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This book presents a discussion of inter-ethnic conflicts in post-Soviet South Caucasus and analyses of the struggle for independence in Nagorno Karabakh and Abkhazia, two failed Soviet autonomies, from a sociological perspective. Drawing on comparative case studies of the two former Soviet autonomies, this sociological study argues that when social and political restructuring is resisted or ignored by a dominant social group over a long period of time, alternative measures are sought by minority groups either to force a change or to create a new social order, especially when 'historic' opportunities are presented. Minority-majority relations in the process of restructuring involve territorial claims, ethnicity, economic inequalities, cultural differences, religion, social customs, political inequalities, access to political power, and group interests.

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ABSTRACT

This book, my doctoral dissertation, presents a discussion of inter-ethnic conflicts in post-Soviet South Caucasus and analyses of the struggle for independence in Nagorno Karabakh and Abkhazia from a sociological perspective. Drawing on comparative case studies of the two former Soviet autonomies in the South Caucasus, the research demonstrates that a unidimensional analytical framework of inter-ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus does not adequately explain why ethnic groups struggle for independence. This sociological study argues that when social and political restructuring is resisted or ignored by a dominant social group over a long period of time, alternative measures are sought by minority groups either to force a change or to create a new social order, especially when 'historic' opportunities are presented. Minority-majority relations in the process of restructuring involve territorial claims, ethnicity, economic inequalities, cultural differences, religion, social customs, political inequalities, access to political power, and group interests.

The book is organised around seven chapters. Chapter One presents an overview of the ancient and modern histories of Nagorno Karabakh and Abkhazia, with particular focus on political autonomy. Chapter Two discusses autonomy under Soviet rule and the problematic relationships between the titular states and their autonomies. Chapter Three discusses the sources of conflict between titular authorities and the autonomous regions. Chapter Four focuses on the social and political mobilisation processes in the former Soviet autonomies. Chapter Five deals with the role of religion in inter-ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus and how it is used and exploited by various actors in society and politics. Chapter Six discusses the theoretical, legal and practical dimensions of self-determination and their relevance to Abkhazia and Nagorno Karabakh. Chapter Seven demonstrates how the two former Soviet autonomies engage in state-building processes in the context of the role of regional powers and the international community. The thesis concludes with a discussion of prospects for the resolution of the conflicts in Nagorno Karabakh and Abkhazia.

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CONTENTS


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | *Introduction* | 1 |
| 1 | History and Autonomy | 13 |
| 2 | Autonomy under Soviet Rule | 35 |
| 3 | Sources of Conflict with Titular States | 57 |
| 4 | Mobilisation towards Restructuring | 85 |
| 5 | Religion: sustaining the 'new order' | 123 |
| 6 | The 'New Order' and the International Community Self-Determination vs Territorial Integrity | 183 |
| 7 | Contested independence and State-Building | 203 |
| | Conclusion | 225 |
| | *Appendix*: Frequency of major military and political conflicts and popular protests in Abkhazia and Karabakh from 1803-1992 | 233 |
| | *Notes* | 237 |
| | *Bibliography* | 282 |

# INTRODUCTION

> *'When foreigners visit the Caucasus, at first they understand this place a little better, and then they start to feel that they no longer understand anything at all'.*[1]

This observation of an Abkhaz social worker captures the general frustration of "outsiders" with the Caucasus. The aim of this thesis is to contribute to a wider understanding of the complexities of the South Caucasus, particularly the conflicts in Karabakh and Abkhazia, a) by presenting the generally ignored or undervalued views of the "insiders" and b) by addressing the larger question of "outsiders": Why and how are former Soviet autonomies struggling for independence? Answers to the question are sought in the historical, cultural, political, legal, socio-economic, religious, and territorial dimensions of inter-ethnic relations. Karabakh is the primary focus for this case study, with substantial comparisons with Abkhazia. The multitude of factors is examined from sociological and inter-disciplinary perspectives.

Many volumes are available about the various aspects of the former Soviet republics in the South Caucasus and, more recently, a growing literature on the Karabakh and Abkhazia conflicts has emerged. However, generally, there is a vast thematic and historical gap in the literature produced in the West, most of which, especially that published since the end of the Soviet Union, provides a superficial historical background and very little sociological analysis of the conflicts. The long decades of the Soviet regime, which are significant to the understanding of the current conflicts, are either not discussed at all or are skeletal. A representative example of such discourse on the conflicts in the South Caucasus is a book by Michael Croissant (1998) called *The Armenian-Azerbaijani Conflict: Causes and Implications*. In this 150-page volume, the author devotes only *one* paragraph to the Soviet period in Karabakh (1923-1988) when discussing the *causes* of the conflict (p. 20). Similar serious omissions are found

in Tim Potier's (2001) over-300-page book on the legal aspects of the conflicts in Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. While such studies, especially "resolution-oriented literature", on the South Caucasus in general, and the Karabakh and Abkhazia conflicts in particular, focus primarily on models or suggestions for a resolution to the conflicts, this thesis presents an extensive discussion and analysis of the much ignored Soviet period in the two former Soviet autonomies. It pays particular attention to the experience of decades of failed autonomies and their impact on the present situation, the transitions that have taken place since the end of the Soviet Union, and the "facts on the ground" established since the declarations of independence by both the former Soviet Republics and their autonomous entities. The basic argument of this thesis is that the conflicts in the South Caucasus are due to a process of major *restructuring* of internal and external group relations and are not merely, as often presented, the outcome of nationalism or 'centuries old hatred'.

Attempts to provide a simplified narrative to explain inter-ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus fall short of providing a fuller picture of the causes, dimensions and implications of ethnic relations and conflicts in this region. Yet, many Westerners, with the intention of drawing a 'balanced', 'objective' and 'neutral' approach to 'conflict resolution', wittingly or unwittingly, do sometimes offer such simplistic explanations — largely for Western consumption.[2] The simplification of the history of the conflicts is also used in many of the outside attempts to find solutions — which have generally been unattractive or unacceptable to the conflicting parties.[3] Indeed, one major shortcoming in the various proposals for conflict resolution has been the absence of engagement of the "insiders", i.e., the "supporting" social actors and the very people affected by the conflicts. It is only recently that the necessity of wider societal engagement (as opposed to that of key political actors only) in the process of conflict resolution is being recognised by international mediators.

There is also a definitional and evaluative problem: What are these conflicts? What do we call them? In Western academic and political discourse, the conflicts in Karabakh and Abkhazia have been variously labelled, most of the time without qualifiers, as *ethnic conflicts; ethno-political conflicts; ethno-territorial conflicts; inter-ethnic conflicts; ethnic violence; ethnic cleansing; separatist movements,* and so on. Gia Nodia, the noted Georgian scholar, rightly argues that 'Though

western observers are less preoccupied with terminological debates, the terms they choose also manifest a kind of prejudgement or prejudice'. Indeed, the way reality is framed by scholars and outside players 'says a great deal about the kind of western discourse by which this reality finds itself reconstructed' (Nodia 1997-1998: 3). The analytical distinction between primary and secondary constructions of reality is important. As Eileen Barker explains, primary construction is comprised of basic data; secondary construction is an account — a re-presentation — of the former. 'Although looking for nothing but the truth in the sense that we are committed to accuracy and eliminating falsehoods from both our own and others' constructions, social scientists *select* what will go into our constructions, excluding some aspects that others include, and including further aspects that others exclude' (Barker 1995). This process of selection — of *inclusion* and *exclusion* — has presented perceptual and discursive problems to the analysis (and to some extent the resolution) of the conflicts in the Caucasus. There are "knowledge gaps" between the o*utsiders'* understanding of reality and the *locals'* understanding of reality — when, for example, using labels such as 'separatists' vs. 'self-determination', 'ethnic conflict' vs. 'political conflict', etc. Indeed, for Karabakh and Abkhazia, the secondary construction of reality by 'outsiders' has had an effect on the self-perception of the members of the societies that the outsiders describe or re-present. This thesis addresses some of these critical representational problems by highlighting the position of the conflicting parties themselves — with a primary focus on the perceptions and viewpoints of Karabakh Armenians and Abkhazians — the way they define and construct *their* reality and how the worldview of the affected actors is shaped by that reality.

## Theoretical approaches

At least until the mid-1990s, many Western observers, especially journalists and media commentators, viewed these regional ethnic conflicts as anachronistic ethnic and territorial disputes fuelled by nationalistic or religious passions. Indeed, in current political discourse, 'nationalism' has become a pejorative term, implying intolerance, narrow interests, and dangerous chauvinism.

Presenting these conflicts primarily as 'nationalist movements' often in effect prejudges what has neither been described nor analysed adequately and neutrally.

Significant studies of *nationalism* in the last three decades have offered a range of approaches and interpretations to the phenomenon. Even as various theories of nationalism are inter-related and often overlap, they do not necessarily refute the validity of the other, but rather emphasis its different features as more important. As Anthony Smith (1998: 222) points out: 'very often, we are dealing with theories, models and approaches which are equally plausible and valid, even if they appear to be based on opposed premises, because they seek answers to quite different questions'. Smith (1998: 223-5) categorises the vast studies of nationalism in recent years into five paradigms: *primordial, perennial, ethno-symbolic, modernist, and post-modernist*. Others classify them in variations of these categories.[4] Ernest Gellner, an influential modernist theorist, frames the debate as primarily between 'primordialist' and 'modernist' approaches. He asks: 'Is the sense of ethnicity, the identification with a "nation", and the political expression of this passionate identification, something old and present throughout history, or is it, on the contrary, something modern and a corollary of the distinctive feature of our recent world?' (Gellner 1997: 90).

In general, the modernist paradigm argues that the *nation* — and nationalism — is rather a recent phenomenon 'constructed' in the last few centuries. The concept of the nation is a product of 'modernity' — the modern world characterised by capitalism, industrialisation, the bureaucratic state, urbanisation, and secularisation. This approach puts strong emphasis on political and economic processes rather than culture, and views the nation as 'socially constructed' or 'invented' by the elite and the intelligentsia, through ideologies and movements of nationalism. Elie Kedourie (1994: 1) argues that 'nationalism is a doctrine invented in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century'. Hobsbawm associates the nation with 'invented traditions', which are 'recent historical innovations' (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992: 13). However, he and other modernists do not imply that such traditions are fabricated or are not genuine, but they emphasis how 'old' traditions (symbols, myths, etc.) are exploited or reinvented for political purposes. Kedourie (1994: 71) asserts that 'there is little doubt that the appeal of modern Egyptian, or Panarab, or

Armenian, or Greek nationalism derives the greater part of its strength from the existence of ancient communal and religious ties which have nothing to do with nationalist theory, and which may even be opposed to it'.

While theorists largely agree that nations and nationalism are modern social constructs, they differ on particularities, especially on which comes first: the nation or nationalism. For instance, for Gellner (1983: 55) 'nations can be defined only in terms of the age of nationalism' (modernity), that 'nationalism engenders nations, not vice versa', while Greenfeld (1992: 21) argues that 'historically, the emergence of nationalism predated the development of every significant component of modernisation'. John Hutchinson (1994) and Anthony Smith (1986; 1999), proponents of the ethno-symbolic paradigm, while accepting the modernity of the nation, emphasize the significance of pre-modern ethnic ties in nations — for example, in Europe and the Far East where ethnic communities were well developed before the modern age — and the 'pre-modern' elements used in nationalism, such as symbols, memories, customs, language, territory, etc.

Other modernists, such as Karl Deutsch (1966) and Benedict Anderson (1991), emphasize the centrality of *communication* in the making of nations. They argue that displacements caused by economic developments in modernity increased social communication among members of the same cultural group spread in various localities and on wider range of subjects. Anderson, whose book, *Imagined Communities* (1991), has significant appeal in the study of nationalism, stresses the processes of social communication in the development of modernity and how print capitalism — circulation of vernacular literature and printing technology — has had an influence on nationalism. He defines nations as collectively 'imagined' political communities where individuals are bound by a sense of belonging to the larger group. 'It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'. As such, the nation is 'conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship… [which] makes it possible, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings' (Anderson 1991: 6-7). This poses the 'central problem' of nationalism, which could be answered by studying its cultural roots.

The antiquity or 'dating' of nations is a major dividing matter in the theoretical discourse of nationalism. The primordialist approach emphasizes the 'primordial' and organic nature of the nation; that it has existed from 'immemorial times' (Jews, Armenians, Greeks, the Chinese and others are often cited as examples). It takes the nation as given and as a constituent element of human society and history, where ancestral, cultural and territorial origins, and recurrent patterns of social action are prominent features. 'Primordialists [theorists] attempt to understand the passion and self-sacrifice characteristics of nations and nationalism by deriving them from 'primordial' attributes of basic social and cultural phenomena like language, religion, territory, and especially kinship' (Smith 1998: 223; Smith 1986). The related 'perennial' paradigm, on the other hand, suggests that nations should be viewed over the long period of time — the *longue durée*. The question for the perennialists is not the pre-existence of nations before modernity per se, but the historical and ethnic roots and ties of modern nations, which are important features in collective consciousness, the sense of belonging to a group or a nation. It is the 'persistence rather than genesis of particular patterns' (e.g., language, myths of origin) in the 'cycle of ethnic consciousness' (Armstrong 1982: 50), which inspire nationalism. Some aspects of this approach overlap with the ethno-symbolic paradigm, which emphasizes the 'pre-modern' characteristics of nations and their role in the construction of *modern* nations and nationalism. Smith, a prominent proponent of this paradigm, argues that *'ethnies* are constituted, not by lines of physical descent, but by the sense of continuity, shared memory and collective destiny, i.e., by lines of cultural affinity embodied in myths, memories, symbols and values retained by a given cultural unit of population' (Smith 1991: 29; cf. Smith 1986). He underlines that the examination of these subjective features and their 'rediscovery' and 'reinterpretation' by nations and nationalisms are crucial to the understanding of 'the problems of modernity' and to the 'appreciation of the subjective and historical dimensions of nations and nationalism' (Smith 1991: 224). The main difference between the modernist and ethno-symbolic approaches is the role of culture. Modernists insist that nationalism is primarily a political movement or principle, while non-modernists consider culture as critical — without, however, underestimating the role of political processes (cf. Hutchinson 1994). Nielsen (1999: 127), for example, argues that 'all

nationalisms are cultural nationalism of one kind or another. There is no purely political conception of the nation, liberal or otherwise'.

An eclectic, rather than rigid, approach that draws upon both the primordial/ethno-symbolic and modernist paradigms is more useful theoretical background to our case studies. It should be noted, however, that the primordial/ethno-symbolic dimension is more dominant in the nationalist discourses in the South Caucasus — or what Tishkov calls 'the power of primordialism' in post-Soviet nationalism (a legacy of the Soviet nationalities policy), where ethnicity is seen 'as objective "given", a sort of primordial characteristic of humanity' with 'objective entities' and 'inherent features such as territory, language, recognizable membership, and even a common mentality' (1997: 1). Smith proposes that:

> Nationalism can be seen as a form of political archaeology, seeking out continuities in order to reveal the ancient layering of nations and glossing over discontinuities. Nationalism is equally important as a secular form of "salvation drama": it paints a heroic myth of collective salvation through communal regeneration in the image of the golden age and by means of a sacred mission of the chosen community (Smith 2000: 87).

