faces,
Where are my honor and zeal?!
When is it time for me to return to my lands? When is it time?! (YouTube 2020a).

The OSCE Lisbon Summit took place in December 1996, during which the offer was for Nagorno-Karabakh to have the status of the highest level of

self-government within the borders of Azerbaijan. The resolution
supported the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and demanded the
withdrawal of Armenian forces from the occupied territories near
Nagorno-Karabakh (De Waal 2003, 256). While the summit was presented
as Heydar Aliyev's diplomatic victory, populist discourse questioned the
very possibility of reconciliation with Armenians as an act of dishonor.
While the governmental strategy was more pro-negotiations, the populist
and nationalistic discourses stressed the radical difference between
Azerbaijanis and Armenians, between whom no symbolic or material
common spaces and values were thought to be shared.

Conclusion

The discourses of independence movements in Armenia and Azerbaijan
left an indelible imprint on post-Soviet national identities in both
communities. Beginning as a reaction to spreading anxieties about the
fates of fellow countrymen in Armenia and Azerbaijan, the movements
quickly adopted antagonistic nationalist tropes. These tropes did not
include any vision of co-existing and (conflictual) togetherness. In both
cases, the 'selves' were imagined and articulated as defenders; neither of
sides accepted crimes committed by the members of their communities in
near or distant past.

The absence of a discourse on 'togetherness' and the hegemonic
interpretations that essentialized and sacralized the meaning of
'Karabakh' further deepened the conflict, making finding a solution all the
more difficult. The eruption of violence, te dissolution of the Soviet
national identity, and traumatic loss of territories all presupposed the
emergence of new national myths and narratives. These new narratives
were transmitted by politicians, poets, and populist leaders the
independence movements. They have constituted the basis of the post-
Soviet identities, embedding the sacralization of Nagorno-Karabakh.

In Azerbaijan, the loss was perceived as a national tragedy and disgrace.
The necessity of the return of Karabakh by any means necessary was a
consensual point of agreement between all mainstream social actors in the
country, playing the role of the national ethos. While the right-wing
opposition parties (the successors of the independence movement and
1992-1993 government) and popular discourse stressed the intention for

ressentiment through military involvement, Heydar Aliyev's statist government remained ambivalent, embracing constructive agonism at the international level and articulating popular antagonistic nationalistic narratives for the internal audience. In the end, Heydar Aliyev's regime did not challenge the popularly accepted antagonistic nationalism. Neither there was a clear policy on the future of Armenian-inhabited parts of Karabakh after its 'return.' Nevertheless, the need for its return constituted the collective goal of the national community for the next decades.

When analyzing the outcomes of the current post-war situation in the region, and the role of nationalism and national identity in the region, specialists should consider the beginning of the conflict and the construction of national identity. Here, it is essential to be aware of not reducing antagonistic nationalism in Azerbaijan to the government and propaganda tools: in fact, the emergence and spread of an antagonistic form of nationalism derived materially from the trauma of loss and discursively from the populist discourse of the independence movement.

To put it differently, antagonistic nationalism in Azerbaijan has not only been the prerogative of the ruling regime to legitimize itself. Rather, the entire political spectrum has been inflected by this nationalism from the first years of the country's independence. This deeply embedded antagonism has prevented the construction of alternative narratives. This would require the proliferation of the idea of shared spaces in the discourse of new progressive politicians, media initiatives, and social groups.

The widespread acceptance of conspiracy theories should be tackled in both societies. Civil societies, especially NGOs focusing on peace discourse, should touch on these seemingly uncomfortable topics. At the same time, they should produce models of spaces of togetherness while accepting the symbolic and cultural importance of Karabakh for both societies.

Bibliography

Barseghyan, Kristine. 2003. "Rethinking "Nationhood: Post-Independence
Discourse on National Identity in Armenia." *Polish Sociological
Review* no. 144: 399-416.

Beissinger, Mark R. 2002. *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the
Soviet State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brown, Cameron S. 2004. "Wanting to Have Their Cake and Their
Neighbor's Too: Azerbaijani Attitudes towards Karabakh and
Iranian Azerbaijan." *Middle East Journal* 58, no. 4: 576-96.

De Waal, Thomas. 2003. *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace
and War*. New York: New York University Press.

Ghaplanyan, Irina. 2010. "Empowering and Engaging Civil Society in
Conflict Resolution: The Case of Nagorno-Karabakh." *International
Negotiation* 15, no. 1: 81-106.
https://doi.org/10.1163/157180610X488191.

Laclau, Ernesto. 2005. *On Populist Reason*. London: Verso.

Militz, Elisabeth and Carolin Schurr. 2016. "Affective Nationalism:
Banalities of Belonging in Azerbaijan." *Political Geography* 54: 54-63.
https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2015.11.002.

Tahirzadə, Ədalət. 2021. *Meydan: 4 Il 4 Ay: Azərbaycan Xalq Hərəkatı
Haqqında Gündəlik-Qeydlər*. Edited by Cəmil Həsənli. Qanun.

YouTube. 2013. *Baba Punhan - Qarabag Getse Eger*. September 14, 2013.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nlDmOLvMZjg.

———. 2019. *Xəlil Rza Ulutürk - Qarabağ*. February 10, 2019.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=giOCMRwjczg.

———. 2020a. *Aşıq Yediyar - " Nə Vaxta Qaldı? " - Qulp*. March 17, 2020.
https://youtu.be/i1txwLvCikM.

———. 2020b. *Dağlıq Qarabağ Haqqında Bilmədikləriniz (Heydər Əliyev)*.
December 13, 2020.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TsSEvha0TTM.

_____. 2020c. *Əbülfəz Elçibəy - Meydanda*. June 30, 2020.
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QtDasuDsnbQ.

_____. 2020d. *Sabir Rüstəmxanlı, Bəxtiyar Vahabzadə - Meydanda*. JUne 23,
    2020. https://youtu.be/enRjkPuODLM.

_____. 2020e. *Լևոն Տեր-Պետրոսյանի Ելույթը, 06.11.1988*. January 10, 2020.
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BajHInvsA8o.

_____. 2021. *Qarabağ Tarixi Azərbaycan Torpağıdır! - Sabir Rüstəmxanlı
    Meydanda*.   March   18,   2021.
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJSmoUkHGaA.

Imperial Legacies in the South Caucasus: Armenian-Azerbaijani Relations, 1918-1920

Diana Yayloyan, N. A., Lala Darchinova

This article provides a conceptual framework for decolonial approaches and analyses Armenian-Azerbaijani relations between 1918 and 1920 based on the works of two political figures, Hovhannes Kajaznuni and Mahammad Amin Rasulzadeh. The article discusses their views on nationalism, peace, confederation, independence, relations with neighbors, and imperial struggles in the Transcaucasus region. We argue it is necessary to elaborate further on the decolonial dialogue, particularly when it comes to the importance of distinguishing between decolonial and nationalistic thinking in the South Caucasus. Based on this discussion, we provide recommendations for organizing decolonial dialogue, research, and discourse analysis in the South Caucasus and the larger post-Soviet space.

Introduction

The developments of the past years—the 44-day Nagorno-Karabakh war and the war in Ukraine—have made analysis of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Armenian-Azerbaijani relations heavily 'geopoliticised.' On the one hand, it is indeed important to keep one's fingers on the pulse of current world-scale processes, as the South Caucasus once again has become a scene for the active struggle of interests between bigger powers. On the other hand, the existing popular lenses of analysis diminish the regional actors' agency and the South Caucasus's internal struggles.

107

In this article, we use a decolonial lens of analysis to look at local views and discussions in the period between 1918 and the mid of 1920s to analyze how these competing and sometimes colliding interests played a decisive role in the emergence and shaping of the conflict in the South Caucasus. We analyze the works of prominent early twentieth-century officials in the First Republic of Armenia, Hovhannes Kajaznuni, and the First Republic of Azerbaijan, Mahammad Amin Rasulzadeh. Their works exemplify ongoing debates among the political elites of Armenia and Azerbaijan in the contexts of Ottoman-Russian tensions and aspirations for Transcaucasia. We look at the condition of in-betweenness that the Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders found themselves amid the rapidly changing geopolitical situation during and after World War I. While in May 1918, Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Transcaucasia obtained formal independence for the first time in history, the political leaders representing the nations could not overcome the mutual mistrust and establish cooperation, thereby enabling the imperial powers to exploit the situation. By looking at the writings of Kajaznuni and Rasulzadeh, we try to analyze the motives of these leaders' political choices and actions to explain why they could not overcome their fears and establish viable cooperation as independent states. We also show the inconsistencies in their criticism of imperialism, colonialism, racism, and oppression, which was reduced to the Russian (in both cases) and Ottoman (in the case of Kajaznuni) Empires, failing to extend to Western European colonization. While we do not claim that the decolonial approach is a single all-encompassing framework that can explain the history of the Armenia-Azerbaijani conflict, we believe that this approach can help show the patterns of the colonial legacy today and deconstruct some prevalent myths about the origins of Armenian-Azerbaijani hostility. Consequently, this approach can help us to critically analyze those two symbols of the First Republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia, Kajaznuni and Rasulzadeh, and offer alternative readings of their works.