This is especially reflected in the 'nationalist' articulation of the histories of Karabakh and Abkhazia in particular, and the Caucasus in general, as discussed in Chapter 1. On the other hand, Gellner's (1983: 1) definition of nationalism as 'primarily a political principle' provides another important insight. This principle 'holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent. Nationalism as a sentiment, or as a movement, can best be defined in terms of this principle'. Within this framework, Tishkov, for example, explains that Soviet 'ethnographers used ethnic territories as maps for Soviet state-building; ethnonations became political facts through territorialization and the assigning of an officially recognized administrative status' (Tishkov 1997: 231; cf. Suny 1998: 284-290). Indeed, through these processes 'new nations were created' in the Soviet Union, especially in Central Asia, and other nationalities' national

consciousness strengthened. By the mid-1980s, 'nationalities were more self-conscious and better educated, more consolidated demographically, and more in control of their own capital city and ensconced in the local government after seventy-years of Soviet rule than they had been earlier' (Suny 1998: 463).

Gellner further argues that 'nationalist sentiment is the feeling of anger aroused by the violation of the [political] principle, or the feeling of satisfaction aroused by its fulfilment. A nationalist movement is one actuated by a sentiment of this kind'. In other words, as Suny (1997) puts it in the context of the Soviet Union, nationalism 'is an effective instrument for unifying a people around strategic goals'. This sentiment of 'violation' or 'anger' is acute — as in the case of the Caucasus — 'if the rulers of the political unit belong to a nation other than that of the majority of the ruled, this, for nationalist, constitutes a quite outstanding intolerable breech of political propriety. This can occur either through the incorporation of the national territory in a larger empire, or by the local domination of an alien group' (Gellner 1983: 1).[5] Indeed, the process of colonisation-decolonisation is one of the arguments put forth by Karabakh Armenians and Abkhazians vis-à-vis their titular states on the one hand, and Georgians and Azerbaijanis vis-à-vis the Soviet Union on the other. The arguments are tied to the concept of self-determination and territoriality (cf. Kedourie 1994: 56ff; Smith 1991: 123ff).

In the case of Karabakh and Abkhazia, the 'politicisation of space' is an important feature as it relates to the concept of independence and sovereignty. Herb and Kaplan (1999: 2-3) argue that 'nations aspire to have their own states because only states hold sovereign power. The ideal of the nation-state — an entity which the territory of the nation and the territory of the state are congruous — still reigns as the primary goal of the modern world'. This 'spatial identity' of Karabakh Armenians and the Abkhazians interacts with their sense of security vis-à-vis the majority titular state and their national 'political projects'. In the context of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, Nodia argues that 'political project' is 'an ideal construct' that addresses questions of identity, culture, territorial boundaries, political status, the 'other', and the political-economic order. As such, 'a national project is a project of independence' (Nodia 1997-1998:10-12) — a goal pursued by Karabakh and Abkhazia.

The construction of group or national identity — as well as the processes of mobilisation and legitimation of the 'political projects' of Karabakh Armenians and Abkhazians — includes elements of the essentialist-constructivist, objective-subjective, primordial-modernists dichotomies. However, in practical terms, especially in the context of conflict resolution, there remains a gap between the theorists' approach to nationalism and the nationalists' approach to theory. For example, one key problem observed by Anderson (1991: 5) is 'the objective modernity of nations to the historian's eye, vs. their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists'. For some, 'a rueful European saying' could arguably be applicable (perhaps humorously) to the Caucasus: that 'a Nation is a group of persons united by a common error about their ancestry and a common dislike of their neighbours' (quoted in Deutsch 1969: 3). Others, who criticise theorists of nationalism as 'those who are in the comfortable position of belonging to a nation formally recognised by other states', see such theories as a 'message for abolishing nations'.[6] Ronald Suny's observation on the problematic provides a valuable insight:

> The disjuncture between the constructivist conviction of nationalism theorists and the nationalist's belief in firm, real, essential characteristics of nation is not easily resolved by a simple exposure of the processes by which national histories and group distinctions are constructed. Primordial identity construction cannot be reduced to a mistake, a self-deception, or false consciousness. Rather, theorists need to appreciate the important work that primordialism and essentialism perform (Suny 2001: 892).

The discussion of the perspectives of the two minorities in the South Caucasus presented in this thesis is an attempt towards such an appreciation' suggested by Suny — and Smith (1991: 224).

The dissertation is organised around seven thematic and loosely chronological chapters. Chapter 1 presents the ancient and modern historical backgrounds of Karabakh and Abkhazia, and highlights the problematic issues

of political autonomy. Chapter 2 discusses autonomy in the Soviet period, with particular focus on the relationships between the titular states and their autonomies. Chapter 3 discusses the various sources of conflict between the titular authorities and the autonomous regions and their implications for the resolution of the conflicts. Chapter 4 examines the social and political mobilisation processes in Karabakh and Abkhazia, the role of the elite, the issue of legitimation, and power relations between the various political and social actors. Chapter 5 deals with the role of religion in inter-ethnic relations, a much-neglected discursive dimension of the conflicts in the Caucasus, and how it is used and exploited by various actors in society and politics. Chapter 6 presents the theoretical, legal and practical aspects of self-determination and their relevance to Karabakh and Abkhazia and how the new post-Soviet 'order' is legitimised. Chapter 7 focuses on how the two former Soviet autonomies engage in state-building processes, and the problems they face as internationally unrecognised entities. The thesis concludes with a brief discussion of prospects for the resolution of the conflicts.

The existing literature on the history and conflicts in the South Caucasus could be arranged into three categories: a) *Scholarly*: primary texts and historical sources, Soviet-era publications by local and regional scholars, Western literature (sovietology), and post-Soviet era western scholarship with large focus on nationalism and 'the problem of nationalities' in Soviet and post-Soviet space; b) *Journalistic*: descriptive and analytical reports, articles, news material; c) *'Conflict resolution' literature*: papers and proposals generated by NGOs, academics, think tanks, university institutes, and international organisations. In addition to an extensive literature review, research for this thesis consists of fieldwork in Karabakh, the main case study, and 38 in-depth interviews (tape recorded) with Armenians and Abkhazians. I visited Karabakh from July to September 1995 — and Armenia for a total of three months between 1992 and 2000 — where I interviewed government officials, doctors, soldiers, clergy, teachers, journalists, intellectuals, students, social workers, senior citizens, diaspora Armenians working in Karabakh, international NGO workers in Karabakh, and others. These interviews were complemented by conversations with tens of other individuals during my long stay in Stepanakert, the capital of Karabakh (and week-long visits to Shusha and Martakert), extensive field

notes, and participant observations. A visit to Abkhazia did not materialise due to travel and technical complications caused by the blockade and the military situation. However, I have interviewed Abkhazians visiting London, as well as representatives of NGOs who have worked in Abkhazia. Certainly, a research trip to Abkhazia would have provided broader data on Abkhazia, however, I believe, the interviews with Abkhazians and about Abkhazia, and extensive use of the available literature provide adequate comparative data. Consequently, the reader will notice that there is richer data about Karabakh than on Abkhazia in this research project. This is also reflected in the fact that there is more material available on the Karabakh conflict and the Armenians in general than on the Abkhazians and Abkhazia, due to its isolation from the rest of the world and difficulties of access by outsiders.

## Technical notes

I have withheld the names of my informants, out of respect for the interviewees' privacy and requests not to be mentioned by name. The very few exceptions are in the case of prominent public figures.[7]

In the Caucasus, as elsewhere, the spelling of place names have "political" implications — e.g., Sukhum (for Abkhazians), Sukhumi (for Georgians), Shushi (Karabakh Armenians), Shusha (Azerbaijanis). I have used each group's own preferred spelling, especially when presenting their particular point of view. Also, throughout the text, with a few contextual exceptions, I use the short form 'Karabakh' instead of *Nagorno Karabakh*, *Nagorno-Karabakh*, *Nagorny Karabakh*, *Mountainous Karabagh, Daghlig Qarabagh* (for Azeris), or *Artsakh* (for Armenians).

# CHAPTER 1

# History and Autonomy

The collapse of the Soviet Union triggered unprecedented processes of rapid and long-term transition in virtually all aspects of life: political, social, economic, religious, cultural, and territorial.

One of the most contentious problems in the processes of social restructuring, especially in the former Soviet periphery, is the right of self-determination of minority nationalities *versus* the territorial integrity of newly independent states. In the Caucasus, unresolved conflicts from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which had been 'frozen' when the region was sovietised, re-emerged in, for example, Chechnya, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Ajaria, Nagorno Karabakh and other part of the Caucasus which is the 'ancestral homeland' of over twenty-three nationalities. Soviet colonialisation did not bring relief or solutions to these existing territorial and cultural autonomy disputes, but contained them through various state measures ranging from granting limited autonomy to forced population shifts.[8] Thus, when an opportunity rose in the period of *perestroika* in the mid-1980s, 'disadvantaged groups responded quickly to cues suggesting that they [were] justified in acting on old grievances' (Gurr 1993: 37).

The national(ist) movements in this region are not simply a reflection of primitive ethnic sentiments that were unleashed by *perestroika*, but are more the by-product of the historical processes introduced by competing powers and, in more recent history, the result of the Soviet ethnic political institutional system, which fostered structural and political contradictions between ethnic communities.[9] Furthermore, these historical processes were exacerbated by the inadequacy and incompetence of the governments of newly-independent republics, which almost always represented the interests of the titular national

majority (be they Moldavians, Kazakhs, Georgians, Azeris, or Armenians) of the new republics as the determinative concern of new, incompetent and often corrupt governments that would produce, within a decade, several 'failed states.' These governments could neither cope nor deal fairly and judiciously with complex internal ethno-political conflicts through peaceful means, or constitutional re-arrangements.

Karabakh and Abkhazia serve as an example of the troubled legacy of the Soviet empire and of how former Soviet societies are creating a 'new order' through a process of multi-layered territorial, political, social, economic and cultural reconfiguration. The stated ultimate goal is to achieve independence from, they argue, the 'colonisers' of their territories — to achieve independence *de jure,* if the international community grants it, or *de facto*, as the case has been since 1993-94.

The struggle for full self-determination is played out in the context of the existing minority-majority cleavage. In these two case studies, the process of restructuring is characterised by:

a) territorial claims, i.e., restoration of 'historical' territorial boundaries;
b) cultural differences, i.e., ethnicity, language, religion, social customs;
c) economic inequalities, i.e., distribution of income and resources.
d) political inequalities, i.e., access to political power and the effective right to organise political activity on behalf of group interests;

These objective differences, through a process of internalisation, shape the subjective self-perception of the minority group. Thus, social mobilisation towards the creation of a new order coalesces with this objective-subjective axis.

This chapter will present a brief history of Karabakh and Abkhazia, with particular focus on intermittent periods of self-rule and political-social arrangements of considerable autonomy that occurred under various ruling powers. A review of the historical developments in the region is important, not only for a better understanding of the dynamics of the current conflicts, but also to understand why the warring parties refer to history to legitimise their demands. As one British observer put it, 'history is an extension of territory,

to be claimed and defended with fortresses of fact' (Marsden 1993: 109). For over a decade, Nagorno Karabakh and Abkhazia have been theatres of the longest-running unresolved conflicts, not only in the Caucasus, but also in all of the former Soviet Union.

Karabakh is a 4,388-sq. km. enclave in the South Caucasus[10] — recognised by the international community as legally part of Azerbaijan — with an Armenian population of about 120-150,000. According to the 1989 Soviet census, there were 145,000 Armenians (78.4%) and 40,000 Azeris (21.6%) in Nagorno Karabakh.[11]

What had started as a popular movement for self-determination in 1988 in Stepanakert, the capital of Karabakh, turned into a full-scale war in 1991 — with far reaching political and military implications for the region (see Chapter 4). The situation is further complicated by the fact that both parties in the conflict — the Armenians of Karabakh and the Republic of Azerbaijan — consider what used to be the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) their territory. In September 1991, the Supreme Soviet of Nagorno Karabakh declared an independent 'Republic of Mountainous Karabakh' (RMK) — encompassing the territory of the former autonomous region, plus the Shahumian district in the north. This was confirmed by a referendum in December, when elections were held for a new parliament (boycotted by the Azerbaijani minority). No state, including the Republic of Armenia, has recognised RMK's independence.

Azerbaijan responded militarily to Karabakh's declaration of independence and escalated the conflict into a full-scale war. In addition to a campaign to force the Armenian population of Karabakh to leave, Baku believed that the relentless bombardment of Stepanakert would quickly "resolve" the conflict, but the "military solution" had more dire consequences. Not only Stepanakert was physically devastated and hundreds killed, but also the societies of Karabakh, Azerbaijan, and Armenia were deeply militarised. In 1992-1993 Karabakh Armenians, with military help from Armenia and Russia, achieved major military "victories" against large-scale Azerbaijani offensives.[12] When a ceasefire agreement was signed between the warring parties in May 1994, Karabakh forces controlled not only what were the boundaries of the Oblast in Soviet times (except for a small north-eastern and a larger south-

eastern sections), but a large swathe of Azerbaijani territory surrounding the enclave. The return of these occupied territories is a significant element in the negotiations that may lead to a final peace agreement, which since 1994, the OSCE's Minsk Group has attempted to facilitate.

Abkhazia shares many common features with Karabakh; however, a key difference is that, unlike Armenians in Karabakh, the Abkhazians were a minority in Abkhazia. Situated on the eastern Black Sea coast, the Abkhazian Autonomous Republic — an 8,700 sq km territory — was part of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, with a population of 535,061 (1989 Soviet census). The Abkhazians constituted a minority of 18%, compared with the 46% majority of Georgians (including their ethnic-kin the Mingrelians and Svans).[13] However, in the late 19th century, before the 'Georgianisation' of the region, as Abkhaz scholars argue, Abkhazians were the majority, with 55.3%, and the Georgians counted for only 24.4%.[14]

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Abkhazian-Georgian relations deteriorated, when, in 1992, the Abkhazians reinstated their 1925 Constitution to prevent Georgian attempts to curtail the political status of the autonomous republic. Following the fall of ultra-nationalist President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, a full scale war broke out between the Abkhazians and Georgia, which resulted in the latter's defeat in September 1993. As with Karabakh, the Abkhazians received Russian assistance, whose policy, at least at the time, was to use the conflicts in Abkhazia and Karabakh to pressure Tbilisi and Baku, which were rapidly drifting away from Moscow's "sphere of influence". Since the 1994 Georgian-Abkhazian ceasefire, the United Nations but not, in this case, the OSCE, have been involved in mediating a solution. While unrecognised by the international community, Abkhazia and Karabakh have achieved *de facto* independence in what is now the 'Republic of Abkhazia' and the 'Republic of Mountainous Karabakh' respectively.

Nevertheless, the international community's position regarding the fragmentation of the former Soviet Union does not favour the positions of Abkhazia and Karabakh. The international community recognized only the independence of what were the 15 Soviet Socialist Republics. The international community, in fact, discouraged further break up of second-tier 'states' in the Soviet system, i.e., autonomous republics such as Abkhazia, and third-tier

autonomous regions, such as Karabakh. For the international community, based on a variety of political and geostrategic considerations, the 'functional history' of this region starts in 1991, that is, with the end of the Soviet Union and independence of former Soviet republics.

Not so for the Abkhazians and Karabakh Armenians — history goes back much further, to 'time immemorial'. Indeed, both groups, as well as their titular establishments in Tbilisi and Baku, have used their history as a significant and key recourse and point of reference to: a) articulate their grievances; b) demonstrate to the 'outside world' that their claims are based on objective 'historical facts'; c) reconstitute their eroded national consciousness. This is also true for some two hundred groups involved in conflicts around the world (Gurr 1993: 36), especially territorial disputes, where references to history, collective memory and experience are utilised to legitimate claims and mobilise group efforts toward the attainment of collective goals.

## History and Territorial claims

The 'collective memory' and 'record' of independence, self-rule, autonomy and various forms of self-government in Karabakh and Abkhazia throughout the centuries – and their consequences on the present situation – are generally ignored in contemporary discussions of these conflicts and their resolution. In diplomatic discourse, the points of departure are the territorial demarcations (although still legally not finalized) fixed in 1992 when the three republics in the South Caucasus became members of the United Nations. But, for the Karabakh Armenians and the Abkhazians there are 'objective' factors in history that are key to their contemporary struggle and case for independence.

Throughout the centuries, the boundaries of the region known today as Nagorno Karabakh (the toponym Karabakh, 'black garden', has been used since the thirteenth century) have been shifted and redrawn depending on invaders, conquests, territorial and administrative divisions and the relationship of the major powers dominating the region. The long list of foreign domination includes the Arabs, Seljuk Turks, Mongols, Turkmens, Ottoman Turks, Persians, Tsarist Russians and finally the Soviet Union.

One of the earliest records indicating that the region was part of Armenia goes back to the second century BC — that is, the ancient provinces of Artsakh and Utik, situated between Lake Sevan (north-west), the River Kura (north) and the River Araxes (south).[15] Following the first partition of Armenia in the late 4th century between the Byzantine and the Persian Sassanian empires, the area was divided and made part of Caucasian Albania — Aghwank (not to be confused with the Albanians in the Balkans). Given the geographic proximity of Albania and Armenia, they maintained close cultural, religious and economic contacts with each other.

In the early fourth century, after the Christianisation of Armenia, the Albanians adopted the Armenian brand of Christianity through the efforts of Armenian missionaries sent to Albania. They pledged canonical allegiance to the Armenian Church and upon their request, Grigoris, the grandson of Gregory the Illuminator, the patron saint of the Armenians, was designated the head of the Albanian Church. Over the centuries, while autocephalous, the catholicoses of the Albanians were consecrated by the head of the Armenian Church.[16] Furthermore, the Armenian influence extended beyond canonical jurisdiction whereby Armenian gradually supplanted Albanian as the language of the church and state (Dasxuranci 1961, Hewsen 1982). By the 10th century, the Albanian Church was fully absorbed by the Armenian Church and became known as the 'Armenian Catholicosate of Albanians or Aghwank', which survived until the mid-19th century.[17]

In the seventh century, the Arabs conquered the region, including the Caucasian Albanian kingdom. The eastern lowlands were first Islamised and then the majority were Turkified by the eleventh century when a Seljuk Turkish dynasty was established in the region. The population in western parts of Albania, which included what is Karabakh today, was largely assimilated by the Armenians — who were the majority in the southern region — and, to a lesser degree, by the Georgians.[18]

## Abkhazia in History

Abkhazia, on the other hand, in ancient times was home for 'linguistically and

culturally related tribes', such as the Heniokhs, Achaeans, Kerkets, Koraksians, Sanigs, Missimians, and others, as mentioned by early Greek and Roman chroniclers. However, in the 8th-10th centuries, during the period known as the Abkhazian Kingdom, these tribes were 'consolidated into a single nation'. A first century chronicler identifies one of these tribes as the *Absilae* (or *Apsilae*), an ethnonym contemporary Abkhazians use to identify themselves in Abkhazian (i.e., *Apswa*) (Chirikba 1999: 44-47). Their 'ethnic' roots are traced back to the Heniokhs, 'the collective term for the separate tribes of the Caucasian Black Sea Littoral' in the first century AD, from whom the Abkhazo-Adyghe tribe emerged (cf. Shamba 1999: 56, Bgazhba 1999: 59, Smith et al 1998: 55-56).

It is believed that Christianity came to Abkhazia through the missionary efforts of two of Christ's apostles, Andrew and Simon. According to a religious legend Simon is buried in the New Athos monastery, north of Abkhazia's capital Sukhum (Sukhumi in Georgian). However, the Christian presence in Abkhazia grew in the late third and early fourth centuries as Pitiunt (Pitsunda) was a place of 'banishment for Christians'. Christianity was officially embraced in Abkhazia in the mid-sixth century during Justinian the Great's rule. 'The first pastor amongst the Apsilians was a Bishop Constantine. At the Imperial Court in Constantinople a school was founded where Abkhazian children were given special tuition, and at his own expense a church was constructed in Abkhazia itself by Justinian' (Bgazhba 1999: 60).

Starting in the seventh century, a 'Divan of Abkhazian Kings' — hereditary power to rule Abkhazia passed from one ruler to another — was formed through intermarriage within the Byzantine imperial family. After the defeat of the invading Arabs in Abkhazia, in the eighth century (788-797) an Abkhazian Kingdom emerged with Kutaisi as its capital (today Imereti province in Georgia). The kingdom that lasted for some two centuries consolidated the various tribes living in Abkhazia and formed the basis of an 'Abkhazian feudal nationality, the common ancestors of both the Abkhazians proper and also the Abazinians' (later settled in North Caucasus).[19] By 1122, after the Arabs were expelled from Georgia, Tbilisi became the capital of the kingdom, 'but the title of the Georgian Bagrat'ids preserved up to the middle of the 13th century in first place the name of the Abkhazians as a tribute to the memory of their leading role in the unification of the country.' (Bgazhba 1999: 60-63).

Here, before going any further, it is important to engage in a brief discussion about the 'history of nationalities' in the Soviet Union. In Soviet times, writing history was a messy state-sponsored enterprise.

## Re-writing Histories

For decades, long before the start of the armed conflicts in Karabakh and Abkhazia, the 'authentication' of the history of the region had become the scholarly battleground of historians, political scientists, archaeologists, researchers and bureaucrats. The consequences of such Soviet scholarship — particularly in the process of construction of histories — have been disastrous and continue to have a negative impact on how conflicting parties view 'the other'. It should be noted that even today nationalist forces among the conflicting parties in the South Caucasus continue to exploit the propagandistic histories created in the Soviet period to shape public perceptions about 'the other' or 'the enemy'. As one Azeri refugee put it: 'In the Caucasus, wars are not started by national leaders, as in the East, nor by colonels, as in Latin America. They are started by scholarly historians'.[20] For example, despite the lack of linguistic and cultural similarities, Azerbaijani historiography has constructed an 'Albanian connection' in the ethnogenesis of the Azerbaijani nation. In this version of history, Albania is presented as the social, cultural and territorial predecessor of contemporary Azerbaijan; thus, refuting Armenian claims to Karabakh.[21]

The roots of this historiography go back to the Soviet policy of 'nativisation' (*korenizatsiia*), whereby the construction of 'national histories' in the Soviet republics was part of the official state 'teaching' that national identity is inseparable from the given territory of a national republic. In line with this policy, the 'official history' of the majority ethnic populations and that of their republics became virtually interchangeable.[22] In accord with the Soviet state's political operational code — 'one republic, one culture' — 'Azerbaijani historians produced histories of "Azerbaijan" in the medieval period based not on the historical facts of a prior national state but on the assumption that the genealogy of the present-day Azerbaijani republic could be traced in terms of putative ethnic-territorial continuity' (Saroyan, 1997: 141; cf. Dudwick 1990; Hunter 1993; Nadein-Raevski 1992).

Hence, the once prosperous Armenian community in Baku and Armenian culture in Karabakh are not covered in the official history of Azerbaijan.[23] In turn, the history of Azerbaijanis (and Moslems) who lived in Armenia as the majority population at the turn of the twentieth century of what is Armenia today is not part of the official history of Armenia.

While the ethnogenesis of the Azerbaijanis is a matter of academic debate, most scholars agree that Azerbaijan, as a national entity, emerged after 1918.[24] In the context of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, the 'Albanian connection' has become a politicised issue of irredentism. Azerbaijani historians, by establishing a connection between present Azerbaijanis and Caucasian Albanians, in addition to providing a common national history, sustain the idea of ethnic continuity and presence in Karabakh and 'demonstrate' that Karabakh Armenians are relatively recent immigrants to the region and thus a 'non-indigenous' people living on ancient Azerbaijani lands.[25]

In the context of the ongoing process of negotiations over the Karabakh conflict, a retired colonel of the Azerbaijani army, Isa Sadykhov, chairman of the Azerbaijani Association of Reserve Officers, took 'comfort' in such 'historiography': 'It is comforting to note that in recent times our historians and politicians have increasingly raised the issue of lands given to the Armenians'.[26] Indeed, 'reinterpretation' of history has been intertwined with Azerbaijanis' self-perception in contemporary times. An Azerbaijani diplomat in Washington, D.C., Elin Suleymanov, puts this more succinctly: 'Azerbaijan's complex identity will continue to evolve based on how the past and its consequences are reinterpreted to deal with the present' (Suleymanov 2001).[27]

As for historians in Armenia, they have been engaged in refuting Azeri historical claims, especially since the intensification of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict in the late 1980s, using evidence from pre-historic periods, primary medieval sources and modern scholarship on the region (cf. Donabedian, 1994). But, Karabakh Armenians living on the land, rather than in history books, point to hundreds of ancient monuments, ruins of religious buildings, churches and monasteries as 'living witnesses' to Armenian presence in Karabakh. Wholly innocent of scholarly learning, one middle-aged Karabakh farmer living near the 13th century Monastery of Gandzasar said:

' This monastery kept us Armenian, the writings on these walls made

us know who we are. There is a *Khachkar* (cross-stone), the size of a car, on top of this mountain; our ancestors placed it there to indicate that this is Armenian land'.[28] Ryszard Kapuscinski calls these *khachkars* 'symbols of Armenian existence, or else boundary markers, …signposts. You can find [them] in the most inaccessible places'.[29] Nevertheless, Karabakh Armenians' own selective telling of the past barely mentions that there were Azeris in Karabakh until the twentieth century. If pressed for acknowledgement, they point out that most Azeris were transient residents living in one place in the summer for grazing cattle and another place in the winter.[30]

Like their counterparts in Azerbaijan SSR, Georgian historians and intellectuals also constructed a *nativised* history of Abkhazia and the Abkhazians. Abkhazian intellectuals and scholars refute such constructed histories by Georgian academics. Linguist George Hewitt (1999: 17) likens the re-writing of history by some Georgian authors 'to prostitut[ing] their disciplines in the service of local chauvinist politics'. One of the controversial issues in the current Abkhazian-Georgian conflict is the fact that Abkhazians, unlike Karabakh Armenians in Karabakh, do not constitute a majority in Abkhazia.[31] As such, Abkhazians are portrayed as 'relatively new comers' who settled in Abkhazia.[32] Azerbaijani scholars, similarly, consider Armenians as latecomers to Karabakh.

Indeed, such representations of the Abkhazians pre-date the Soviet period. In 1889, Georgian historian Davit Bakradze 'argued that the Abkhazians came over the mountains, driving out the Mingrelians and eventually forcing them over the River Ingur.' He does not provide precise dates to 'this hypothesised southern push'. Teimuraz Mikeladze is another historian whose ethnocentric theories have been widely promoted by Georgian authors and media (Smith et al 1998: 53-59). During the Soviet period, some Georgian intellectuals further promoted Bakradze's 'theory' of Abkhazian origins in Georgia, which, in general, claimed that the Abkhazians migrated to Western Georgia in the 17th century, 'displacing the Kartvelians resident there and adopting the ethnonym of the dislodged population' (Hewitt 1999: 17-18; cf. Smith et al 1998: 54-56).[33]

This academic and information 'campaign' by Tbilisi, Lakoba argues:

> Incited [Georgians] to assimilate Abkhazian lands

> denuded as a result of the exile. In these publications it is baldly stated that only Mingrelians, by right of being the neighbouring peoples, should colonise the territory of Abkhazia. And not only Abkhazia — as Georgian writers remarked: 'The whole Caucasus is our land, our country' (Lakoba 1999: 84-85; cf Hewitt 1996: 269-282).

Yuri Voronov, archaeologist and historian, provides further insight into this Soviet enterprise. Commenting on the nativisation policy and its effect on the region's inter- and intra-national relations, he wrote in 1992:

> In each republic [of the Soviet Union] there became established standard variants of local history, and, when in the 1970s the need arose for a composite history of the countries of Transcaucasia, it became clear that the views about history among leading representative academics in the respective republics were so divergent that such a jointly prepared general work on this theme was quite out of the question.
>
> The position of the Autonomous Republics within the Union Republics is that of third-class states. This gave life to yet another tier of historical elaboration, which re-cut the cloth of the history of these autonomies in accordance with the conception of the leading scholars within each Union Republic. Such manipulation of history took on the shape here and there of actual law. Thus, for instance, in Georgia in 1949 with the aim of keeping local material out of the hands of Russian and foreign researchers a special law was promulgated according to which archaeological research on the territory of the republic was forbidden to all persons and organisations which have no relations with the Georgian Academy of Sciences (Lakoba 1999a: 99).

More important to the theme of this thesis, the 'national histories'

of the Soviet titular states leave out mention or discussion of periods of self-rule in the history of non-titular peoples in their territories. Yet historically documented rights granted to Karabakh Armenians and Abkhazians by various rulers and regimes constitute a significant part of their legal and historical argument.

Between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries, major demographic changes took place in the region in general, and particularly in Karabakh, as a result of Turkish and Mongol invasions. The emerging Turks from Central Asia — having conquered Iran and founded the Seljuk Turkish dynasty — invaded and devastated much of Armenia and Karabakh, especially its lowlands. By the mid-eleventh century, the Armenian kingdom was also crushed. But in Karabakh and Siwnik — the mountainous territory in the southeast of the present Republic of Armenia — feudal principalities known as Meliks ('princes' in Arabic) survived for about three hundred years and became a safe haven for thousands of Armenians who sought the protection of the native lords.

These melikdoms were established by Jehan-Shah, chief of Turkomans, in the mid-fifteenth century as part of a strategy of creating a row of tiny buffer territories along the northern frontiers of his domain.