One of the key values of the decolonial approach is its ability to expose how, despite the decolonization of Africa and Asia and the announcement of an equal, universalist, and international law, the legal and non-legal mechanisms of colonial powers persist and are used over the ex-colonies (Villalon 1998). Grosfougel argues that myths around the "decolonization of the world" obscure the reality of colonial governmentality today (Grosfoguel 2007). In the 1990s, the similar euphoria of becoming a

member of an equal, international law was shared by many ex-socialist countries, including Armenia and Azerbaijan, only decades later to be replaced by disillusionment with "the fixed position they have been assigned within the new world architecture" (Tlostanova 2012). Meanwhile, the acknowledgment and identification of continuity (or some form of it) in the hierarchical structure of power relations, rather than an illusion of a complete rupture and being equal actors of the international law, enables a deciphering of the colonial logic.

The decolonial approach also brings to light domestic ideological struggles, often disregarded by the deterministic neorealist approach that treats nation-states as a single unit of analysis. In the early twentieth century, local political thought in Armenia and Azerbaijan was far from homogeneous. One cannot ignore the severe ideological differences between the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun), the Ramkavar, Hnchakian parties and Armenian Bolsheviks, or the Azerbaijani Musavatists and the Azerbaijani Bolsheviks. Rather than explaining the political developments in the Transcaucasus in the early twentieth century through the prism of the conflict between imperial powers and nations as a single and homogenous unit of analysis, an approach that disregards the ideological heterogeneity that existed in the region at that time, we choose to zoom into the struggles and debates between the main political forces in Azerbaijan and Armenia and the relationship of these sometimes antagonistic forces vis-a-vis the rival imperial powers in a rapidly changing geopolitical context. Discussing the history of the First Republic of Armenia, Gerard Libaridian (2018, 1) argues that such an approach "places a good deal of the responsibility for the way Armenia's history has evolved on the shoulders of Armenian individuals and organizations who spoke and acted in the name of the Armenian people." This approach, which he defines as the "domestication and internalization of regional and international rivalries" and "the internationalization of domestic ones" (Libaridian 2018, 21) provides a more comprehensive and responsible reading of the past, emphasizing the agency of different political forces in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Hence our motivation is to adopt the decolonial approach to look at the challenging process of Azerbaijan's and Armenia's unprepared arrival at formal sovereignty, which also moves us beyond a methodological nationalism that would imply nation-states and nations are the modern

world's natural political and social formations (Wimmer and Schiller 2002). Armenia and Azerbaijan obtained formal sovereignty from the Russian Empire, but that did not yet mean that the mechanisms of domination faded away, nor did their formal sovereignty prevent the Ottoman Empire from launching a military campaign and exerting pressure on the region. In this sense, it was essential for us to establish the distinctive character of sovereignty that Azerbaijan and Armenia inherited in 1918 and the relationship the main political forces in both countries attempted to form with each other and with the imperial powers during their state formations.

The South Caucasus through the Decolonial Approach

This article does not seek to theorize the Russian or Ottoman Empires as colonial powers or how their hegemony in the region influenced regional relations and conflicts. Instead, we look at regional developments from a bottom-up approach through discussions of political figures, their challenges, and aspirations as well as the main regional obstacles. Meanwhile, to fully understand the context, it is necessary to survey recent literature on Russian colonialism and discussions on decolonization.

Postcolonial studies in general, as well as postcolonial theory and criticism, arrived in post-Soviet scholarship after an extended delay (Tlostanova 2019). By focusing solely on the Western European colonial experience, postcolonial scholars mostly disregarded the imperial relations of subordination outside of European colonialism and their legacies (Oskanian 2018), notably the Ottoman, Japanese, and Russian imperial legacies. One common feature that some of the postcolonial analyses of the Russian and Ottoman empires share is the emphasis on the Russian and the Ottoman condition of *ambiguity* and *in-betweenness* vis-a-vis the Western European colonial powers. Selim Deringil (2003) uses the concept of *borrowed colonialism* when referring to the late Ottoman "civilizing mission" mentality and its "project of modernity." In *Age of Anger: A History of the Present* (2017) Pankaj Mishra writes about the resentment felt by the Ottomans and Russians from their position of inferiority to the West, calling the feeling an "existential resentment of other people's being, caused by an intense mix of envy and sense of humiliation and powerlessness" (cited in Koru 2018, 3). As Kevork Oskanian (2018) argues, even today, the condition of ambiguity and in-

betweenness affects Russia's relationship with its claimed periphery and the West.

Viatcheslav Morozov argues that Russia must be viewed as a subaltern empire (Morozov 2015). A subaltern empire is a concept and an empirical phenomenon derived from Morozov's macro-level analysis of the interaction between the domestic context and international developments. Morozov asserts that the postcolonial body of literature was predominantly engaged in analyzing Russian imperial policies, viewing Russia as a colonizer/Self while ignoring the external impact of the hegemonic order and how this impact has been received in the Russian state imagination (Morozov 2015). Margaret Dikovitskaya (2002) argues that across five centuries the Russian Empire utilized expansionist policies at the expense of the colonized people's lands and this qualifies Russia as a colonizer, thus as "a subject/Self rather than an object/Other." She sees the continuity of the Russian colonial mindset in the Soviet Union, which enormously expanded its territory and orbits of influence after the Second World War, imposing its ideology on the peoples of Central Europe, the Baltics, and Asia (Dikovitskaya 2002).

Alexander Etkind provides a valuable account of the Russian imperial conquest and subordination of its own heartlands, characterized as both internal and external colonization since Russia was colonizing not only non-Russian but also Russian people. He makes a valuable contribution to postcolonial scholarship by turning "the focus onto Russia's internal problems, which have not previously been discussed in postcolonial terms" (Etkind 2011, 2). Amid the scholarly debates as to whether Russia qualifies as a colonial power, it is interesting to observe that the terminology of colonialism was already used in the mid-nineteenth century by the Tsarist government. Etkind (2011, 250) notes:

> In 1907–17, Problems of Colonization (Voprosy kolonizatsii) was the title of the official journal of the Resettlement Administration, an agency that had been founded in 1896 within the Ministry of Internal Affairs and later moved into the Ministry of Agriculture. Led by their "etatist and technocratic ethos," officials of this administration oversaw the colonial efforts of the state that were directed both onto the reorganization of the Russian heartlands (Stolypin reforms) and the migration of the peasantry to Siberia, Central Asia, and Transcaucasia.

In 1828, Alexander Griboedov applied to the Tsarist government with a plan "to resettle many thousands of peasants from central Russia to the Caucasus, creating massive colonies there" (Etkind 2011, 110). The interesting nuance here is that Griboedov saw the settler form of British colonization of North America as the best model for the Russian colonization of the Caucasus (Etkind 2011), as compared to the overseas British colonization of India. Contrasted themselves with the European imperialist powers, the Tsarist elite saw Russian imperialism as relatively more tolerant and assimilationist: "We are not Englishmen, who in India strive by no means to mingle with the native races and who for this reason, sooner or later, may pay with the loss of that country, where they will have no ties of *relationship;* our strength, by contrast, up until now has consisted in that we assimilated the defeated peoples, blending with them peacefully" (Mikhail Veniukov cited in Morrison 2012, 327).

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has raised serious discussions on Russian imperialism and the calls to decolonize Russia (Gunko 2022). The decolonial turn in Russia is seen as a prerequisite for questioning and eliminating the Russian imperial ambitions both in relation to the non-Russian regions of the Russian Federation and former Russian colonies: "To solve Russia's antagonistic relations with its neighbors, both the Russian state and society need to confront their country's imperial identity" (Kassymbekova and Mara 2022, 1).

While the discussions on decolonization from the "Russian imperial gaze" (Gunko 2022) are essential, the abundance of opinions on the decolonization process in the post-Soviet realm raises questions related to the methods of dismantling the power hierarchies produced by Russian colonial governmentality. What is understood under decolonization? How to decolonize the cultural legacy produced by the non-Russian peoples in both Tsarist and Soviet times? Should it be entirely rejected? If the answer is yes, then the question is, What will replace the colonial forms of knowledge? While realizing the need for a decolonial dialogue in the post-Soviet space, how do we conceptualize such a decolonial dialogue and how do we see it happening in practice? All these questions will enable us to scrutinize the concept of decolonization and make sure we distinguish between decolonial and nationalistic thinking. In the early twentieth century, some proponents of anti-imperialist struggle would also turn out to be staunch nationalists exerting no less oppressive and

anti-democratic impulses toward other ethnic and religious groups. Decolonization should occur not only in politics, culture, or economics but also in the realm of epistemology and within the critical discourses that deal with imperial-colonial issues (Tlostanova 2019).

Madina Tlostanova (2012, 131) poses a question of how to engage in a meaningful postcolonial dialogue that would not adjust the post-socialist experience to the already established postcolonial theory "traditionally applied to the (ex-)colonies of various capitalist empires" but rather bring to the surface the postcolonial experience growing out of local histories. She argues in favor of problematizing the postsocialist experience by looking at the historically produced local dynamics of relationships in the post-Soviet center and periphery instead of mechanically applying the methodological tools of postcolonial critique predominantly born out of Western colonial history (Tlostanova 2012). Seeing the recognition of the colonial nature of our knowledge as the first step, Nurulla-Khojaeva (2016) proposes *dakhlez*, a philosophical concept that builds a balance between the values of the plural-cyclic culture of the Central Asian region and the influence of external cultures.

Decolonial dialogue has the potential to articulate new ways of rethinking the lasting structural dimensions of the contemporary logic of coloniality in the South Caucasus, offering an alternative framework for understanding the origins of the conflict. The decolonial approach aims to demonstrate the "dark sides of modernity," parts of history that have been extruded and muted by dominant narratives. Finally, decoloniality seeks to bring to the surface narratives of people that have either been long forgotten or are misinterpreted today.

Overview of Critical Political Developments in the Early-Twentieth-Century Transcaucasia

In this section, we provide a brief overview of the turbulent process in Transcaucasia from 1900-1920. During the first twenty years of the twentieth century, the region experienced several territorial reorganizations for which the Russian Empire would continuously dictate the administrative subdivisions of the region: the First World War; the Ottoman armed forces' military incursion in the Transcaucasia in 1918; two revolutions in Russia, the collapse of empires; the formation of the short-lived Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic of 1918; the

proclamation of independence of Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia; and their Sovietization in 1920-1921 by the Bolshevik government.

Firuz Kazemzadeh provides valuable insights regarding the political developments in the early twentieth century with regard to Armenia-Azerbaijan relations in his book *The Struggles for Transcaucasia* (1951, 215): "the distribution of population in the border regions between Armenia and Azerbaijan was such that no definite demarcation line could be drawn." Kazemzadeh elaborates that "Azerbaijani nomads were one of the sources of constant trouble" (1951, 215). These nomads for centuries had driven their flocks from summer residences to winter ones. With the establishment of nation-states and the drawing of borders, such movement of nomads created a serious obstacle on the border of the two newly emerging nations. Kazimzadeh (1951, 215) notes that "now that Armenia claimed the mountains, it tried to systematize migrations by issuing identification papers and certificates of residence to the nomads, establishing guard posts, custom houses, and other such obstacles on their path. The protests of the Azerbaijani Government were of no avail."

Emerging as the issue of free movement, the conflict was tangled up with numerous factors such as imperial interests, rising nationalism, and greater instability in the region. The inactivity of the Russian imperial authorities aggravated the conflict; although they had the power to prevent the bloodshed by arresting the perpetrators or preventing criminal groups from committing massacres in the first place, the authorities abstained from intervention and remained passive. Viceroy of the Transcaucasia, Vorontsov-Dashkov, himself admits that during the Armenian-Azerbaijani massacres of February 1905, the authorities remained almost completely inactive (Kazimzadeh 1951). This fact is also discussed by Rasulzadeh (2014b) as one of the primary causes of recently increasing Armenia-Azerbaijan hostility.

The majority of the non-Russian peoples in Transcaucasia belonged to the peasantry, who shared a strong identification with their religion, class, and locality rather than with the abstract category of nation. Although the peasantry was often subjected to discrimination by tsarist officials or landlords, their grievances had not yet been articulated into nationalism (Suny 2011). The situation was different in urban spaces, where Georgians and Armenians were more dominant, with a vibrant life of intellectuals,

activists, and a developing working class, while Azerbaijanis were the least urbanized in this sense (Suny 2011).

Firuz Kazemzadeh (1951) claims that developments in the Russian Empire such as its defeat in the war with Japan and the revolution of 1905 coupled with growing nationalism all over Europe. This played a significant role in the transformations of the peripheries, especially the Caucasus. Along with Russian, Ottoman, and Iranian imperial powers, British, German, French, and Italian interests were present and further complicated the political dynamics of the region (Kazemzadeh 1951).

According to Georges Mamoulia (2021), several imperial forces had expressed their interest in Transcaucasia, namely the Ottoman Empire, Germany, and Bolshevik Russia. In the situation of the First World War, the interests of the allies were constantly changing (Brisku and Blauvelt 2020). In this turbulent situation, all three countries were promised different outcomes by different imperial powers. While Ottomans desired annexation of Azerbaijan (and considered Armenia and some parts of Georgia as its own territory), local elites were against it as it would mean the loss of independence whereas they were more inclined toward a confederation of the Caucasian states. The Ottomans also desired Batumi, while Georgians and Azerbaijanis were against this as it was the only access to the sea for the Federative Republic. However, the situation on the ground was changing so fast that these three countries had to adjust their foreign policies in order to guarantee their survival.

The Bolshevik seizure of power in Petrograd after the successful October Revolution in 1917 prompted the leading Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Georgian political forces to gather in Tiflis and form a provisional regional executive board. The task of the Transcaucasian Commissariat was to maintain order until the establishment of a democratic federative Russian republic (Hovhannisian 1969). The Georgian Social Democrats and the National Democrats, the Armenian Dashnaktsutyun (or Dashnaks), and the Azerbaijani Musavatists formed a union state, known as the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic (TDFR); it lasted one month, from 22 April and 26 May 1918. Although a short-lived experience, it provides glimpses into attempts of the leaders of three Transcaucasian nations to collectively discuss and find a solution to pressing issues such as border demarcation, land reforms, economy, and foreign policy (Brisku and Blauvelt 2020).

The Russian revolution and the withdrawal of the Russian imperial armed forces from the Transcaucasia region created an imperial power vacuum, which the Ottoman Empire saw as a good opportunity for seizing the region. Despite having victories, the Ottoman army had to retreat from Transcaucasia as a result of the military success of the Entente powers in the First World War (Panossian 2006). The fall of Kars on October 30, 1920, which remains one of the traumatic pages in the collective memory of Armenians, the occupation of Alexandropol (modern-day Gyumri) in mid-May and Gharakilisa on May 24-28, and the advancement of the Ottoman army towards the Ararat plain were perceived as an existential threat by the Armenian leaders (Zolyan 2021). Many Armenian genocide survivors, among them orphans who found a safe haven in these territories of the Russian Empire, were forced to flee again as a result of the Ottoman military incursions. The Armenian political forces viewed their Georgian counterparts as willing to deal with the Ottoman government while fearing that the Musavat Party might support the Ottoman army (Zolyan 2021). In spite of the existence of some kind of political self-governing system in the Caucasus, the region was not internally stable in addition to challenges stemming from its position as a crossroads between competing empires. In the midst of the ongoing economic and political crisis, the mistrust among the various political authorities within the region that were supposed to control Transcaucasia steadily grew.

One of the main priorities of the Azerbaijani Musavat Party within Transcaucasia was to ensure control over Baku. The leaders of the party were trying to convince the Transcaucasian authorities to show tangible support for taking Baku from the Soviets (Kazemzadeh 1951) following the March 2018 incidents of ethnonationalist violence that have recently been portrayed by Rasulzada as a new "Ashura"[8] or new "Karbala"[9] for Azerbaijanis. Armenians were facing serious insecurities in the eastern part of the region after the Bolsheviks signed the Brest-Litovsk treaty, by which Ardahan and Kars were to be returned to the Ottoman Empire. Although by that time Lenin's government had no actual jurisdiction in

---

[8] Ashura occurs on 10 Muharram according to the Islamic Hijri calendar. On this day, according to Shia confession of Islam, the third Imam Hussein bin Ali was assassinated by the troops of Khalifa Yezid bin Muaviyyah.

[9] Karbala is the place where Hussein bin Ali was killed.

Transcaucasia, this did not prevent it from transferring the districts of Kars, Ardahan, and Batum to the Ottoman Empire, in addition to promising to "disperse and destroy the Armenian 'bands' operating in Russia and in the 'occupied provinces' of Turkey" (Hovhannisian 1971, 38).

The major Armenian political force of that time, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, or *Dashnaktsutyun*, believed that only Russia could guarantee the safety of the Russian and Ottoman Armenians united into a progressive autonomous region (Hovhannisian 1971). Dashnaktsutyun was split between Avetis Aharonyan, Ruben Ter-Minasyan, and Artashes Badalyan, who opposed the declaration of independence, and Simon Vratsyan, Khachatur Karjikyan, Alexander Khatisyan, and Hovhannes Kajaznuni, who saw independence and securing peace with the Ottoman government as the only possible solution for the survival of Armenia (Hakobyan 2019). On the contrary, Azerbaijani political figures and the Musavat party saw the solution in confederation and viewed Dashnaktsutyun as a political force preventing them from achieving this goal by forming a stronghold of Russian imperialism in the region (Rasulzadeh 1930).

Contrary to the modern national historiographies of Armenia and Azerbaijan, the national independence of the three Transcaucasian republics in 1918 was a product of imperial contestation and ambitions in the region rather than a long struggle for national liberation. Unable to exert political will and cooperate on vital regional issues such as territorial disputes, economic issues, and foreign policy, the TDFR eventually collapsed.

In his memoirs published in 1924, Alexander Khatisov (cited in Ambartsumyan 2017) would express his disappointment with the inability of the TDFR to cooperate:

> These peoples [Armenians, Georgians, Azerbaijanis] received freedom without any preliminary mutual conversation initiated by the authorities. They did not agree among themselves, and often with opposite interests and always opposite ideas, about how to achieve their ideals—some dreamed of the help of the Germans, others—the Turks, while others—allies [Entente], fourth— Russians. In this chaos of thoughts, moods, sympathies, one must

look for the main cause of all the misfortunes that have befallen the Caucasus in recent years.

Mahammed Amin Rasulzadeh's Views on Imperialist Influence in the Caucasus

Mahammed Amin Rasulzadeh is treated as the founding father of the idea of national revival of Azerbaijanis by major opposition and nationalistic groups (Goltz 2015). He is regarded as a great thinker of Azerbaijani national identity and statehood. This section provides an alternative reading of Rasulzadeh's works on Armenia-Azerbaijan relations and national identity to deconstruct and decolonize the ultra-nationalist and militarist discourse of the Azerbaijani political elite, including both the government and the opposition. It demystifies the symbol of the dominant political groups in Azerbaijan who mobilize the public around a specific image of Rasulzadeh to justify their hatred towards Armenians with ethnonationalist ideas. We have no intention to side with Rasulzadeh's arguments or defend his claims. Our aim is to show that his views are misinterpreted by nationalist groups in modern-day Azerbaijan.