> The granting of autonomy to the remnants of the local Armenian nobility was designed to take advantage of their natural willingness to defend their patrimonies by restoring to them the personal advantages they had formerly possessed over their lands (Hewsen, 1972: 297).

Within fifty years, however, Karabakh came under Persian Safavid rule. The Safavids incorporated existing hereditary structures — which extended from the Caspian Sea to the Ottoman frontiers — whose rulers were Muslims, responsible for protecting Persia from the neighbouring Ottoman Empire, Georgia and Russia.

Among the various Khanates established in the region, the melikdoms of Karabakh were the only 'truly autonomous [ones] while under Persian suzerainty' (*ibid*). Indeed, when Safavid rule ended in 1722, the new Nadir Shah continued to recognise the autonomy of the meliks and reaffirmed their rights — which had been granted to them under Shah Abbas — in gratitude

for their assistance in his campaign against the Ottomans.[34] The 'reward' also included the Shah's removal of a number of Turkish tribes from Karabakh to Iran. However, upon Nadir Shah's death, these tribes returned to Karabakh, and Panah Khan, the leader of the Javanshir tribe, expanded his domain and established a separate khanate for his tribe.[35] This lasted until 1806 (cf. Bournoutian 1994: 17). The Meliks continued their function until 1813 when Karabakh came under Russian rule (Hewsen 1972: 298).[36]

While providing a strategic buffer for their overlords, the five melikdoms of Karabakh preserved a social structure that withstood threats of destruction by perennial conquerors for centuries. The meliks were the governors, judges (their decrees had the effect of law in their domain) and commanders-in-chief of their infantries, which consisted of one to two thousand men.

As for their personal characteristics:

> The meliks possessed a code of honour similar to that of the nobility caste in other parts of the world. Proud of their descent and jealous of their honour, they were war-like and quick to take offence. Brave, hospitable, crude, devoted to their church in their own rough ways; at times cruel, they betray the same characteristics which appear in the *naxarars* [feudal lords] of ancient and medieval Armenia…. Reduced by circumstances to little better than mountain chieftains, the meliks demonstrated in every way, however humbly, their descent from the grandees of the old Armenia.
>
> …The mountain and oft-swollen streams made travel difficult and no trade routes crossed the plateau. It was a world of its own, cut off and shut away and well suited to the preservation of old traditions and the survival of ancient houses (Hewsen 1972: 299).

The Abkhazians had their own version of *meliks* or local princes until the mid-19th century and shared similar traits with Karabakh Armenians.[37] Despite the depredations caused by series of invasions and changes of rulers, such family-tribal networks preserved Abkhazian 'national', social and cultural

characteristics. Serfdom was virtually unknown in Abkhazia, according to Lakoba, as serfdom was not part of the Abkhazians' self-perception. Unlike Mingrelia and central Georgia, 'all categories of peasants were proprietors of land. Such right to land placed the lowest estates beyond dependence on the privileged' (Lakoba 1999: 76). The village-communities (Abkhaz *a'kyta*) or 'mountain feudalism' provided a social structure in which the various strata of the population formed a family-tribal unity. In this system,

> the highest and lowest estates were steeped in the practice of the so-called 'milk-kinship' of the feudals with the peasants. The children of princes and the nobility, given out to peasant-families for their upbringing, became, as did their parents, close relatives of the latter. In fact, even conflict between the estates was reduced (Lakoba 1999: 76).

Lakoba goes on to explain that 'the most honourable occupations [of the Abkhazians] were military activity and hunting. A community was reminiscent of a military camp, and lived in a distinctive 'military readiness.' This was due to the constant threats and attacks from the outside that endangered the life of the community. Indeed, the military preparedness 'bonded yet more strongly the highest estates with the lowest within society' (Lakoba 1999: 77). But, self-rule in Abkhazia was not without depredations. Throughout the 14th century, Abkhazia saw a long struggle between the Abkhazian Chachba and the Mingrelian Dadian princes over control of Sukhum (Tskhum) province. These struggles resulted in dividing a part of the province, which became a part of the Mingrelian princedom of Sabediano.

Abkhazia's strategic location on the north east littoral of the Black Sea also made it a significant commercial centre. The Genoese had established a trading post in the region in the early 14th century, making Sevatopolis (or Sebastopolis, present day Sukhum) an important port of commerce in the eastern Black Sea region — where trading Mingrelians, Armenians, Jews and Muslims lived along side the Abkhahians. In 1330 a large community of Catholics had its own diocese and cemetery in Sevatopolis (Bgazhba 1999: 64, Lakoba 1999: 78).

The Abkhazian-Mingrelian conflict over control of various parts of Abkhazia continued and territorial and political boundaries kept shifting between the 15th and 16th centuries. Meanwhile, waves of Abkhazian migrations took place from 'their historical Transcaucasian homeland to the North Caucasus, into regions formerly occupied by Iranian-speaking Alans, who were defeated by the Mongol forces. These Abkhazian migrants settled along the tributaries of the River Kuban and River Kuma' (Chirikba 1999: 47). A year after the fall of Constantinople, the Genoese 'colonial system' in the Black Sea area ended when the Ottoman Turks entered the scene, and when, in 1475, Kaffe fell into the hands of the Ottomans.

For the next 300 years, under Ottoman Turkish rule, the bay of Sukhum became a significant strategic post for the Ottoman navy; meanwhile, Sunni Islam spread in Abkhazia. Starting in the late 18th century a number of Chachba family princes ruled in Abkhazia; however, not without internal disputes in the 'noble' family and military-political pressures from the outside. Manoeuvring his way through Russian and Ottoman Turkish interests, Keleshbey Chachba became Abkhazia's 'sovereign prince' from the 1880s.[38] For some three decades he 'conducted an independent state-policy' in Abkhazia. Like the *meliks* in Karabakh, Keleshbey consolidated the feudal system in Abkhazia by subordinating the feudal aristocracy and the 'minor nobility' and by organising a 500-warrior defence guard – armed with 'rifle, sabre and pistol'. In times of crisis, Keleshbey was able to mobilise an army of 25,000, 'armed with artillery, cavalry and even a naval flotilla', which patrolled the seacoast from Batumi to Anapa.

While Keleshbey's father and uncle had fought against the Turks in the 1750s, for which they were punished,[39] he maintained good relations with Ottoman authorities, all along 'secretly nurtur[ing]' a dream for a 'fully free and independent Abkhazian state' (Lakoba 1999: 67). Keleshbey came close to realising his dream when in 1803 he asked Russia to help Abkhazia free itself from the Turkish 'protectorate'. He led a large army made of Abkhazians and Adyghean against the Turks and defended the Sukhum fortress against the attacking Ottoman naval forces. But, this was a short-lived victory. Keleshbey's relations with Russia deteriorated after his 20,000-strong army staged an attacked on Mingrelia and took its ruler's (Grigori Dadiani) son and heir, Levan, hostage. Grigori sought Russia's assistance to repel the attacks of both

Keleshbey and the king of Imereti, Solomon II. Thus, in 1803, Georgia for the first time became a protectorate of Russia. By 1805, Keleshbey was forced by the Russians to return his Dadiani hostage.[40]

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the expansionist tsarist Russia annexed Georgia and eventually conquered all of the Transcaucasus (South Caucasus). Abkhazia and Karabakh became part of the Russian empire.

Karabakh was included in the territorial boundaries of the Muslim province, as stipulated by a treaty between Ibrahim Khan of Karabakh and the Russians, whereby the Khan was recognised as governor of the region in exchange for his becoming a Russian vassal. The Russian annexation of Karabakh was officially recognised by Persia in the Treaty of Gulistan in 1813 (Bournoutian 1994: 18). But the boundaries and administrative arrangements were to change again. Eventually, Karabakh became part of Elizavetpol Province, which later became Azerbaijan. Finally, in the Treaty of Turkmenchay in 1828, the Persians completely ceded Karabakh, together with Erevan (Yerevan) and Nakhichevan, to the Russians (cf. Nissman 1987:13-15). These administrative and political changes in the name of colonial interests introduced disruption to the economic life of the region and had lasting implications for the future.[41] In the following decades, subsequent re-drawing of borders and administrative changes were made by the tsarist Russians in the Transcaucasus,[42] and by 1880 the divisions in the region were set and remained unchanged until the Bolshevik Revolution, which brought yet another geopolitical evolution to the South Caucasus.

In Abkhazia, the feud in the Keleshbey clan continued, especially over succession. In the wake of the Russo-Turkish war (1806-1812), the Russians further undermined Keleshbey's power in Abkhazia, as his 'commitment to Russia' had eroded. He was assassinated in Sukhum in May 1808 and his illegitimate son, Giorgi (Seferbey), was recognised, in February 1810, 'as the hereditary prince of the Abkhazian domains under the supreme protection, power and defence of the Russian Empire'. Meanwhile, the Ottoman Porte recognised Giorgi's half-brother Aslanbey as ruler of Abkhazia. The struggle between the two Abkhazian leaders became, in effect, a struggle between Russia and Turkey.

The Abkhazians paid a high price for the continuing rivalry between the two regional powers, as the Turks and the Russians fought for control

over the region. Due to Russian hostilities, some 5,000 Abkhazians resettled in Turkey in 1810. This was the beginning of subsequent waves of Abkhazian emigration in the 19th century. By 1812, Abkhazia and Mingrelia came under complete Russian rule under the terms of the Bucharest Peace agreement between Russia and the Ottoman Empire (Lakoba 1999: 68-76).

But the struggle against Russia did not end; on the contrary, it intensified after Seferbey's death in 1821. Now supported by the Ottomans, Aslanbey mobilised a large uprising in which 12,000 Abkhazians blockaded the Russian troops in Sukhum and Lykhny. The Russians responded with punitive measures against the 'disobedient Abkhazians living in the mountains'. Aslanbey fled to Turkey. Meanwhile, Abkhazian rebels had joined Imam Shamil's armed struggle in Dagestan against the Russians, their common 'enemy'. However, following the Crimean War (1853-1856), when Shamil was defeated and submitted to the Russians, the Abkhazians were, once again, left to face their political-military fate. The Abkhazians and various groups in the North Caucasus found themselves surrounded by the Russian forces at the Black Sea coast as well as the mountains in the west. While under complete Russian control, the Abkhazians, in a last ditch attempt to garner foreign assistance, joined the inaugural *mezhlis* (parliament) of the 'Great and Free Assembly' of the Caucasus 'mountain tribes' in June 1861.[43] The Assembly sent a delegation to lobby European states, but returned empty handed, except for a group of 'Polish revolutionaries who intended to raise simultaneously an Abkhaz-Circassian and Polish revolt against the Russian Empire'.[44]

## Large-scale exile and population move

At the end of the Caucasian War, in June 1864, Russia abolished the Abkhazian princedom — the last ruler, Mikhail, was arrested in November 1864 and sent to Voronezh, only to die two years later — and incorporated it into the Sukhum Military Sector.[45] A large-scale uprising broke out in Abkhazia, after Mikhail's death, in protest against planned reforms of the peasantry by the Russian authorities, which included a massive 'resettlement' scheme — in effect 'ethnic cleansing' — approved by Tsar Alexander II, whereby the eastern Black Sea coast was to be settled by Cossacks. As a result, some 45,000 Ubykhs and

20,000 Sadzians were resettled in Turkey.

In late July 1866 thousands of Abkhazians gathered in the village of Lykhny to protest the Russian plan. The mob killed three Russian military officials and 54 Cossacks. Soon, the conflict spread to other villages and involved some 20,000 Abkhazians (Lakoba 1999: 81-82). Reflecting on the uprising, Michail's son, Prince Giorgi, who witnessed the events, wrote:

> The public declaration of the manifesto concerning serfdom, which did not exist among this people and was consequently inapplicable to them, was an utterly unforgivable error on the part of members of the administration… The people could in no wise understand from whom or what they were going to be liberated (Lakoba 1999: 82).

The popular uprising's attempts to restore Abkhazia's princedom — by declaring the 20-year old prince Giorgi Chachba as Abkhazia's ruler — did not succeed. On the contrary, the Russian forces put down the uprising, deported Giorgi to a Russian military district, and expelled some 20,000 Abkhazians to Turkey. This forced exile is known in Abkhaz national consciousness as the first major *amha'dzhyrra* (exiles), which effectively made 'Abkhazia devoid of Abkhazians and insurgents,' while providing Turkey 'a warrior people' which it needed (*ibid*).

But the exiled Abkhazians would come to haunt Russia. During the Russo-Turkish War (1877-78) the Turkish troops, comprised largely of Abkhazian exiles, captured Sukhum for a few months, only to lose it again to the Russian army. The 'alliance' of the Abkhazians with Turkey caused further repression by Tsarist authorities. 'For participation in this insurrection virtually the entire Abkhazian population was declared to be "guilty"', and the characterisation remained attached to the entire population until 1907 (*ibid*, 83). With only a few exceptions, Abkhazians were prohibited to settle along the Black Sea coast or establish residence in Sukhum, Gudauta or Ochamchira.

## 'Ethnic cleansing'

More Abkhazians were forcibly 'resettled' in Turkey — 50,000 by 1877. At the end of the 19th century, rising Georgian nationalism advocated the 'assimilation' of Abkhazia into Georgia, and encouraged large movements of peasants from Western Georgia to Abkhazia, who settled and claimed the depopulated villages and lands left behind by Abkhazian exiles.[46] Indeed, 'after the abrogation of the Abkhazian princedom and the introduction of direct Russian governance, Greeks, Bulgarians, Armenians, Russians, Estonians, Germans and others, but most of all Mingrelians, had established their own villages' in Abkhazia (Lakoba 1999: 83).

The remaining Abkhazians resented the new settlers — the 'occupiers of their land'. Inter-communal relations deteriorated gradually, and by the 1905 Russian Revolution, tensions were high and explosive. The Abkhazians viewed the revolution, not as an opportunity to regain what they had lost, but as a Georgian conspiracy to further undermine Abkhazia. But, once again, the ultimate fate of Abkhazia was dependent on the regional 'superpower', Moscow, which attempted to exploit the inter-communal tension in the region to suppress the tide of revolution.

In a 1907 editorial, *New Time*, a Russian newspaper in St. Petersburg, wrote:

> Instead of a feeling of gratitude towards the Abkhazian population, amongst whom Kartvelian nationalists are living, there is brazen-faced exploitation… This accounts for the hatred the Abkhazians have for their economic and future political enslavers… Can we permit the Abkhazian people to be gobbled up by Kartvelian immigrants?… Is it not time to wake up? The tolerance of the Abkhazians might dry up. One Armeno-Tatar (i.e., Azerbaijani) conflict in the Caucasus is enough — why do we need to create another Kartvelian-Abkhazian one![47]

For Tsarist Russia, the Abkhazians were no longer the 'traitor people'.