In the early twentieth century, political life in the Caucasus became more complicated with the formation of nationalist, pan-Islamist, pan-Turkist, Bolshevik, and many other political groups. During and after the decomposition of Tsarist Russia, Caucasian intellectuals were left with many questions and problems inherited from the previous form of rule. These issues were gradually gaining political patterns. The dominant political actors of the period were nationalists and socialists. Mahammad Amin Rasulzadeh was a prominent Azerbaijani political leader representing the ideological vanguard of the first Azerbaijani Republic. As a Muslim possessing revisionary views toward Russian elitism, Rasulzadeh wrote about language issues and harshly criticized the Tatars who were trying to speak in the Russian language with little to no Russian language skills. Gradually, these criticisms promoted by the Musavat Party leaders were transformed into political statements and proclamations of new cultural-political maxims. In the uncertainty following the collapse of the hegemonic ethnocultural and economic dominion in the region under the Russian Empire, Caucasian intellectuals attempted to define the nation, nationality, national liberation, national solidarity, and other terms derived from the European modernist

118

traditions. Rasulzadeh was one of those intellectuals who regularly published articles in different media outlets and was perceived as one the key authors among Muslims despite the fact that he did not have higher education. For him, defining these terms was the primary goal for state-building and the international relations of Azerbaijan. Thus, Rasulzadeh writes in the Siyavush of Our Century (2015), they created the state from nothing.

While the so-called civilized world was speaking in a new meta-language of pseudoscientific geopolitics, Rasulzade, urged on by security concerns and the need to find solutions for the functionality of local decision-making, myopically attempted to frame history and worldview. However, dissatisfied with the Western powers, i.e. Europe and the U.S., in his article "It Is the East's Turn", published on May 15, 1926 in the journal New Caucasus (Yeni Qafqaziya), he stated that even the most radical political movements in America and Europe were not concerned with political movements in the East. Only after World War I did the Americans and Europeans pay attention to the solid movements taking place in the East (Rasulzadeh 2018).

Thus, mentioning the new solid movement of so-called Eastern nations, Rasulzadeh was reiterating his main argument: it was now the turn of the East to follow suit. Drawing from the security paradigms of European nations, he was prioritizing anti-Bolshevik, and even anti-Russian stances as an element of the nation-building process of the Caucasian people, a process he saw as inviolable (Rasulzadeh 2018). He stressed that the hatred of the masses seeking their liberty from the lying oppressor is natural. It is also natural that the movements are guided by ideas and fated to show a struggle (i.e. direct the hatred of the masses towards repressive aristocracy and opponents of democracy). Rasulzadeh further draws some parallels with European history: "That is why the tactics of German solidarity was enmity toward France, the tactics of Slavian solidarity was enmity toward Germany and Turkey, the tactics of Italian solidarity was enmity toward Austria" (Rasulzadeh 2018). Consequently, based on such examples from European history, Rasulzadeh concluded that the unity of intellectuals with the masses is essential for nation-building purposes, liberation from the oppressor, and democracy.

Analyzing the historical evolution of nationalism in continental Europe, Rasulzadeh puts forward three formation periods:

1. Period of Rationalism under the influence of the French School;

2. Period of Racism under the influence of German philology;

3. Period of Hybridical Formation under the influences of both French School and German philology.

According to Rasulzadeh, the concept of nation was conceptualized as a legal phenomenon in the period of rationalism. Drawing the legal boundaries for the nation, the nation was perceived as a social group wherein common normative and legislative prerogatives were formed and accepted. Surprisingly, during the second formation period, genetic and blood causes were prioritized alongside romantic excitement. Without ignoring genetic commonalities, in the period of hybridized formation, the concept of the nation was viewed not as static but as a dynamic phenomenon/process influenced by different social drives. Rasulzadeh argued that, while European empires were forming their political attitudes towards Others through the aforementioned phases, analogous developments took place in Turkey during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As a leader of an emerging political agency with a western-oriented direction, Rasulzadeh was compelled to make hard-and-fast decisions within the framework of the given modernist and colonial socio-political realities. His works demonstrate that he adhered to nationalism as an idea against the imperialism and colonialism of the time. However, as a leader of an emerging agency with a western-oriented direction, Rasulzade was compelled to reproduce the knowledge structures provided by the narrators of the history and political sociology of Western societies. In such a situation, he was expected to work within the framework of the given modernist and colonial socio-political realities. In other words, he could not escape the trap of imperialist interests by putting forward a decolonial struggle but rather adhered to a specific form of anti-colonialism against the Russian empire, which led him to a nationalist understanding of politics.

In almost all of his major works, Rasulzadeh describes Russia as an empire and as the cause of the bloodshed in the Caucasus. His thoughts transformed during the existence of the Azerbaijani Republic and throughout the decades after its dissolution. That he maintained the same anti-Bolshevik tone in an article written in September-October 1929 for the Journal Caucasian Hill People (Qafqaz Dağlıları) is remarkable in terms of

revealing his views on neighboring Caucasian nations. The article was adapted to the modern Azerbaijani language and re-published by the Baku Research Institute on March 24, 2022. In the article, Rasulzadeh underlines the necessity of solidarity among Caucasian people from different ethnicities to consolidate against the same oppressor (Rasulzadeh, 2022). With undefended argumentation and an anti-Russian stance, Rasulzadeh (2022) writes that a "Caucasian Union will be welcomed by Iran and Turkey with sympathy, and is there any need for long explanations that [this] particular Union is essential for these two Muslim states [as a buffer zone against Russia]?" Stressing the importance of the creation of the Caucasian Confederation, Rasulzadeh implies that the idea of confederation is affirmed by the Caucasian peoples.

A similar discourse is present in the article "Panturanism and the Problem of Caucasus", presented in 1930 in Paris for representatives of Caucasian, Ukrainian, and Turkistani emigres. His primary argument was the need for the Turkic people of Russia to unite against the oppressor and have political consciousness; therefore he saw Turkism as a political ideology capable of uniting these people against the empire for independence. However, Pan-turanism, according to Rasulzadeh, was a romantic political ideology that was not realizable at the time. On the contrary, he elaborates that Turkism allows different nations, not only Turkic ones, to emerge under this ideology. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that the Pan-turanism developed in Azerbaijan led intellectuals of that time to the path of federalism, seeing independent Azerbaijan in the union of the Caucasian Confederation similar to Pan-slavism in the Czech Republic.

> If, in the good old days, the Caucasus was an arena of mutual struggle for neighboring peoples, then the last period of joint life and the suffering of this region proved that the separate course of action of individual Caucasian peoples brought disasters not only to this people but also to all other peoples of the Caucasus. The commonality of history, the commonality of suffering, more precisely, the commonality of fate created a common, more or less similar psychology among all the peoples of the Caucasus. The terrible years of terror and red imperialism, which equally crushed all the peoples of the Caucasus with a bloody pressure, brought these peoples even closer and strengthened in them the

consciousness of the commonality of their national and political interests (Rasulzadeh 2011).

In addition, the overview of Rasulzadeh's selected works in this article clarifies the fact that Rasulzadeh referred to nationalism as a progressive and modernist ideology coming from Europe that could unite people in empires against the imperial yoke and was not based on ethnonationalist rhetoric. In fact, his calls for peaceful coexistence and peace in the Caucasus put him closer to the modern-day peacebuilders and anti-war activists who were rejected and silenced by society during the Second Karabakh War (Samadov 2020). To clarify, Rasulzadeh saw the enmity between Armenians and Azerbaijanis as a result of Russian imperialism, while the modern-day peace activists do not share this rhetoric as their struggle is directed against ethnonationalist hatred, militarism, and authoritarianism and for building peace between the two independent nations. For example, Rasulzadeh in his "Remedy of Disease" ("Mərəzimizin Çarəsi") published in Davat Goch in 1906, discusses the importance of identifying the disease, which he regards as attempts of the Russian empire to divert the attention of people from instability, corruption, war, and chaos in the Russian Empire.

> I think everyone knows the reason for this disease that is affecting us. Everyone knows and recognizes the tyranny and bureaucracy that plunged Russia into a bloody vortex that left the heaven [of the] Caucasus in hell. Or who doesn't know the Russian tyranny-cruelty that is making Ukraine miserable or other non-Russian cities of Odesa, Chisinau?! Anyone who is familiar with the treachery of the Caucasian emirs will agree with me on this. Because it's impossible to see *nagashidzis*, *alikhanovs*, *goloshapovs*, *lyutskis*, *pivovarovs*, and others and not agree. Bureaucrats revived from the grave of the Russian revolution, in order to find salvation, resorted to all sorts of menial tasks and made impossible tricks to keep the poor subjects of two nations under oppression and isolation from each other. They tried to make the two nations clash with each other and in this way drown the revolution in unjust blood. But the main cause of pogroms and massacres, the bureaucracy that has lost its mind because of the awe of the revolution, is unaware of the fact that the blood of the generous

drowns the oppressors, free thoughts that are kindled are not extinguished by blood (Rasulzade 2014a, 27).