Tsar Nicholas rehabilitated the Abkhazian people by an imperial edict (27 April 1907), proclaiming that the Abkhazian people were no longer 'guilty' against the empire. 'Their loyalty to the [Tsarist] government in the course of the [1905] Revolution' was clearly noted in the proclamation. But as the revolution unfolded, and in the wake of World War I, Abkhazian attempts to make the Sukhum District an independent *gubernia* within the Russian empire remained fruitless (cf. Lakoba 1999: 87). The Abkhazians' opportunity was lost in the enormous political-military waves that followed.

## Conclusion

The fact that the Abkhazians and Karabakh Armenians are among the primary *ancient* native peoples of the Caucasus has been clearly and undeniably established by historical scholarship. Yet the "debate", in the process of politicisation of history, continues as to *who was where and when*. This is not a simple questions in a region where, at least in the last two millennia, empires were built, great powers defeated, territories expanded and changed, entire populations moved from one place to another, new "nations" created — and where other political "experiments" were conducted.

The intermittent periods of sovereignty and self-rule in the history of Abkhazia and Karabakh are significant realities in the historical experience and collective consciousness of their societies. More important, it is still relevant to the political and intellectual elites in the context of the modern struggle for self-determination and, ultimately, to the resolution of the conflicts. Indeed, political leaders in Karabakh still refer to their *meliks* as the pioneers of the Armenian emancipation movement, known for their military training and continuous political struggle for autonomy and national renaissance.[48]

The dominating role of "outside" powers in the affairs of neighbouring nationalities in this region has been both a blessing and a curse — and has contributed to the exacerbation of inter-ethnic conflicts. There is at least one "lesson" in the history of the South Caucasus: that suppressed or unresolved conflicts, especially in the political sphere, will resurface with various levels of

intensity depending on the conditions and the political mood of the times. As we have seen in this chapter, the cumulative force of ignored grievances over a long period of time could have lethal consequences not only to the parties involved in the conflict, but to the entire region. Indeed, as we shall see in the next chapter, the conflicts continued well into the 20th century and to contemporary times, not because the peoples living in this region are intrinsically prone to "ethnic hatred" or "violence", but largely because of systemic changes imposed on them and — to use a modern political cliché so apt to this region's history — denial of basic human rights.

CHAPTER 2

# Autonomy under Soviet Rule

The establishment of Soviet rule in the Caucasus and the subsequent legal, political and administrative arrangements are not only important to understand the historical developments of the ongoing conflicts in the region, but also significant reference points for the parties to the conflicts. In fact, a discourse of 'righting the injustices' of the Soviet regime is part of the process of resolving the conflicts — at least from the Abkhazian and Karabakh point of views. Moreover, the historical processes of sovietisation of the region are crucial to the dynamics of these conflicts.

Several key points are significant for our discussion here:

As discussed in the previous chapter, the current conflicts in the Caucasus did not start as a result of the rapid collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of the 1980s and the early 1990s. Ethno-political conflicts that had been unresolved since at least the late 19th century were 'managed' through various imposed political and administrative arrangements — mostly to the dissatisfaction of the 'minority' groups (e.g., Abkhazians and Karabakh Armenians) whose collective interests were at stake. Thus, for some 70 years, the demand, struggle and hope for resolution of these conflicts became integrated into the 'national consciousness' of disadvantaged groups, who throughout the Soviet period kept a 'national movement' alive. Political situation and climate permitting in the USSR, Abkhazian and Karabakh leaders and the elite kept bringing their issues to the attention of the authorities in Moscow at regular intervals from the 1950s to the '80s.

With the end of the Soviet Union, the inter-ethnic conflicts — which for the large part of the international community were problems among peoples with "unusual" names — were transformed from being an 'internal affair' of

the Soviet Union and their successor states into international conflicts. These developments caught the attention of the international community at a time of great shifts in international relations and against the background of global concerns over the spread of military conflicts. The internationalisation of the conflicts and their resolution had a crucial impact on the way the conflicts are perceived, especially by the international community: The 'historical point' of departure toward the resolution of these conflicts has been, more or less, the demise of the Soviet Union — and the international legal framework that has emerged since then.

Even scholars and experts who have studied these conflicts and made suggestions for resolution take this starting 'historical moment' (1991) for granted and build various scenarios and solutions based on the accepted assumptions and adopted policies of the international community.[49] Why have virtually all of these suggested solutions and arrangements not been embraced by the parties to the conflicts?

This subjective (and convenient) narrowing of the historical background of the conflicts has strengthened (and hardened) the position of the 'titular' states (Georgia and Azerbaijan); it has weakened the position of the disadvantaged groups (Abkhazia and Karabakh Armenians) for whom their 'historical experiences', at least throughout the Soviet period, are extremely relevant to the resolution of their conflict — from their point of view. The question is how different are the proposed solutions of the international community and experts from the forced, tested and failed arrangements and clumsy solutions offered in the last 70 years? In the final analysis, they are not much different — as far as the Abkhazians and the Karabakh Armenians are concerned. The fundamental issue not fully addressed in these proposals is the process of management of minority-majority relations, and by extension, power relations.

There are still objective historical and legal factors that matter, which have been largely ignored or conveniently put aside as irrelevant to the current search for settlement of these conflicts. For the Abkhazians and Karabakh Armenians, 'wrongs' committed in the past are still relevant and worth examining. A series of legal and constitutional issues, which were not resolved in the past, continue to be the centre of debate of any legal and constitutional

arrangements that are being sought, both by experts and the international community.

This chapter shall focus on the constitutional problems in the Soviet system as they relate to the case studies. (The economic, social and cultural factors will be discussed in Chapter 3.) Then it will present the historical stages of the establishment of Soviet rule in the region, the legal/constitutional arrangements made, the shortcomings of the system and its effects in Abkhazia and Karabakh. This process will be compared with the norms and practices in international law.

## 1. Establishment of Soviet rule in the Caucasus

After Germany's defeat of the Bolsheviks, the three dominant nationalities of the Transcaucasus (Georgians, Armenians and Azerbaijanis) were 'granted the right to make their own arrangements for self-government by the Petrograd Bolsheviks in November 1917' (Mawdsley 1989: 225-229; Keegan 1998: 412). First, they declared, in April 1918, a short-lived Transcaucasian Democratic Federal Republic,[50] which lasted for only one month, and then, separate independent republics, which lasted until 1920 (Armenia and Azerbaijan) and 1921 (Georgia).[51]

'In the interim, all three independent states had been drawn into the culminating stage of the Great War by the intervention, direct or indirect, of the major combatants' (Keegan 1998: 412), especially because of the rich oil resources of the Caspian and energy transport routes of the region.[52]

What is relevant to our discussion here is that, at this juncture, the territorial and legal status of Karabakh and Abkhazia were in 'limbo' vis a vis Azerbaijan and Georgia. And both peoples took matters into their own hands. Abkhazia joined the Union of United Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus, founded in May 1917, and elected the Abkhazian People's Council, a representative governing body, in Sukhum in November. The Council declared that: 'One of the main future problems for the Abkhazian National Council (ANC) will be to work for the self-determination of the Abkhazian people' (Lakoba 1999a: 89).

Karabakh Armenians formed a similar representative council in Shusha (Shushi), the then capital of Karabakh — the First Assembly of Karabakh Armenians, in July 1918 — and elected a People's Government. Meanwhile, by September 15, the advancing Turkish army had reached Baku and demanded that Karabakh Armenians submit to the authority of Azerbaijan (Riddell 1993: 153; Keegan 1998: 412ff).

Armenian demands for 'independence' ended with a Turkish military solution whereby thousands of Armenians were killed in Shusha.[53] The Karabakh Armenian leadership were forced to submit and 5,000 Turkish soldiers entered the city. Fearing for their very existence, the Armenians of Karabakh sought military assistance from Armenians outside their borders. However, the newly declared Republic of Armenia was too weak to provide any assistance.[54] By that time, the First World War had ended — along with the genocide of over a million Armenians in the Ottoman Empire — with Turkey surrendering to the Allies (Swietochowski 1985: 143, Keegan 1998: 413-414).

The Abkhazians had better, albeit futile, chances. A delegation of the Abkhazian ANC visited Tbilisi to negotiate their status vis a vis Georgia, as 'with an equal neighbour'. On 9 February 1918 the Abkhazian and Georgian representatives signed an agreement whereby Georgia recognized 'a single indivisible Abkhazia within frontiers from the River Ingur to the River Mzymta', the two rivers respectively in the north-west and south demarcating Abkhazia's borders (cf. Lakoba 1999a: 90). Against this background, in May 1918, Abkhazia joined the newly declared North Caucasian Republic (or The Mountain Republic), consisting of Adyghea, Checheno-Ingushetia, Daghestan, Karachay-Balkaria, Ossetia, and Kabardia.

It is significant to note that both Abkhazia and Karabakh had *legally* remained outside the borders of the newly declared independent republics of Georgia and Azerbaijan. This is one of the key legal arguments presented by Abkhazians and Karabakh Armenians in the current negotiation process.

Nevertheless, soon after declaring independence, Georgian forces, in mid-June 1918, occupied Abkhazia and declared it a 'general *gubernia*' (governorate) of Georgia. Abkhazian political leaders were arrested and popular protests were quelled by force. Abkhazia was put under the direct administration of Tbilisi and governed with 'a sword of power'.[55]

Then came a brief British occupation of the region in the spring of 1919, under the command of General William M. Thomson.[56] The British expeditionary force in the Caucasus, headquartered in Baku, had two key objectives: to protect the oil fields and to thwart Bolshevik advances into the Transcaucasus.[57] The Armenians of Karabakh relied on Britain and the Western Allies to find a lasting solution to their territorial dispute.[58] But Britain, driven by its own strategic considerations vis a vis Turkey, and with an eye on the oil reserves in Baku, gave full support to Azerbaijan leaving the fate of the Armenians in Karabakh in the hands of their 'enemies'.[59] The British were more sympathetic to the plight of the Abkhazians. 'The Georgians are behaving there [in Abkhazia] worse than the Bolsheviks' declared one British General in Sukhumi, 'they are seizing homes and land, and they are conducting a policy of socialisation and nationalisation of property'.[60] But, as with the case of the Armenians, British sympathy did not go beyond the 'moral support' expressed by the generals. Britain withdrew all its forces in the region by the end of September 1919.

## 2. Inter-ethnic conflicts and erosion of administrative demarcations

At the beginning of 1920, a full-scale war broke out between the newly formed republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan over Karabakh. As the war was in progress, the Red Army moved into Baku, then Armenia, in April and November respectively. By the end of 1920, the Bolsheviks had taken over Transcaucasia completely. And by the spring of 1921 all three republics were conquered by the Red Army and sovietised.

The Baku Soviet in Azerbaijan issued a declaration in which it announced that Karabakh, together with Nakhichevan and Zangezur, were to be part of the Armenian Republic.[61] The decree, while initially supported by Stalin, was never put into effect. It was, in fact, Stalin himself who insisted that Karabakh should become part of Azerbaijan, as a sign of 'good will' towards Turkey.[62] Azerbaijani control over Karabakh was formalised in the Treaties of Moscow and of Kars, signed respectively in March and October 1921 (Lane, 1992: 214; Kazemzadeh 1951: 11-19; Hunter 1994: 98).

Thus, Nagorno Karabakh was ceded to Azerbaijan (formally on 7 July 1923)[63] despite the fact that its population was well over 90 per cent Armenian and desired union with Armenia.[64] The strategic importance of the mountainous enclave was immense: 'Karabakh formed a link or a barrier (depending on who controlled it) between the Muslims of Eastern Transcaucasia and Turkey' (Swietochowski 1985:143, cf. Hovannisian 1971: 8). Thus, the decision to make Nagorno Karabakh part of Azerbaijan SSR was motivated by several factors. The Bolsheviks were interested in forming recognised borders with their neighbours as a way of consolidating their revolution. They did this first with their southern neighbour by granting concessions that Turkey wanted — namely, territorial concessions that would weaken Armenia and strengthen their ethnic kin, the Azerbaijanis. With such configurations, the Bolsheviks hoped it would be easier to expand their revolution into Turkey and other Muslim territories.[65] The decision to grant Nagorno Karabakh to Azerbaijan was also part of a divide-and-rule strategy that the Bolshevik leadership put into operation throughout their new empire. It was a way of implanting troublesome and dissident populations within minority Republics and pitting ethnic groups against each other, thereby undermining the possibility of minority nationalities working together against the central government.

Once handed to Azerbaijan, Baku redrew Nagorno Karabakh's boundaries. The northern Shahumian district and western territories which linked Nagorno Karabakh with Armenia were made part of Azerbaijan proper (i.e., placing them outside the Autonomous Oblast), creating an 'island' enclave within western Azerbaijan.

Abkhazia, however, fared better in the early Soviet period.

The inevitable Sovietisation of the region was seen as another 'chance' by 'mistreated' peoples in Georgia — Abkhazians, Armenians, Russians, Greeks and Kartvelians — to right past injustices and territorial disputes with their more powerful and larger neighbours. Indeed, it is argued that such disgruntled peoples 'actually helped to facilitate the establishment of Soviet power' and embraced the new regime as 'a deliverance from the repression and meddling of the Georgian Republic' (Lakoba 1999a: 92).[66]

At first, the Bolsheviks allowed political choice and recognised the declaration of an independent Abkhazian SSR in March 1921, which was

independent of both Russia and Georgia, but lasted for only one year. As in the case of Karabakh, however, under Stalin's pressure, Abkhazia was forced to sign a 'special union treaty' with Georgia in December 1921, establishing equal status to both republics. This arrangement was put in a legal, federative framework in the Abkhazian SSR Constitution of 1925 and in the Georgian SSR's Constitution of 1927(Lakoba 1999a: 93).[67]

As we shall see, the legal, territorial, political and cultural rights of Abkhazia and Karabakh were further diluted in the complex Soviet state structure and bureaucracy. Legal and territorial issues that were prevalent in the early Soviet period remained fundamentally unresolved and were 'frozen' with the gradual, imposing centralisation of the USSR.

In order to underline the discrepancies and the illusive nature of autonomy under Soviet rule, we shall now scrutinise the autonomy granted to Abkhazia and Karabakh against the background of a) the Soviet legal/ constitutional framework, and b) the international legal understanding of autonomy.

### 3. State and administrative structure of the USSR

As stated in its Constitution,[68] the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was an 'integral, federal, multinational state formed on the principle of socialist federalism as a result of the free self-determination of nations and the voluntary association of equal Soviet Socialist Republics'. The seeming noble purpose of this Union was to 'jointly build communism' (Section III, Chapter 8, Article 70).

In the post-Revolution period, the Soviet Union evolved into an ethnically defined federation of 15 republics — the most dominant of which was Russia with its own federative divisions. But, the federal system remained largely a fiction, at least in the eyes and experience of its constituent entities. The rights accorded in the federal system were virtually meaningless as all decisions were made by the Communist Party and its organs, which also held all levers of power and authority. 'The fiction of federalism [was] a legacy of the civil war, when it was found expedient, for both domestic and foreign reasons,

to leave the conquered borderlands a semblance of sovereignty' (Pipes 1972: 507).