He ends this work with a call to end hostilities between the two peoples and redirect it against the real cause of the conflict: imperialism. Such calls these days can be considered equal to treason in Azerbaijan and peace activists advocating similar discourse are oppressed or silenced (Rasulzade 2014a, 28):

> Peace activists from the Caucasus: If you want peace, meaning if you want to find a remedy for the disease, unite to get rid of this illness. As long as the cause is there, this disease will remain.

This section provided a different reading of Rasulzadeh's selected works, which are widely manipulated by Azerbaijani nationalists. The ideas of nationalism were mobilized by Rasulzadeh as a reaction to Russian imperialism and followed the trends of European intellectual circles. Modern ethnonationalist hatred and enmity are justified as normal and as a legacy from the founding fathers of Azerbaijan. However, Rasulzadeh's works from different periods cited in this article do not reflect the same ethnonationalist hatred and enmity; on the contrary, in many cases, Rasulzadeh supports the idea of Caucasian Confederation. His aspirations were for an independent Azerbaijan but within the Caucasian Confederation, which he saw as a natural solution for people sharing common values, traditions, sufferings, and struggles. Along with Turkic identity, which he embraced and theorized in his writings, he also had a strong Caucasian identity. For him, the motherland along with Azerbaijan was also the Caucasus. His ideas of Pan-turanism and Turkism sought political ends of uniting and mobilising the Turkic population of the Russian empire, which in many cases was the Muslim population and at the same time most backward. His analyzed works do not reflect ethnonationalism and hatred but the cooperation and unity of Caucasian people along with aspirations for peace and stability in a region independent from imperialism.

Hovhannes Kajaznuni's Views on Imperialist Influence in the South Caucasus

The writings of Armenian political figures from the First Republic of Armenia (May 28, 1918- December 2, 1920) comprise valuable sources on the political developments and public debates in Armenia before its

takeover by the Bolsheviks and Sovietization in December 1920. This section will focus on two articles by Hovhannes Kajaznuni, one of the founding fathers of the First Armenian Republic and its first prime minister. Kajaznuni's writings not only illustrate the heavy emotional burden of making critical choices for the newly independent country squeezed between the former Ottoman and Russian imperial powers but also reflect a pragmatic line of thinking that was necessary for the unprecedented newly emerged state. Even a century later, the debates between Kajaznuni and his party colleagues over which political orientation should Armenia take, what the regional challenges and chances for the country's survival were *vis-a-vis* the external forces— Turkey and Russia—remain relevant today. At the same time, Kajaznuni's reflections on the nation and nationalism, his criticism of the Ottoman and Russian imperial powers' oppressive policies, and his inability to decipher and debunk the oppressive British or German colonial policies indicate a limited understanding of imperialism and colonization due to the civilizational divides that structured the modern world.

Before declaring independence from Russia on May 28, 1918, Armenia was in the middle of a severe humanitarian crisis. The country was flooded with Ottoman Armenian refugees, among them many orphans, survivors of the Armenian Genocide. Starvation and disease left thousands dead on the streets of Yerevan and Echmiadzin. The dire humanitarian crisis in Armenia was further complicated by the heavy consequences of the Bolsheviks' deal with the Ottoman Empire reached at the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on March 3, 1918, which was seen by many Armenians as a vile betrayal (Hovhannisian 1971).

The geopolitical situation in Transcaucasia was rapidly changing, and new security risks were added to the old ones, affecting the alignment of small states such as Armenia. With the First World War still going on, Transcaucasia remained under the Ottoman-German occupation with all the catastrophic consequences of the humanitarian crisis. The Armenian government had to prioritize peace and the development of the First Republic of Armenia:

> I will follow a single supreme principle: to establish good-neighborly relations with neighboring states, in every possible way avoiding clashes with them. This is dictated by the fact that our country needs peace, we need peace, even if it is fragile... At this

moment, we can have only one goal—to save the fragments of the Armenian people and heroically try to create a state in the small territory that still remains in our hands. (Petrosyan n.d., 1).

With the Ottoman army stationed at Armenia's borders in mid-June 1918, establishing good relations with the Ottoman Empire was outlined as a top priority in foreign policy and an essential pillar of Armenian national security. Moreover, the presence of the Ottoman armed forces in the region had led to uprisings by the Muslim populations in Armenia, who, "encouraged by the Ottoman Empire and Azerbaijan, adhered to an anti-state position" (Kajaznuni 1923, 36). The situation was similar in Georgia, where thousands of Georgian Muslims in Ajaria were assisting the Ottoman forces that moved into Batum, the district's major city (Hovhannisian 1971). As Hovhannisian writes, "religious identity played a much more significant role than national origin did in determining political loyalties" (Hovhannisian 1971, 158).

In his first speech to the Armenian parliament on August 3, 1918, Kajaznuni raised the main issues that needed rapid solutions and outlined the main foreign policy directives (Ani Armenian Research Center 2020):

1. Reinforce peace with the Ottoman government and establish neighborly relations. Rigorously fulfill all commitments agreed upon with the Ottoman government and ensure that the Ottoman government acts mutually. In particular, solve the issues of removing Ottoman troops from our country and returning refugees [to their homes].

2. Mutually solve border issues between Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia by accepting the principle of self-determination, which corresponds to the spirit and aims of democratic states.

3. Liquidate the institutions that remain from the Transcaucasian Republic by reaching a mutual agreement with Azerbaijan and Georgia.

Russia was missing from the program. While broad political and civil society circles of Armenia were in favor of establishing diplomatic relations with Russia regardless of who was in power, with the unstable political situation in Russia and the civil war between the Soviet and (anti-Bolshevik) non-Soviet groups still ongoing, Kajaznuni refrained from

making any public statements regarding the fate of Russian-Armenian relations (Petrosyan n.d.). Under pressure from the Ottoman Empire, on June 3, 1918 in Batumi, the head of the Armenian delegation, Alexander Khatisyan, signed a document according to which "the Government of the Republic of Armenia undertakes throughout the war not to maintain any diplomatic relations with those states that are in a state of war with the Ottoman Empire (Petrosyan n.d.)." The pressure from the Ottoman Empire, which remained until the end of the First World War, and the uncertainties of the civil war in Russia between the Red and White armies forced the Republic of Armenia to maintain unofficial, secret communication with both fighting political forces in Russia, limiting relations to trade and an economic framework (Petrosyan n.d.). The end of the First World War and the defeat of the Ottoman Empire marked a turning point for the Transcaucasus region. The commitments of the Armenian government signed at the Batumi peace conference with the Ottoman Empire became invalid. From the end of November 1918, the British armed forces began to gradually enter the region, replacing the retreating Ottoman military units (Petrosyan n.d.).

In his six-part article published in 1922 in the ARFD's *Jakatamart Daily*, Kajaznuni reflected on Armenia's economic and geopolitical challenges, working-class conditions, and the difficulties of implementing the communist program in the economically backward and collapsed Armenia (Kajaznuni 1922). As his long-time party colleague and the last Prime Minister of the First Republic of Armenia Simon Vratsian (1924, 9) argued, Kajaznuni imagined Armenia as an independent state under a mandate "in some vague relationship with a great power, but never with Russia." Despite denouncing Ottoman and Russian imperialism, Kajaznuni failed to debunk European imperial/colonial expansion and oppression. His essay "Nation and Homeland" [Ազգ և Հայրենիք], published in 1923-1924, presents an interesting take on the anti-imperial struggles led by the colonized peoples, where the Ottoman and Russian imperial regimes were categorized as "autocratic for everyone" and the British regime was a "civilised" one—an assessment that resulted from that period's epistemological Eurocentric perspective:

> The regimes of the Sultans and Tsars were autocratic for everyone. All their subjects were lacking in rights. […] The English regime was not alike the Turkish one. The abuses committed by the

> Sultan's rule in Greece were not familiar to the Irish. The English government was not massacring them, ravaging their country, imposing additional taxes, nor did it differentiate the Irish from the English in the courts… Nevertheless, the Irish rebelled against English rule. Why should the English lords and elected representatives of English communities invent laws for Ireland? Why shouldn't the Irish themselves create their own laws and run their country?... The Greeks were subject to a barbaric regime where in addition to abuses of national rights there were also abuses of political and civil kinds. The English regime in Ireland was a civilised regime under which the Irish, belonging to another nation, enjoyed national liberties to the extent that is possible in any state (Kajaznuni, 1923-1924, 50).

In February 1921 an anti-Bolshevik uprising took place in Armenia, and the Committee for the Salvation of the Fatherland took power in and outside of Yerevan from the Armenian Revolutionary Committee, which retreated to Artashat (Vratsian 1924). With Dashnaktsutyun seeing the February uprising as a critical moment to restore its rule in Armenia, Kajaznuni supported the policy of rapprochement with Turkey as the only way to prevent the absorption of Armenia by Russia:

> Today, we have two real powers by our side: one is Soviet Russia, and the other is Turkey. The rest of the powers are too far away from us. As bitter experience has shown, we cannot put up with the first force. What is left is to become friends and make peace with the second force. The return of the Bolsheviks is undesirable for the Turks and us. The return of Bolsheviks will mean nothing but annexing Armenia to Russia. In this case, Turkey will again have a border with its centuries-old enemy—a large and aggressive Russia (I say aggressive, because it is clear to everyone that Soviet Russia is the same imperialist power as tsarist Russia). (Vratsian 1924, 18)

Vratsian denounced Bolshevism as the continuation of Russian imperialism, lamenting that Armenians had futile hopes with the Bolsheviks, for whom "Armenia was nothing but material for their communist experiments" (Vratsian 1924, 10). He wrote about the large-scale terror campaign launched by the Soviet secret police against Dashnak party members, Armenian military officers, and anyone seen as

political opposition: "the independence of Armenia remained a dead letter. Our country simply became one of the provinces of Greater Russia" (Vratsian 1924, 13).

Kajaznuni's motivation to establish good relations with Turkey and rely on Ankara to fight against Bolshevik Russia's influence stemmed from a pragmatic assessment of Turkey's strategic interest in Transcaucasia. According to Kajaznuni's line of thinking, if Soviet Russia was seen as the continuation of imperialist tsarist Russia and would absorb Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, thus ending their formal sovereignty, Turkey was interested in keeping the three republics as a buffer zone between Soviet Russia and itself. As Kajaznuni wrote in March 1921, "These three newly formed, small, and powerless [states] cannot pose any danger to Turkey, but at the same time, they represent certain security against the Russian impingement" (Vratsian 1924). Moreover, the leading Dashnaktsutyun members Hovhannes Kajaznuni, Aram Manukyan, Alexander Khatisyan, Ruben Ter-Minasyan, and many others were convinced that the improvement of relations with the Ottoman Empire would also restrain Azerbaijan's territorial claims to Armenia (Ani Armenian Research Center 2022). However, this strategy of relying on Turkey against Bolshevik encroachment could work only as long as the geopolitical conditions did not contribute to a Turkish-Russian rapprochement.

1923 marked a dramatic turn in Kajaznuni's political orientation. While before 1923, Kajaznuni's position toward the Bolshevik government was irreconcilable, after Armenia became a part of the Soviet Union, contrary to most of his party colleagues, he backed the unpopular idea that Armenians around the world should support Soviet Armenia. In an address to the Dashnaktsutyun Party Congress held in Bucharest in 1923, Kajaznuni read the manifesto "Dashnaktsutyun Has Nothing to Do Anymore," which was a critical review of the party's proclaimed aims and policies and a heavy criticism of illusionary expectations from great powers such as Russia and the Western powers, predominantly the United States, the British Empire, and France. The article "Open Letter to Z: Turkey or Russia?" written a year later presents interesting parallels with Armenia's attempts to protect its sovereignty in the changing geopolitical neighborhood with two major powers—Russia and Turkey—fighting for influence in the region (Kajaznuni 1924).

As for the question of who Armenia should ally itself with, Kajaznuni saw Armenia's neighbors—Georgia, Azerbaijan, and other national-political units (Abkhazia, Ajaria, South Ossetia, Zaqatala and, partly, Dagestan)—as Russia's most natural allies to form a state union due to the geographically, economically, and historically intertwined relationships among by these nations. Looking at the first attempt of Armenians, Georgians, and Azerbaijanis to form a political union under the umbrella of the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic, Kajaznuni blamed the collapse of the TDFR on the three nation-states being unable to come to an agreement and the external powers exploiting these internal disagreements. The leadership of the first three Transcaucasian republics could not find enough political maturity to solve their border disputes, nor could they overcome "mutual mistrust, suspicion and fear" (Kajaznuni 1924). Instead of using this unique opportunity of formal independence and rupture from their imperial sovereign to ally with each other, Azerbaijan and Georgia favored an alliance with Turkey, while in the eyes of the Armenians, Turkey was an existential threat. Kajaznuni (Kajaznuni 1924 1) lamented these lost opportunities in the past:

> If the Transcaucasian peoples had been politically a little more mature then, indeed, they would have found a way to solve their internal disputes peacefully and with their own means. But they had not reached that level of maturity and so the alliance collapsed, for it to be restored under external duress.

Speaking about the interests of Western powers, in particular, the British Empire and the United States in the Transcaucasia region after the end of World War I, Kajaznuni noted the illusory hopes that the Armenian people had tied to the West, which was not interested in the region due to a potential conflict with Russia. With the Sovietization of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, the freedom of choice to decide one's fate had been lost. Given Transcaucasia's limited options as a part of the Soviet Union, for Kajaznuni, the only viable option of the alliance for Transcaucasia as a state entity was standing between the two regional forces of Turkey or Russia. For the small and internally weak Transcaucasian states, balancing between two forces was not an option; thus, Armenia had to align with one of the two powers.

The ethnic kinship, geographical position of Azerbaijan, and ideological proximity with the Azerbaijani "Musavat" party are essential reasons why

Turks established themselves in Baku. As Kajaznuni writes, during the First World War, the Musavatist intellectuals saw the Ottoman Empire as their most natural ally. Kajaznuni emphasizes the strategic importance of the Azerbaijani connection for Turkey, which is "separated from Nakhijevan only by the Arax river and Nakhijevan is separated from Azerbaijan by a very short corridor in Armenian Zangezur. The Alyat-Julfa railway, which has almost reached completion, will end that separation and Baku will be linked to Nakhijevan physically, and thus also to Ankara" (Kajaznuni 1924, 1). Considering the Georgian government's positive stance towards Turkey and the easily eliminated resistance to Turkish hegemony in the region from Armenians (and probably from some Georgians), the only obstacle on the Turkish path to incorporating Transcaucasia was Russia. Thus, separating Transcaucasia from Russia would inevitably lead to the region's subjugation to the Turkish imperial hegemony: "In the past, we have seen a Russian Transcaucasia; in the future, we may see a Turkish Transcaucasia" (Kajaznuni 1924 1).

Kajaznuni does not see a fundamental rupture of Kemalist Turkey from the Ottoman Empire. On the contrary, the Republic of Turkey was seen as continuing the essence of the imperialist policies of its Ottoman predecessors. Such force "cannot be an ally, but simply a dominating force, in its most harsh and primitive sense" (Kajaznuni 1924 1). Taking the internal relationships of the governments with their minorities as a critical factor underpinning the psychology of alliance, the inability of Ankara to recognize the rights and aspirations of the Kurdish people was seen by Kajaznuni (1924, 1) as an essential indicator of the state's inability to respect the alliance and an indicator of its dominating power:

> Turkey has thus far not shown any such intention, neither in practice nor in words. We have not heard, for instance, of the governors in Ankara planning, or intending to plan, for any granting of rights to Kurdistan (let alone allying with it). We see the opposite--they are making every effort to centralize power and nationalize the state, as soon as possible and as completely as possible. A state that, in contrast to the glaring reality, declares that there are no "minorities" within its borders and so cannot grant them "rights" is a state that is psychologically not prepared to make alliances.

Contrasting the national-militarist Kemalist Turkey to Bolshevik Russia, Kajaznuni refers to the distinctive character of the *system of alliances* that constituted part of the Bolshevik political system and was already put into practice. Considering Turkey's existential threat to Armenia, the fall of the Bolshevik government would also signal the end of the Armenian state. Kajaznuni concludes that with no allies in the West and being under the fatal threat of Turkish dominance, Armenia has no other political option but to ally with Russia.

In 1923, Kajaznuni left the ARF and appealed to the Soviet government, allowing him to return from exile to Armenia. In Yerevan, he continued to work as an architect, gave lectures at Yerevan State University, and helped Alexander Tamanyan draw up Yerevan's plan (Stepanyan 2018). Along with many prominent Armenian intellectuals and public figures, during the Stalinist repression, he was accused of treason against the Soviet state and being a covert Dashnak member. He was arrested in 1937 and died in prison in 1939.

Despite being one of the founding fathers of the First Republic of Armenia, the figure of Hovhannes Kajaznuni remains neglected today. Kajaznuni's criticism of the ARF programme, his split with the party, and appeal to the Soviet government have contributed to the negative remembrance among ARF-affiliated circles. Kajaznuni's intellectual legacy remains neglected in the Republic of Armenia as well, and the attendance of only a few Armenians at the 150th anniversary of Kajaznuni's birth in 2018 is a sad testimony to this fact (Stepanyan 2018).

In his classical work *The Historian's Craft*, Marc Bloch (1977) sees history not just as a sequence of grand epochs and significant dates but as the action and creation of ordinary men and women that makes them *historically conditioned beings* in the sense of how they learn and pass on the stories and narratives they tell about themselves (Little 2020). The Blochian approach to history opens up an innovative way of rethinking the connection between the present and the past in the life of every community. The historical facts are important, but the narration and (mis)interpretation of these facts by subsequent generations are no less important. As an intellectual and a public figure, Kajaznuni's writings provide deep insight into the most critical challenges faced by Armenian statehood and the nation. Many of these challenges remain relevant today.

Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

This article looked at Armenian-Azerbaijani relations from the angle of the decolonial approach. The legacy of colonization, despite the collapse of empires, remains embedded in the knowledge, discourse, and mentality of formerly colonized countries; the South Caucasus is not an exclusion. The inability of the political leadership of both Azerbaijan and Armenia to agree with each other, instead assuming that reliance on powerful allies will eliminate the threats to national sovereignty brings to mind parallels between the situation of Armenia and Azerbaijan at the beginning of the twentieth century and today.