The Soviet Union was a rigorously centralized state from its inception. The Communist Party ruled the state and society both on horizontal and vertical levels. State affairs were further compounded by the fact that at all levels of the Party, there was an enormous, parallel Soviet government hierarchy 'on every rung of the ladder'. Thus, 'the distribution of power between the two bureaucracies was a confused issue' (Pethybridge 1990: 157).

The Soviet thinking on administrative and legal divisions was based on the assumption, as argued by Lenin and Stalin, that 'the policy concerning nationalities should be based on an egalitarian ideology as part of an overall goal to build the communist society'. The aim of this line of thinking was that in due course nations would merge (*sliyanie*) into a united Soviet people (*Sovetsky narod*). It was thought that the loyalty of such a united people 'to the socialist society would take precedence over ethnic affiliation'.[69] Eventually, Lenin and Stalin promoted the notion of 'territorial self-determination, but with the clear assumption that the Communists would control the national movements which would subordinate themselves unquestionably to the demands of the centralised Communist party' (Eide 1998: 269-271; cf. Pipes 1972: 505-507).[70]

Constitutionally, this vast territorial and multinational empire was managed (and controlled) through three hierarchically arranged and complex state legal structures:

> **Union Republics** (SSR): Each of the fifteen Soviet Socialist Republics (or Union Republics) in the USSR had its own constitution (subordinate to the Constitution of the Union), governments and ministries, led by their respective Communist Parties (part of the larger Communist Part of the Soviet Union) and headed by a First Secretary.[71] The structure of the local Parties mirrored that of the CPSU, with their own Central Committee and a (Polit)Bureau.[72]
>
> **Autonomous Republics (ASSR):** An autonomous republic — generally with a non-Slavic population — was a territory within a Soviet 'titular'[73] republic, with its own constitution (subordinate to the USSR and Union Republic constitutions), but 'with the specific

features of the ASSR taken into account', and with a government led by the Communist Party, the structure of which mirrored the Oblast Party committee (obkorm), headed by a first secretary.[74]

**Autonomous Oblasts and Areas:** An autonomous *oblast* (area or territory) was an administrative sub-division of a Union or 'titular' republic — for example, Nagrono Karabakh, South Ossetia, Gorno-Badakhshan in Tajik SSR and others — which was further divided into raions (boroughs). In addition, there were Krais (provinces), administrative sub-divisions within a Union republic designating a territory where a nationality other than the 'titular' people lived.[75]

What interests us here are the second and third tier of administrative structures, which relate to Abkhazia and Karabakh respectively.

Arguably, Soviet central policies, good or bad, affected virtually all citizens of the USSR regardless of their national or ethnic origin.[76] But the perennial conflicts between ethnic minorities and 'titular' states were the result of discriminatory policies set by the leadership of the titular states, the top officials of which were almost always members of the titular nation.

What is generally not made clear in discussions of ethnic conflicts in the former Soviet Union is that the issues raised by disadvantaged groups are related to *dissatisfactions with their titular states and how they were treated by their titular leadership* — in our case, the leaderships in Tbilisi and Baku.

In effect, autonomous republics and regions were totally subordinate to the authorities of the republics in which they were situated. Hence '"autonomous" did not mean independent' (McCauley 1996: 714).[77] Granted, the Soviet system is an important part of this process, but it is only the context in which minority-majority relations developed and reached where they are at this point.

In line with Moscow's 'divide and rule' policy, as generally with other such ethno-territorial divisions, existing territorial disputes and ethnic tensions were kept in suspension and never addressed or resolved.[78] Indeed, such seemingly legal and administrative arrangements did not 'ensure the respective minorities against oppression and attempts at assimilation'. On the contrary, for example, 'Georgian communist authorities pursed, more or less vigorously, a policy of Georgianization' (Starovoitova 1997: 41-42). A similar process of

'Azerbaijanization' took place in Karabakh, most intensively in the 1960s and '70s. Such policies were based on the propagated nationalist notion that the continued existence of these autonomous territories on the titular nation's claimed 'historical lands' was a threat to that nation's survival (*ibid*; cf. Hunter 1994: 122-24).

Nevertheless, the constitutional arrangements made in the early Soviet period are significant as they provide the legal background to the resolution of the conflicts today.

## 4. Soviet Constitutional Arrangements

### Abkhazia

In 1925 the All-Abkhazian Congress of Soviets adopted Abkhazia's first Soviet Constitution, as a full Soviet republic, not an autonomous republic within Georgia. This was legally a significant move as Abkhazia considered itself 'in union' with Georgia, and not subject or subordinate to it. As such, argues Lakoba, the 1925 Constitution of Abkhazia 'was not subject to confirmation in the structures of other states'.[79] The 'in union' legal understanding of Abkhazia and Georgia was also reflected in Georgia's 1927 Constitution (Lakoba 1999a: 93; cf. Avtonomov 1999).

However, Abkhazia did become incorporated into Georgia in 1931 due to Stalin's pressures on the Abkhazian leadership.[80] The Sixth All-Georgian Congress of Soviets, on 19 February 1931, passed a resolution to transform the Abkhazian Soviet Socialist Republic into an Autonomous Republic within the state structures of Georgia SSR.

Soon, the Abkhazian leadership was liquidated, especially under the repressions of Lavrenti Beria, himself a Mingrelian from Abkhazia, who was the notorious leader of the Communist Party of Georgia and later of the entire Transcaucasus. Between 1937 and 1953 'tens of thousands of Kartvelians were transplanted from regions of Georgia into Abkhazia'. This introduced major demographic changes and increased the number of non-Abkhaz population. As part of Tbilisi's 'Georgianisation' policy, among others, Abkhazian toponyms

were changed, Abkhazian writing was changed to Georgian graphical base and the language of teaching in schools changed to Georgian.

In 1978, Eduard Shevardnadze, the then First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party, admitted that the implementation of these policies had been to the detriment of Abkhazian culture and people. During the Georgian Communist Party's congress, he stated:

> It needs to be stated directly that in the past, in a period well-known to us, a policy was pursued in relation to the Abkhazian people which in practice can only be characterized as chauvinistic… Such acts as the closure of schools in the native language, the oppression of national institutes, the practice of distrusting cadre-policy, and other matters which are very well known to you cannot so easily pass into oblivion' (Hewitt 1999: 95).

**Karabakh**

As an Autonomous Oblast, Karabakh did not have its own constitution. The 1936 Stalinist Constitution of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan (Basic Law) provides 11 Articles (under Chapter VII) for the Karabakh Autonomous Region.[81]

What is most significant in the 1936 Constitution is the clear, legal recognition of *'the national peculiarities of the oblast',* i.e., its Armenian attributes.

> Article 85. The Council of the workers' representatives of Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous oblast presents "Laws on the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous oblast" to the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan SSR for approval, which takes into account the national peculiarities of the oblast.

Furthermore, Article 78 states:

> The decisions and arrangements of the Council of the workers' representatives of Nagorno Karabakh

> Autonomous oblast are made public [published] in Armenian and Azeri languages.[82]

In contrast, unlike the population of Karabakh, the 1936 Constitution of Nakhichevan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, an exclave of Azerbaijan SSR, provides guarantees and safeguards to the population of Nakhichevan.[83]

Article 90 states:

> Any breach of legal rights, directly or indirectly [of the Nakhichevan citizens of the Azerbaijan SSR] any limitation, or any privileges accorded to the citizens based on racial and national origin, as well as any propaganda or contempt based on race, national uniqueness, or hatred is punishable by law.

However, just four decades later, the 1978 Constitution of Azerbaijan SSR reflects the gradual erosion of the legal and cultural rights of the Karabakh Armenians[84] Most critically, the *'the national peculiarities of the oblast'* and the use of the Armenian language, along with Azeri, for official publications in Karabakh, are deleted from the 'updated' constitution.

The 11 Articles in the 1936 Constitution are reduced to a mere two articles in the 1978 Constitution (Chapter IX). The laws regulating the soviets of Karabakh are dispersed in other general articles related to regional, city and town soviets. The two remaining Articles in the 1978 document are very telling about the legal mechanisms and thinking of the leadership in Baku about the 'status' of Karabakh. The two articles simply affirm Azerbaijan's territorial right to Karabakh and Baku's complete control over 'autonomous' Karabakh's legislative prerogatives. They state:

> Article 83. The Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast is situated in the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic.
>
> Article 84. Laws concerning the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast are made by the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan SSR, [which are] presented by the soviet of the peoples' deputies of the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast.

As in Abkhazia, Karabakh experienced gradual and systematic erosion of its rights as an autonomy. The "demographic engineering" carried out by the leadership in Baku, especially under the leadership of Heidar Aliyev in the 1970s, is among the most obvious elements of this trend.

In 1999, Azerbaijan's Interior Minister, Ramil Usubov, in an article entitled 'Nagorno Karabakh: Mission of salvation began in the 1970s', published in the government newspaper *Bakinskiy Rabochiy*, affirmed that indeed starting in the 1970s, Heidar Aliyev, in his capacity as First Secretary of the Azerbaijani Communist Party (starting on July 12, 1969) 'changed the ethnic balance in Karabakh in favour of Azeris'.

In praising Aliyev's achievements, Usubov wrote:

> [...] All these measures in economic, educational, personnel, and other policies, undertaken thanks to the wisdom of the First Secretary of the Azerbaijani Communist Party Heydar Aliyev, helped in strengthening of ties between the autonomy and regions of Azerbaijan and inflow of Azerbaijanis. *Thus, if in 1970 Azerbaijanis made up 18% of Nagorno Karabakh's population, in 1979 they were 23%, and after 1989 - 30%* [emphasis added].[85]

*Yeni Azerbaijan* newspaper of the eponymous ruling party of Azerbaijan, went even further declaring that 'The Azerbaijan of the 1970s and 1980s should be named 'Heidar Aliev's Azerbaijan'.[86]

Against this background of failed autonomy arrangements in the Soviet period, the following section will examine the concept of autonomy in international law.

## 5. International law and autonomy

### I. Legal definitions of autonomy

Autonomy is a loosely-defined concept in international legal discourse. Commenting on the existing legal literature, Wiberg points out it is 'very

disturbing that almost all writers on the topic of autonomy do not make clear to the readers (or even to themselves) what they actually mean with the notion' (Wiberg 1998: 43). Legal scholars, in general, concur that legal definitions of autonomy are, at best, imprecise in positive international law or international and regional human rights instruments (cf. Myntti 1998: 277; Alfredsson 1998: 126; Eide 1998: 273).

This definitional problem has two key dimensions:

a) Political considerations

The international community, for political and strategic considerations, has favoured an 'ambiguous' definition of autonomy, concurrent with the particular interests of autonomy-granting states. States are generally concerned that granting of autonomy would ultimately lead to secession or demand for full self-determination by the autonomous groups. This concern has a basis in developments since World War II, as studies show that dissatisfied groups see autonomy as an 'interim' arrangement, until final status is negotiated — for examples, the case of the Palestinians with Israel.[87]

Legal experts point out that international law, especially vis a vis the United Nations, is more in favour of states (discouraging secession) than groups living within a state.[88] Despite this 'norm' set by the international community and its political implications, disadvantaged groups in the former Soviet republics continue to be engaged in a process of redrawing territorial, political and social boundaries. Against the background of Soviet 'colonialisation' and its eventual collapse, former Soviet autonomies in the Caucasus argue that, just as their 'titular' states had the right to secede from the Soviet Union, they too have the right to secede or renegotiate their existing territorial and state arrangements with their former 'colonial rulers'. (See further discussion of this issue in Chapter 6.)

b) Conceptual problems

The other definitional problem stems from the complexity of the concepts and processes related to autonomy, or what Wiberg calls 'core concepts in

modern political theory', such as authority, control, freedom, interdependence, interest, liberty, non-interference, paternalism, power, responsibility, social coordination, sovereignty (Wiberg 1998: 56).

Nevertheless, legal scholars provide a number of functional definitions. Autonomy is generally understood as an internal self-government or special political status granted by a national or central state to ethnic or cultural minorities or groups within states. It 'implies formal recognition of 'partial independence' from the influence of the national or central government', including legislative competence (cf. Heintze 1998: 7; Myntti 1998: 277). This is far from the 'autonomy' granted to Abkhazia and Karabakh.

Autonomy has also been used as an alternative arrangement to granting full self-determination. Such arrangements presuppose that: a) granting autonomy preserves the territorial integrity of the states; b) prevents further break up of states; c) pre-empts secessionist movements as the group/minority would be satisfied with its 'self-determined' status. (cf. Heintze 1998: 11-12, 29; Lapidoth 1993: 270ff). Nordquist adds that as a conflict-resolving device, autonomy is a 'form of social organisation in a given territory,' (e.g., Nicaragua, Israel-Palestine and Bosnia-Herzegovina). He defines an 'autonomous region' as 'an intra-state territory, which has a constitutionally based self-government that is wider than any comparable region in the state'. This does not apply to federal states consisting of multiple regions and territorial divisions (Nordquist 1998: 63-64).

In further explaining the constituent characteristics of a 'full autonomy', Hannum (1990: 467ff) outlines four basic structural elements:

1. a locally elected legislative body;
2. a locally selected chief executive;
3. an independent local judiciary; and
4. power-sharing arrangements between the autonomy and the central government in areas of joint interest

Autonomous arrangements are also subject to domestic and/or international legal agreements and, in many cases, are guaranteed by international recognition through bilateral or multilateral agreements (e.g., the Åland Islands and South Tyrol). But, as discussed in subsequent chapters,

Karabakh and Abkhazia present examples of the failure of such arrangements. There are, nevertheless, a number of types of autonomy in the international legal system, which provide useful theoretical bases for further analysis.

## II. Types of Autonomies

Four types of autonomy identified by legal scholars — *territorial*, *cultural*, *historical*, and *seized* autonomies (Hentze 1998, Eide 1998, Nordquist 1998)[89] — are relevant to Karabakh and Abkhazia, as at various periods in history and during the Soviet period, ruling states have used such operative arrangements for the Armenians and the Abkhazians.

Territorial Autonomy is granted to minorities or groups who live within a defined territorial area and where they constitute the majority of the population, and in recognition of special historical circumstances of the region. This is also reflected in the CSCE Copenhagen Document (29 June 1990). For example, the Åland Islands and South Tyrol, through international mediation; Greenland and the Faroe Islands, through legal acts with Denmark (cf. Hentze 1998: 18)

Cultural Autonomy, restricted to culture, is granted to minorities or groups for the maintenance, preservation and production of language, education and culture heritage. (For example, 'cultural autonomy' granted to groups in Latvia, Slovenia, Hungary and Russia (cf. Hentze 1998: 21; Eide 1998: 252).[90]

Historical Autonomy, groups or regions that have been self-governing or autonomous at various times in history, regardless of the geographical distance from the central state and 'have had a de facto autonomous positions vis-à-vis their (changing) political environment and now, although integrated into the modern state system, have remained autonomous', such as, the Isle of Man vis a vis the British Crown.

Seized Autonomy is the result of internationally significant conflict between a group and a central state and is achieved through political and/or military mobilization. For example, Nicaragua and the Atlantic Coast; the Philippines and Mindanao, Finland and the Åland Islands.