Despite living a century ago, the questions raised by Rasulzadeh and Kajaznuni, and the discussions led by the various political forces in Azerbaijan and Armenia regarding the political orientation each country should adopt, are still relevant today. At the same time, while Rasulzadeh was advocating for the anti-Russian imperial struggle and Kajaznuni was criticizing the Ottoman and Russian/Bolshevik imperial powers, both were nationalist leaders whose anti-imperial criticism failed to debunk the Western, mainly British, French, and German imperialism, colonialism, racism, inequalities, and exploitation of the colonized peoples. For many Transcaucasian thinkers of that time, including Kajaznuni and Rasulzadeh, the imperial powers identified as the West were seen through the civilizing mission leading the less developed nations toward progress. While the Russian and Ottoman Empires were enacting the material colonization of the region—which involved economic, political, and/or cultural forms of domination over the colonized—the Western European powers were successful in the reproduction of discursive domination. Even today, many postcolonial scholars argue for the need to critically reread the Eurocentric modernization project that still retains its universal position. This rereading will also require a critical engagement with the terminology that today's postcolonial social sciences use to identify the various geographies as West and non-West, which is deeply problematic due to the division of vast geographies between civilizational lines, thus turning them into binary oppositions that are irreducible (Parashar 2016).[10]

---

[10] Cynthia Weber makes a similar criticism of Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations", see, Weber 2010, 171.

The collapse of state socialism left Armenia and Azerbaijan with two opposite choices—either to align with the West, which would mean moving farther from the Russian sphere of influence and closer to the fantasy of catching up with the 'civilized world,' or adopt semi or full alignment with Russia, thus resubmitting to a former imperial power. Moreover, imperial nostalgia has become a part of state discourse with the rise of the global right-wing and populism across the world in general, and in the two regional powers, Russia and Turkey, particularly. As Çapan and Zarakol (2017) argue, anti- and post-colonial critiques are weaponized by authoritarian regimes. As a case study, the authors analyze the Justice and Development Party (the AKP) government's employment of postcolonial concepts to justify its policies. Alexander Dugin offers another example of how the postcolonial critique, in his case, the one against the West, is instrumentalized on behalf of Russian neo-imperialism (Ivakhiv 2022).

The first and second Nagorno-Karabakh wars left Armenian and Azerbaijani societies in a severe condition, with thousands dead and displaced as well as deeply traumatized generations. The closed borders and isolation from each other since the first war have further alienated societies and paved the way for the radicalization of narratives of the past and stripped away any prospect of cooperation and dialogue.

For the sake of the long-term stability and development in the region, we would like to make the following recommendations to the communities of people, scholars, activists, policy-makers, and peacebuilders:

- To engage in a decolonial dialogue by establishing ties, joining networks, or attending conferences and other significant events of the Global South community;

- To decolonize knowledge and practices of conflict resolution by focusing on local knowledge and grassroots peacebuilding;

- To organize workshops, conferences, and general public discussions among the communities of the South Caucasus to problematize the continuation of the Western colonial logic in global peacebuilding and debunk the legacies of Russian and Soviet colonialism (such as the construction of Caucasian identity, the role of Muslim women in society and private life, origins of the

conflicts and current relations with neighboring states, etc.) in the post-Soviet space;

- To stimulate post-(de)colonial discussions in Armenia and Azerbaijan that would go beyond the academic scholarship over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to tackle the hostile narratives;

While the primary focus is peoples of the South Caucasus, we believe it is necessary to enlarge the spaces for a bottom-up, and not state-initiated, decolonial dialogue and engage scholars and activists from Russia and the post-Soviet subalterns while looking for ways to address all forms of colonial oppression, both external and domestic, to transform their societies together. Adrian Ivakhiv (2022, 1) reminds us that "decoloniality is by definition not just an anti-imperialism, but an anti-*all*-imperialisms. That makes every place in the world an 'obligatory passage point' for decolonialism."

Bibliography

Ambartsumyan, K. 2017. "Русская Революция И Образование Республики Армения На Кавказе (1917–1918 гг.) А. И. Хатисова" [A.I. Khatisov: The Russian Revolution and the Formation of the Republic of Armenia in the Caucasus (1917–1918)]. *Dialogue with Time* No: 60: 365-383.

Ani Armenian Research Center. 2020. "Hovhannes Kajaznuni's First Speech in the Armenian Parliament: 1918." August 3, 2020. Accessed May 15, 2022. http://www.aniarc.am/2020/08/03/hovhannes-kajaznunis-first-speech-in-the-armenian-parliament-august-3-1918/..

_____. 2022. "Թուրքիան է միակ պետությունը, որի հետ Հայաստանը պիտի խոսի" [Turkey Is the Only Country with Which Armenia Should Talk"]. March 10, 2022. Accessed June 2, 2022.http://www.aniarc.am/2022/03/10/tyria-is-the-only-state-armenia-will-speak-to-3102022/.

Bloch, March. 1977. *The Historian's Craft: Reflections on the Nature and Uses of History and the Techniques and Methods of Those Who Write It*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Brisku, Adrian., and Timothy K. Blauvelt. 2020. "Who Wanted the TDFR? The Making and the Breaking of the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic." *Caucasus Survey* 8, no. 1: 1-8. https://doi.org/10.1080/23761199.2020.1712897.

Çapan, Zeynep Gülşah, and Ayşe Zarakol. 2017. "Postcolonial colonialism? The case of Turkey". In *Against International Relations Norms*, edited by Charlotte Epstein, 193-210. London-New York: Routledge.

Deringil, Selim. 2003. "'They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery': The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 2: 311-42.

Dikovitskaya, Margaret. 2002. "Does Russia Qualify for Postcolonial Discourse?: A Response to Ekaterina Dyogot's Article." *Ab Imperio* 2002 2: 551-557. https://doi.org/10.1353/imp.2002.0020.

Etkind, Alexander. 2011. *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Goltz, Thomas. 2015. *Azerbaijan Diary: A Rogue Reporter's Adventures in an Oil-Rich, War-Torn, Post-Soviet Republic.* London-New York: Routledge.

Grosfoguel, Ramón. 2007. "The Epistemic Decolonial Turn: Beyond Political-Economy Paradigms." *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3: 211-223. https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162514.

Gunko, Maria. 2022. "'Russian Imperial Gaze': Reflections from Armenia since the Start of the Russia-Ukraine Military Conflict." *Political Geography*, [In press]. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2022.102739

Hakobyan, Tatul. 2019. *Armenians and Turks: From War to Cold War and Diplomacy*. 2nd ed. Yerevan: Lusakn.

Hovhannisian, Richard G. 1969. *Armenia on the Road to Independence, 1918*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

_____. 1971. *The Republic of Armenia: The First Year*, Vol. I: *1918-1919.*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ivakhiv, Adrian. 2022. "Decolonialism and the Invasion of Ukraine". *e-flux Notes*. March 23, 2022. Accessed November 10, 2022. https://www.e-flux.com/notes/457576/decolonialism-and-the-invasion-of-ukraine/

Kajaznuni, Hovhannes. 1922. "What Path Should We Take?" ARF's *Jakatamart daily*. Published by Ani Armenian Research Center. February 9, 2021. Accessed May 1, 2022. http://www.aniarc.am/2021/02/09/what-path-should-we-take-by-hovhannes-kajznuni/.

_____. 1923. *The Armenian Revolutionary Party Dashnaktsutyun Has Nothing To Do Anymore.* Bucharest. Reprinted by Ani Armenian Research Center. Yerevan.

_____. 1923-1924. *Ազգ և Հայրենիք [Nation and Homeland].* Published by Ani Armenian Research Center, 2016.

_____. 1924. "Open letter to Z: Turkey or Russia," Published by Ani Armenian Research Center. May 8, 2021. Accessed May 1, 2022. http://www.aniarc.am/2021/05/08/open-letter-to-z-turkey-or-russia/.

Kassymbekova, Batakoz, and Eric Mara, E. 2022. "Time to Question Russia's Imperial Innocence." *PONARS Eurasia*. April 27, 2022. Accessed November 10, 2022. https://www.ponarseurasia.org/time-to-question-russias-imperial-innocence/.

Kazemzadeh, Firuz. 1951. *The Struggle for Transcaucasia (1917-1921)*. New York: Philosophical Library.

Koru, Selim. 2018. "How Nietzsche Explains Turkey." June 21, 2018. Accessed April 12, 2022. https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/06/turkey-erdogan-election-kurds/563240/.

Libaridian, Jirair. 2018. "The 'Garbage Bin' Approach to History and Its Discontents." *Heinrich Böll Stiftung Tbilisi South Caucasus*. May 28, 2018. Accessed April 10, 2022. https://ge.boell.org/en/2018/05/28/garbage-bin-approach-history-and-its-discontents.

Little, Daniel. 2020. "Philosophy of History." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. November 24, 2020. Accessed June 13, 2022. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/history.

Mamoulia, Georges. 2021. "Azerbaijan and the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic: Historical Reality and Possibility."

In *The Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic of 1918: Federal Aspirations, Geopolitics and National Projects*, edited by Adrian Brisku, Timothy K. Blauvelt, London-New York: Routledge. 21-44.

Morozov, Viatcheslav. 2015. *Russia's Postcolonial Identity: A Subaltern Empire in a Eurocentric World*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Morrison, Alexander. 2012. "Metropole, Colony, and Imperial Citizenship in the Russian Empire." *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 13, no. 2: 327-364.

_____. 2022. "After The War: Central Asia Without Russia." *Österreichische Akademie Der Wissenschaften Study Of Islam In Central Eurasia*. October 24, 2022. Accessed November 12, 2022.https://www.oeaw.ac.at/sice/sice-blog/after-the-war-central-asia-without-russia#_edn25.