At different times in history, these four categories of autonomy, now current in international law, have been implemented variously or in combination both in Karabakh and Abkhazia. Indeed, until the mid-19th century Abkhazia and Karabakh enjoyed full internal autonomy (through local principalities) and, later in the Soviet period, were recognized as autonomous republic and region respectively. However, as discussed in Chapter 1, historically, in both cases autonomous arrangements have not provided lasting solutions to minority-majority conflicts and to inter-ethnic territorial disputes.

Karabakh and Abkhazia are not unique in this respect. In the 1980s, the 'common denominator of almost all autonomy demands [by 120 groups] is the historical fact or belief that the group once governed its own affairs'. Another 63 contemporary separatist groups justify their claims by descent from ancestors whose long-term autonomy ended when they were conquered by modern states' (Gurr 1993: 76).

But the most contentious issue, in both history and modern times, is the territorial dimension of autonomy. Between 1989 and 1995, territorial claims or configurations accounted for more than half of all major armed conflicts around the world, compared to civil wars over government control (Nordquist (1998: 59).[91]

## III. Territorial conflicts and autonomy in modern times

While in some cases granting autonomy has been used as a conflict-resolving political and legal arrangement (cf Hannum 1993: xvii; Hentze 1998: 10), it is not a common practice in international relations and remains problematic. Moreover, 'autonomy does not have a strong status in international law' (Hannikainen 1998: 86; cf. Alfredsson 1998: 125), which strengthens the position of states at the expense of minority groups. In fact, since WWII, more than 200 groups in Gurr's study (1993: 92) have struggled against their 'incorporation in states controlled by other groups' and 79 groups have rebelled to restore their 'lost autonomy'.

The success and durability of autonomous arrangements depend largely on the level of democracy in a given state. Studies show that a group's

autonomous status and functioning is unlikely to last long in repressive states and in 'non-democratic political contexts' (cf. Wiberg 1998: 44). Gurr, too, demonstrates that democracy contributes to 'a substantial decline in most kinds of ethnic conflict', with the exception of Canada and Northern Ireland (1993: 290).

Three main reasons have been observed for failure of autonomies. Nordquist, based on an analysis of 11 conflicts, explains why seven autonomies (between 1945 and 1987) 'ceased to exist after some time':

1. the central government or the head of the state violated the autonomy legislation;

2. external political developments affected the central state of the autonomies; and,

3. the autonomy was implemented without agreement from the negotiating group (Nordquist 1998: 69-71).

Others point out that democracy alone is not a guarantee for minority rights and does not resolve the problem of groups who do not wish to share a common polity with the majority state (cf Ratner 1998: 123).

Hannikainen notes two basic conditions necessary for a durable autonomy:

1. the State concerned must be prepared to grant certain rights of autonomy to the region, thus limiting its own jurisdiction, and to act *bona fide*;

2. the autonomy must be democratic in character. (Hannikainen 1998: 90).

The cases of Ethiopia, Kosovo, Karabakh and Abkhazia indicate that when groups under undemocratic or repressive regimes call for secession as an 'outlet' from their perceived or real 'misery', states — with their larger

resources and power levers — are in a position to change the status of groups within their states. Thus, Ethiopia unilaterally abolished the autonomous status of Eritrea in 1962, which led to a protracted war until Eritrea's independence in 1993. Yugoslavia unilaterally suspended Kosovo's autonomy in 1990, when a minority in Kosovo demanded to change its status from autonomy into a republic, the result was massive ethnic cleansing. The Parliament of Azerbaijan abolished Karabakh's autonomous status in 1991, following which the armed conflict between the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis became a full-fledged war. Likewise, Abkhazia's autonomous status was left in limbo soon after Georgia's independence and Georgia's new 1995 Constitution did not spell out the degree of sovereignty for the Abkhazians in their territory (see Chapter 6).[92]

In other cases, such as Tibet after China's annexation, autonomies have been granted under international pressure. However, such arrangements do not necessarily guarantee the safety of the 'autonomous' population, but, rather, resulted in forced assimilation (Tibet) or radical demographic changes through transfer of populations (the Caucasus and Central Asia in Soviet times) and, in other cases, through ethnic cleansing or genocide (the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda).[93] In undemocratic states, groups experience 'overt and institutional discrimination' (Räikkä 1998: 35-36) and tend to be marginalized by the majority on various pretexts — whereby the group, collectively, enjoys fewer rights than the majority. In addition to these arbitrary measures, in the post-Soviet period, the notion that 'post-independence borders must coincide with pre-independence lines' have resulted in population expulsions, internally displaced people (IDPs), large numbers of refugees and catastrophic human conditions (cf. Ratner 1998: 123-24, cf. Eide 1998: 273).

The durability of autonomies granted since WWII remains a concern for legal scholars. Among notable exceptions are the autonomy granted to South Tyrol, through a bilateral agreement between Italy and Austria in 1946; and, more recently, East Timor, which Indonesia grudgingly gave up under international pressure. Other cases mediated by the international community — for example, Kurds in Iraq after the Gulf War, Palestinians in Israel, and the Bosnians — have been less successful and conflicts remain largely unresolved.[94]

Furthermore, it has been observed that in militarised conflicts between central governments and dissatisfied groups, autonomies are less likely

to last. While some point out that economic factors might also contribute to the weakness of an autonomy, Nordquist (1998: 71-73) argues that politically weak or unstable central states and/or 'major structural changes in the state system' present 'a greater threat to an autonomy'. In addition to state resources allocated for the autonomy, he adds that 'the degree of national consensus over the autonomy and the role of international actors in the implementation and continuation of effective autonomies' are significant factors for its durability.

Against this background, it is clear that while the international legal system provides for autonomous arrangements, practice and case studies show a different picture. Baku's and Tbilisi's promised (but undefined) autonomous status to Karabakh and Abkhazia fall short of fulfilling all major requirements necessary for a durable and stable autonomy. Internally, the lack of rooted democracy, national consensus, political developments, socio-economic conditions and continuing inter-ethnic rivalry pose serious questions about any such arrangements. Externally, regional competition among major powers, and the ambiguous (at times double-standard) position of the international community, cause concerns over long term guarantees that such arrangements require.

Abkhazia and Karabakh are not the only former Soviet autonomous regions which rejected (and continue to resist) the notion of autonomy in the framework of the emerged post-Soviet state entities. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the republics of the Russian Federation 'announced their refusal of the "autonomous" status' since 'the notion of "autonomy" simply means local self-government and locally run economies, and this is incompatible with the notion of 'republic'. The crux of the contention was the fact that in the Soviet system 'the exercise of governance was a form of administering one nation over another' (Tishkov 1997: 55). Which was, in effect, an infringement of the right of self-determination of peoples.

## Conclusion

The establishment of the Soviet regime in the Caucasus was at first welcomed as a solution to existing territorial and inter-ethnic conflicts. However, the

incorporation of conflicting nationalities and ethnic groups into the labyrinth of constitutional arrangements did not bring solutions to the conflicts. Instead, disadvantaged groups were left under the control of the very authorities — titular states — with whom they had long-running, fierce conflicts.

The so-called autonomy granted to the Abkhazians and Karabakh Armenians by the Soviet regime failed to secure basic collective rights and the preservation of 'national peculiarities'. On the contrary, titular authorities, through 'demographic engineering' and policies designed to erode national distinctiveness, systematically undermined the viability of the 'autonomous regions'.

On one hand, the idiosyncratic problems of the Soviet regime and its complex, centralised bureaucracy, on the other, the implementation of nationalistic designs of titular states (away from Moscow's attention), rendered a constitutionally guaranteed autonomy meaningless. The hollowness of this autonomy becomes even more apparent when it is scrutinised against international legal norms and practices.

In the next chapter we shall discuss the key elements of dissatisfaction with autonomy and the titular state. These objective and legitimate dissatisfactions provide the basis for struggle, mobilisation and the search for preferred legal arrangements and restructuring.

# CHAPTER 3

## Sources of Conflict with Titular States

The previous chapter discussed the legal and constitutional arrangements made for Abkhazia and Karabakh in the early Soviet period and the subsequent failure of the "autonomous status" granted to them. The legal-political arrangements imposed on the Abkhazians and Karabakh Armenians were further exacerbated by economic, administrative, cultural, and social policies of the titular states. In addition to the dubious autonomous status, there are a number of key factors which show a pattern of 'discrimination' against the minority group by the dominant majority group. Such failed policies represent the bases of objective grievances of the disadvantaged groups. The policies, formulated and implemented by the titular authorities, were institutionalised through a process of centralisation of political power. Thus, centre-periphery relations were dominated by officials in Tbilisi and Baku with negligible, or no representation in the decision-making process by the people affected by such policies.

Furthermore, decades of dissatisfaction with administrative, political and economic policies had contributed to the subjective self-perception of the minorities (for example, ethnic identity). It is upon this objective-subjective axis that the 'us-them' boundaries are drawn. Such subjective boundaries are 're-enforced', moreover, by 'ethnic cleansing' policies introduced by the titular authorities. The process of homogenisation of society — through transplantation and removal of populations, ban on education in the native language, limitations on cultural production, and other institutional measures — had made the 'threat' to the minority group's existence real.

This chapter will focus on the objective reasons of dissatisfaction of Abkhazians and Karabakh Armenians in the economic, political, cultural and social spheres. It will discuss how objective factors (policies) established by the

political leadership of the dominant (majority) group — especially concerning language, education and culture — were social control mechanisms. On the one hand, these policies empowered the titular governments to conduct "ethnic cleansing" covertly, on the other, they created a sense of "real threat" to the collective existence of the minority groups. By articulating and formally presenting their grievances and dissatisfactions, the minority group attempts to reverse the "threatening" trend, with the hope of effectuating socio-political restructuring. However, the outcome is the exact opposite: continued exacerbation and deterioration of relations between the minority and the titular leadership.

## 1. The failure of Soviet Internationalism

Protests by the Abkhazians and Karabakh Armenians over growing difficulties with their titular states during the long Soviet years did not improve their conditions, nor change the situation. On the contrary, it became more alarming. Indeed, throughout the Soviet period unresolved territorial disputes and socio-economic disadvantages were ignored in the name of Soviet *internationalism.*[95] A Karabakh intellectual provided further insight during an interview in Stepanakert in 1995:

> Internationalism was a Communist veil — a false ideology —because, in actuality, internationalism was leading to the destruction of nations. Internationalism considered national particularities as secondary values, for example, the mother tongue of the nation was considered secondary. Internationalism was cutting the national roots of people. The emphasis was put on the unity of the workers, whether German, Russian, Turk or else. It seems to me that one of the reasons for the collapse [of the USSR] was the wrong approach to the nationalities issues. The USSR was destroyed first ideologically, then administratively and economically.[96]

In reality, ethnicity remained a strong force for group identification.[97]

Soviet authorities dealt with complaints about difficult standards of living or dissatisfactions with titular authorities in the regions by either minor reforms or forceful measures (cf. Merridale and Ward, 1991: 209). Abkhazia and Karabakh suffered the consequences of a dual burden: the impact of Stalinist policies and the pressures of Georgian and Azerbaijani national self-consciousness. This was often fuelled, respectively, by a Georgian nationalist plan to create a unitary Georgian state — or a 'mini-empire' — and Pan-Turkist ideology in Azerbaijan.[98]

Since Sovietisation of the region, the Armenian majority in Karabakh never reconciled itself to Azeri rule, nor did the Abkhazians, as a minority, within the Georgian SSR. On both the popular and the elite levels, complaints about the increasing economic, social and cultural difficulties in their enclaves were sent to central authorities in Moscow, Tbilisi, Baku and Yerevan. But to no avail. Even during the very repressive 1930s, there were instances of non-violent resistance and protest.

With the Khrushchev thaw in the 1950s and '60s, protests, in the form of letters and petitions to Moscow, increased. Large public meetings and protests, demanding Abkhazia's independence from Georgia were held in 1957, 1964, 1967, 1978, and 1989. In Karabakh, similar protests and letter campaigns were held in 1958, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1977, 1987, and 1988 demanding Karabakh's unification with the Armenian SSR.[99] These persistent and sustained campaigns affirm that the Abkhazian-Georgian and the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflicts did not start as a result of the demise of the Soviet Union.

The protests of Abkhazian and Karabakh elites, supported by their respective groups, under the most severe environment of the Soviet system, are also indicative of the dire conditions that these communities felt they were in. The question here is not whether these conditions were perceived or real, but the fact that centre-periphery power relations were problematic, unresolved and increasingly unsustainable, except by the imposition of political and administrative force from above. The unsatisfactory political and legal arrangements made in the 1920s continued to be a bone of contention in minority-majority relations.

## 2. Karabakh: 'When the knife reached the bone'

One of the most significant turning points in the struggle of Karabakh Armenians — which would become the basis of the 'Karabakh movement' in the late 1980s — is the so called *Letter of the 13*, occasioned by the Soviet system's 'Five Year Plan' in 1965.[100] This campaign has received little attention in recent studies of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, especially in the West. The issues raised in the letter constitute the fundamental grievances of the Armenian population in Karabakh vis a vis Azerbaijan. Indeed, the points discussed in the 1965 letter are still part of the key grievances referred to by the Armenian activists in the post-Soviet period of the conflict.[101]

Moreover, the 1965 campaign was the first significant attempt, since the 1920s, to effectuate legal and territorial restructuring within the Soviet system, based on the Soviet "rules of the game". This was long before the internationalisation of the conflict in the early 1990s, by which time some of the key objective reasons of the conflict — for example, the socio-economic conditions, cultural limitations — disappeared from the discourse of "conflict resolution" and were disregarded amid the politicisation and militarisation of the problem.