Nurulla-Khodzhaeva, Nargis T. 2016. "Деколониальность Исторических Знаний и Межкультурный «Дахлез» В Центральной Азии" [Decoloniality of Knowledge and Intercultural 'Dahlez.'] *MGIMO Review of International Relations*4, no. 49: 16-25. https://doi.org/10.24833/2071-8160-2016-4-49-16-25.

Oskanian, Kevork K. 2018. "A Very Ambiguous Empire: Russia's Hybrid Exceptionalism." *Europe-Asia Studies* 70, no. 1: 26-52. https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2017.1412398.

Panossian, Razmik. 2006. *The Armenians: From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars*. London: C. Hurst & Co.

Parashar, Swati. 2016. "Feminism and Postcolonialism: (En)gendering Encounters." *Postcolonial Studies* 19, no. 4, 371-377.

Petrosyan, G. n.d. *Сравнительный анализ отношений между Республикой Армения и антибольшевистским правительством южной России* [*Comparative analysis of relations between the Republic of Armenia and the anti-Bolshevik government of southern Russia]*. Yerevan State University.

Rasulzadeh, Mahammad A. 2011. "Пантуранизм и проблема Кавказа" [Panturanism and Problem of the Caucasus]. Presented at the Presentation for Caucasian, Ukrainian and Turkustani emigre, Paris. *Turan Today*. March 6, 2011. Accessed November 10, 2022.

https://www.turantoday.com/2011/03/rasulzadeh-panturanizm-kaukas.html

_____. 2014a. Mərəzimizin Çarəsi [Remedy of disease]. In *Məhəmməd Əmin Rəsulzadə əsərləri. I cild. 1903-1906.* [*Vol. I. Compilation of Mahammad Amin Rasulzadeh's works: 1903-1906*]. Baku.

_____. 2014b. "İki Nüktə" [Two Subtle Messages]. Məhəmməd Əmin Rəsulzadə əsərləri. I cild. 1903-1906. [*Vol. I. Compilation of Mahammad Amin Rasulzadeh's works: 1903-1906*]. Baku.

_____. 2015. "Əsrimizin Siyavuşu." [Siyavush of Our Century]. *Azadlıq Radiosu.* January 31, 2015. Accessed November 10, 2022. https://www.azadliq.org/a/26823199.html

_____. 2018. "Sıra Şərqindir." [It Is the East's Turn] *525-ci qəzet* October 8, 2018. Accessed 10 May 2022. https://525.az/news/107584-resulzadenin-muhaziresi-qerbde-ve-serqde-milli-mesele.

_____. 2022. "Qafqaz Birliyi" [Caucasus Unity.] *Baku Research Institute.* March 24, 2022. Accessed June 15, 2022. https://bakuresearchinstitute.org/qafqaz-birliyi-2/

Samadov, Bahruz. 2020. "Azerbaijan's Peace Activists Face Harassment, and a Reckoning." *Euarsia.Net*. November 20, 2020. Accessed October 27, 2022. https://eurasianet.org/perspectives-azerbaijans-peace-activists-face-harassment-and-a-reckoning.

Stepanyan, Suren. 2018. "Hovhannes Kajaznuni and Aram Manukyan: Armenia's Forgotten Founding Fathers – Chai Khana.". *Ani Armenian Research Center.* . April 2, 2018. Accessed June 11, 2022.http://www.aniarc.am/2018/04/02/hovhannes-kajaznuni-and-aram-manukyan-armenias-forgotten-founding-fathers-chai-khana/.

Suny, Ronald G. 2011. *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press.

Tlostanova, Madina. 2012. "Postsocialist ≠ Postcolonial? On Post-Soviet Imaginary and Global Coloniality." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 48, no. 2: 130-142. https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2012.658244.

_____. 2019. "The Postcolonial Condition, the Decolonial Option, and the Post-Socialist Intervention." In *Postcolonialism Cross-Examined*, edited by Monika Albrecht, 165-178. London-New York: Routledge.

Villalon, Leonardo A. 1998. "Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans: Race and Self-Determination in International Law." *American Political Science Review* 92, no. 4: 975-976.

Vratsian, S. 1924. *Խարխապումներ [Kharkhapumner]*. Ani Armenian Research Center. Boston: Hayrenik Publishing House.

Weber, Cynthia. 2010. *International Relations Theory: A Critical Introduction*. London-New York: Routledge.

Wimmer, Andreas, and Schiller, Nina. G. 2002. "Methodological Nationalism and beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences." *Global Networks* 2, no. 4: 301-334. https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-0374.00043.

Zolyan, Mikayel. 2021. "Between Empire and Independence: Armenia and the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic." In *The Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic of 1918 Federal Aspirations, Geopolitics and National Projects*, edited by Adrian Brisku, Timothy K. Blauvelt, 9-20. London-New York: Routledge.

Authors

Bahruz Samadov is a political activist and PhD candidate in political science at Charles University in Prague. His research deals with hegemony, authoritarianism, and nationalism in Azerbaijan.

Diana Yayloyan is a PhD Candidate in International Relations at the Middle East Technical University (METU). Her interdisciplinary research interests include track one and track two diplomacy between Turkey and Armenia, Turkish nationalism, political violence in Turkey, oral history, reconciliation and transitional justice. She is the Co-founder of the grassroots platform CaucasusTalks, which brings together academics, activists, and practitioners from the South Caucasus to conduct alternative and informed discussions about issues related to the region.

Eviya Hovhannisyan is a social anthropologist from Yerevan, Armenia. Since September 2019 she has been a Project Coordinator at the Heinrich Böll Foundation Yerevan-South Caucasus Office. She is also an associate researcher at the Centre of Oral History at the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the National Academy of Sciences. She holds degrees from Yerevan State University and the European University in St Petersburg. Her research interests include identity and nationalism studies, ethnopolitical conflicts, and migration and refugee studies.

Flora Ghazaryan is a PhD Candidate in the History Department at CEU, and a Gerda Henkel Fellowship Recipient.

Lala Darchinova holds an LL.M. in Comparative Constitutional Law from Central European University. Her research interests include feminist, decolonial and critical theory; and re-thinking of politics and law applying methodologies offered by these worldviews. She has been involved in peacebuilding and conflict analysis for the past five years. She is currently affiliated with the Feminist Peace Collective and Imagine Dialogue and Conflict Transformation Center. Previously, she worked as a policy specialist at the United Nations Office in Azerbaijan.

Mane Grigoryan is a researcher interested in nation building in post-soviet countries. Her research has mainly focused on nation building as applied to narrative formations in conflict areas.

Marina Danoyan is a peacebuilding practitioner from Armenia. For more than 10 years, Marina has been working in Finnish peacebuilding NGOs, CMI-Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation, a Finnish NGO that works to prevent and resolve violent conflicts, as well as the Peace and Reconciliation Department at FELM (Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission). Marina is currently engaged in CMI's Women in Peacemaking (WiP) programme as a Project Manager. Marina holds MA degrees in "European and Global Politics" from the Tampere University, and "International Trade with Eastern European Countries" from the University Paris 12 Val de Marne, as well as from Yerevan State Linguistic University after V. Briussov, where she specialised in French linguistics and Management. Marina has also been the Vice-Chair and Board Member of the Finland-Armenia Association since 2016.

Mirkamran Huseynli is a PhD Candidate in Political Science at Vytautas Magnus University; and Researcher in the fields of Political Science, Nationalism Studies and Comparative History.

Namiq Abdullayev holds a BA in International Relations from Qafqaz University. He is currently working as a youth worker for Y-PEER Azerbaijan (a local civil society activists' network in Azerbaijan), the "Youth Peace Camp 2018" educational program backed by the Council of Europe, and the Peace-building for Capacity Enhancement and Civic Engagement (PeaCE) initiative.

Nika Musavi is a journalist, writer, and researcher specializing in migration, socio-cultural processes, human rights, contemporary leftist movements in the post-Soviet space, and the human aspect of the conflicts. Since 2005, she has been involved in various regional and international peacebuilding and cross-border projects.

Editors

Philip Gamaghelyan is an Assistant Professor at the Kroc School of Peace Studies at the University of San Diego. He is also the co-founder and Director of Programs at the Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation and Managing Editors at the Journal of Conflict Transformation – Caucasus Edition.

Sevil Huseynova holds a degree in Law from the Baku State University. She is a PhD Student at the Institute for European Ethnology, Humboldt University, Berlin. Her main research interests include urban anthropology; ethnicity; and diasporic, transnational, and trans-local communities. She co-authored the book "Beyond the Karabakh Conflict: The Story of Village Exchange" and has authored many articles. She is a member of the Editorial Board of the Journal of Conflict Transformation – Caucasus Edition and has previously worked as the Azerbaijan Country Director of the Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation.

Vadim Romashov is a postdoctoral researcher at Tampere Peace Research Institute, Faculty of Social Sciences, Tampere University. He works for the project "Diasporas and conflict transportation: Inter-group dynamics and host-country responses" (funded by Academy of Finland, 2019-2023). His ethnographic doctoral research was on narratives and everyday practices of living together in Armenian-Azerbaijani rural communities in Georgia. He has been involved in several international research-based conflict transformation initiatives in South Caucasus and Moldova.

Christina Soloyan is a journalist and a researcher. She holds an MSc in Conflict Studies from London School of Economics and Political Science. Currently she is a Project Director at Imagine Center for Conflict Transformation.