Unlike the 1988 'movement', the 1965 campaign required, as a Karabakh intellectual put it, 'brave citizens to protest'. The outside world, even Armenians in the Diaspora, hardly knew where Karabakh was on the map in the 1960s. This was the period when Khrushchev's (1953-1964) persecutions had ended and Leonid Brezhnev had come to power. Under Brezhnev (1964-1982), tolerance for dissent was virtually zero. Dissenters were sent to psychiatric wards and anyone who disagreed, however minimally, with the official ideology was persecuted severely. 'The social and political conditions and realities were very different' in the 1960s. 'The dreaded KGB was pressuring everyone and everything… many intellectuals refused to join [the letter campaign]; they were fearful of their lives'.[102]

In the summer of 1965, a group of thirteen Armenian intellectuals, artists, and professionals, all members of the Communist Party, studied the Plan and its provisions for the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO)

and compared it with that of the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic, an exclave of Azerbaijan SSR.[103] As the group scrutinised the document, 'a wide range of horrible discriminations', discrepancies and unfair developmental measures were observed in all aspects of the economic, political, cultural and social life in Karabakh, especially in the agricultural sector, which was NKAO's largest source of income.[104]

Having previously failed to negotiate changes with local and titular authorities, the authors of the letter decided to present the grievances of Karabakh Armenians to the highest level of leadership in the USSR: the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of USSR, headed by the General Secretary of the Party Central Committee, Leonid Brezhnev; the Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers, Aleksei Kosygin; and the Chairman of the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium, Anastas Mikoyan.[105] The NKAO and Azerbaijan SSR Communist Party leaders were not aware that such a letter was being prepared to be sent to Moscow. It was kept within a very close circle of intellectuals and sympathetic local party officials.[106]

'Patience has its limits', one of the signatories of the letter explained to me, 'in as much as we are patient and able to carry burdens, there comes a time when you cannot go on any more. In human life nothing is limitless'. The gradual decline of the Armenian population of Karabakh was the most alarming factor: 'The policies were such that eventually the best of Karabakh was leaving Karabakh. A nation is led by intellectuals and our best intellectuals were leaving Karabakh', stressed my informant. By comparison, 'Karabakh could have been like Nakhichevan [where the Armenian population had gradually and drastically declined], but we turned out to be more stubborn'.[107] Again, past experience is sought to explain differences: 'Our historical biography is different from Nakhichevan. For many years we had our statehood in the form of Melikdoms.[108] True it was very conditional statehood, but we had a state — each Melik had his army, his land, his people and subjects'.[109]

The list of problems and their implications discussed in the letter spell out the main elements of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. It is also significant that the authors of the letter present objective problems *particular* to Armenian-Azerbaijani relations only, lest they were accused of criticising the Soviet Union. For example, as one of the signatories explained, the issue of

closure of churches in Karabakh is not discussed in the letter as a grievance because this was a 'Union-wide problem of the Communist regime'.[110] This context of the letter makes the document even more important for current attempts to resolve the conflict as it provides a glimpse of the experience of Armenians living under Azerbaijani rule. Thus, today Karabakh Armenians question how different life would be in Karabakh if it were made (*de jure*) part of the post-Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan.

The 13-page letter starts with an introduction mentioning the economic, cultural, scientific and technical developments throughout the Soviet Union, and poses a rhetorical question to the Soviet leadership: 'One does not know why Nagorno Karabakh is an exception [to all this]?' It then goes on to enumerate a long list of objective problems in Karabakh.

**Economy and infrastructure**

- Agriculture: The letter points out that an agricultural infrastructure had yet to be developed in Karabakh. The only project in this sector had been the building of a food processing factory in Stepanakert, 'which took eight years to build, and was closed immediately after it was opened'. Its machinery was dispersed to neighbouring Azerbaijani regions.[111]

- NKAO's industry and construction sectors had become dependent on republican or non-NKAO regional authorities. In 1962 the workers expressed dissatisfaction and complained. In response, the Azerbaijan SSR Party Central Committee and the government made a decision about 'developing the agricultural sector and improve the social-cultural life of the workers in NKAO', however, '70-80 percent of the provisions remained on paper'. Instead, the economy of the enclave gradually deteriorated. Compared with the plans of 1964, there was a reduction of 16.9 percent in overall production.[112]

- A carpet-weaving factory was built in Stepanakert, but 'closed as soon as construction ended'. Reductions in production left 100 craftsmen without work.

- Reductions in the silk production factory, the largest in NKAO, resulted in the discharge of 130 workers from work.

- Many production collectives were put under the jurisdiction of regional authorities outside NKAO. As a result, for example, out of 540 workers at the construction factory, 220 were transferred to regions outside NKAO.

- Unemployment among Armenians was increasing in NKAO. 'Hundreds of technicians and drivers in Stepanakert were replaced by workers coming from other regions in Azerbaijan'.

- In the bread production sector, the 1965 plan calls for 36 percent reduction in the Azerbaijan SSR as a whole, but only 18 percent in NKAO. 'This is especially significant in view of the fact that there was no seed cultivating system in NKAO and the collective farms (*kolkhozi)* [were] forced to buy annually 20-25 tons of seed and fertilisers from the government'. When compared with Nakhichevan ASSR, which is larger than NKAO by 700 sq. kilometres and had more arable land, 'a clearer picture emerges'. Nakhichevan is expected to sell 2000 tons of bread to the government, while NKAO is expected to sell 5000 tons.

- In 1966 the Nakhichevan republic was expected to sell 11,800 tons of cotton to the government, and 6.5 thousand tons in 1970. But the Plan for NKAO until 1970 had remained the same when, by the decision of the Council of Ministers of the Republic, the overwhelming majority of cotton fields in NKAO had been turned into vineyards.

- According to the 1965 Plan for Azerbaijan SSR, the sale of meat had been reduced by 18 percent in the Republic, but in NKAO by only 2.5 percent. For the next five years, the Plan called for an increase of production of meat in the Republic by 2.7-3 percent, but by 12-13 percent in NKAO. By 1970, meat production in the Republic was to increase to 2000 tons annually, of which 500-700 tons was expected to come from NKAO.

- The production of grapes was the largest income-generating sector

of NKAO. In good years, NKAO had sold 100,000 tons of grapes to the government. In the early 1960s, several thousand hectares of vineyards had been added to NKAO agriculture, which meant a production increase in the coming years. However, according to the Plan, instead of increasing the amount to be purchased by the government, it had been substantially reduced. 'This would have dire consequences on the grape production in NKAO'.

- The letter gives an example of 'deliberate' and 'unfair' policies of the Azerbaijani authorities. A USSR government commission, after inspections and studies, declared 50,000 hectares of land in NKAO unsuitable for use for agriculture. The NKAO Party and the Oblast Council had asked the planners to leave those 50,000 hectares out of the provisions in the plan. However, 'the government of Azerbaijan has refused to make changes and has included these useless lands in the production provisions'. Thus, NKAO was expected to provide large amounts of production from lands which had been officially declared useless.[113]

**Transportation**

- Due to lack of trucks and means of transportation for agricultural production 'NKAO had been denied large sums of potential income'. Despite a specific decision of the Council of Ministers of Azerbaijan SSR recommending to responsible bodies to provide needed vehicles to NKAO *kolkhozi*, 'nothing had been delivered'. Generally, 'republican authorities take decisions, make promises of arrangements and so on, but their subordinates never implement these decisions and remain unpunished for their inaction'.[114]

**Depopulation**

The letter lists the components of a 'systematic effort' by the Azerbaijani authorities to depopulate Karabakh of Armenians. 'People are leaving NKAO

en masse with the hope of finding jobs elsewhere'. During the period between the 1939 and 1958 census, 110,000 people left NKAO[115] In 1939, NKAO had a population of 150,000 and Nakhichevan ASSR had 127,000. In 1964 NKAO had 142,000 people, but Nakhichevan 179,000. 'How could this be explained,' ask the signatories, 'when NKAO has a high birth-rate and is well known for long life expectancy?' They complain that, 'In the name of recruitment of workers, every year 250-300 men are transferred from NKAO to other parts of the republic. This amounts to depopulation of one village a year. They keep them there in the name of various government policies and subsequently their whole family moves out as well'.

While government measures gradually decreased the number of Armenians living in Karabakh, the Azeri population increased, especially in the 1970s. By 1979, Azeris made up 23 percent of the population of Karabakh, a 5 percent increase in nine years. The inflow continued, and by 1989, coupled with the birthrate, Azeris were about 30 percent of the population of Karabakh. The number had doubled since 1965.[116]

- In 1961, a technical institute was opened in Stepanakert. 'It was hoped that this would enhance the training of new cadres for the NKAO industry and agriculture. However, the institute became another means of depopulating NKAO's professional force'. The institute was graduating 200-250 experts every year, but most of them were sent to serve in Azerbaijani regions outside NKAO. Not only were these professionals unable to provide sorely needed expertise to local *kolkhozi*, but they were permanently leaving NKAO. In addition, 'there are 700 unemployed people in Stepanakert alone, almost every tenth resident of the city'. A USSR Gosplan member had reported to the Azerbaijan SSR Central Committee about this situation, but to no avail.

- The letter asserts that the 'Azerbaijan SSR authorities have no desire for any capital investment in NKAO'. All requests for economic and cultural development and investment in the enclave were rejected. 'It is impossible not to see the worst intent' of these policies. 'They are trying to weaken the Oblast's economy and halt any steps toward cultural development'.[117]

Statistics in subsequent decades confirm the continuation of this policy. Starting in the 1940s, capital investment in Nagorno Karabakh was far below the republican average in Azerbaijan SSR. This trend continued until the 1980s. Based on 1986 figures, Baku invested 473 rubles per citizen in Azerbaijan, but only 181 rubles in Nagorno Karabakh (cf. Luchterhandt 1993).

**Decline of Culture**

'Autonomy', argue the signatories, 'is primarily cultural, whereby the population is given assurance for the free development of their culture'. But this was not the case in NKAO. They state:

> The USSR Constitution is the basic law of our country. According to the Constitution, the [Party] officials and the government of the Oblast are to conduct their affairs in the mother tongue of the local nationality. However, in NKAO, this fundamental law is considered 'illegal'. All affairs of the Oblast are conducted in non-Armenian, including the official sessions of the Oblast Central Committee, practical and formal consultations and all other meetings.[118]

- The Executive Committee of the Oblast Soviet had a president and two deputies. But 'none of them was providing leadership in the cultural, educational, and health sector development of NKAO'. And in the Party Central Committee of the Autonomous Oblast cultural and ideological development had been entrusted to the former assistant to the Judge of the Autonomous Oblast, 'an uneducated and ill equipped man'.

- The autonomous oblast did not have its publishing house, literary or artistic journals and organs. NKAO did not have publications for youth or literature dealing with educational issues. The letter points that 'Until World War II, such publications were in existence'. By 1965, the only newspaper published in NKAO was *Soviet Karabakh*, which followed the format of *Pravda* and 'was obliged to perform the responsibilities stipulated by Soviet media and publishing'.

- The number of talented and qualified writers had increased in NKAO, but 'none of these writers' works have been included in the publishing plans of Azerbaijan SSR, despite the fact that appropriate professional bodies have approved their printing'. (In the Soviet system all publications were sponsored by the state and had to be approved by relevant state, in this case titular, authorities.)

- The theatrical, song and dance collectives of the Autonomous Oblast, 'which were called to serve not only NKAO, but also the Armenian population of Baku and other regions in the Republic', were barely surviving. 'The theatre was receiving negligible funds, the song-dance collective received nothing, while similar collectives in the Republic are receiving as much as needed'.[119]

- The letter enumerates the 'artificial obstacles created between NKAO and Armenia SSR' and calls the policies 'inhuman'. Karabakh Armenians were 'not allowed to hear the radio of their mother people in Armenia'. Theatrical and artistic groups from Armenia were occasionally invited to perform in Baku, Kirovabad, and other cities of Azerbaijan SSR. 'This [was] considered friendship. But they [were] not allowed to come to Karabakh, to visit their blood brothers'. This policy was set out as a decision of the Karabakh Oblast Bureau.

- Armenian films were not shown in Karabakh, 'even if they were technical in nature with the purpose of educating the workers in specific areas of new technology, science or development that would help them in their work'. The letter concludes this section with a sharp statement:

> One has to be blind and deaf not to become aware of this plan intended to systematically reduce NKAO's economic, cultural development, and to trample on the legal rights of Karabakh Armenians and their national dignity. [This has reached] a point where calling Karabakh 'autonomous' has become a bad joke.

Educational policies implemented after the period covered by the letter

reaffirm the concerns of 1965. On the order of the government in Baku, the teaching of Armenian history was removed from the curriculum of the schools in Karabakh. Armenian culture, language and history were not permitted to be taught even in the only higher-education institution of the region, the Stepanakert Pedagogical Institute (SPI). In the 1970s, in a clever move, the Baku government under Aliyev's leadership closed the Azeri-language Medical Institute in Aghdam, an important Azeri town close to Stepanakert, and transferred the Azeri-language programme into the educational programme of SPI.[120]

After primary school, 'parents had to choose for their children whether to continue their education in Russian or in Azerbaijani, …Armenian was not an option' (Hosking 1990: 83, cf. Goldenberg 1994: 161).[121] One Soviet ethnographer characterised such policies as 'the imperceptible crowding out of the native tongue by a more powerful and stronger neighbouring people' (Linevski 1956: 114).

Azerbaijan SSR government reports, which 'published the most comprehensive statistics' on education (Bilinsky 1972: 531), shed further light on this problem. While Armenians represented 12 percent of the population of Azerbaijan (1959), including those living outside Karabakh, statistics show that within two decades the percentage of students taught in Armenian saw a vast decline. In 1940-41, the number of students taught in Armenian, in all of Azerbaijan SSR, was 12 percent, but by 1963-64 it went down to 5.4 percent. However, the percentage of students taught in Azerbaijani increased from 68.9 percent in 1940-41 to 71 percent in 1963-64 (at the time Azeris made up 67.5 percent of the total population of Azerbaijan SSR).[122]

These changes took place in the background of the 'russification' of education in the USSR under Khrushchev, which was strongly opposed in Azerbaijan. Bilinsky observed: 'The Russians seek to keep Russifying the Azerbaijanis, and the Azerbaijanis retaliate by Azerifying their Armenians' (Bilinsky 1972: 532; cf. Bilinsky 1962).

The situation was worse in other parts of Azerbaijan. A Soviet government official, in a report published in 1930, cites a telling incident in the town of Kuba (Quba), in northeastern Azerbaijan:

A member of the staff of the Regional Educational Committee [of Kuba], an Armenian woman, refused to speak Armenian with Armenian

callers, and demanded that they should speak to her in Turkic [Azeri]. When she was asked for the reasons she said: "If I should talk to them in Armenian, I shall be immediately dismissed for nationalist deviation". Evidently in Kuba there were reasons for such an assertion. Examples such as this seem to dwarf the dozens of cases when the cultural, economic and day-to-day amenities of the national minorities are ignored outright.... When the cultural five-year plan was drawn up in Azerbaijan, educational work among the national minority was 'forgotten' (Rysakov 1956: 179-180).

Ironically, even after the end of the Soviet regime, Azerbaijani intellectuals see no contradiction when they complain about control over language and cultural production regarding their kin in northern Iran — or 'Southern Azerbaijan' as Azerbaijani irredentists call it. For instance, in 2002, dissatisfaction expressed by Javad Derahti, the Chairman of Congress of World Azerbaijanis, the umbrella organisation of the Azerbaijanis living in the Diaspora, mirrors the complaints and arguments of Karabakh Armenians living under Soviet Azerbaijani rule. Derahti stated:

> Regarding Southern Azerbaijan [northern Iran], the fact that more than 30 million Azeris do not have national rights is known to [the] mass media. Articles of the constitution of the Iran Islam Republic [sic], e.g. Article 15—teaching of the Persian language along with national languages in schools, and Article 19—inadmissibility of any discrimination among nationals living in Iran, are not followed there already for 23 years. Azeris do not have any national organization. There is no opportunity to teach Azeri language in schools. [The] main objective of World Azeri Congress (WAC) is [the] restoration of human rights of Southern Azeris and protection of their national rights.[123]

**Political leadership and Territorial Claims**

The 1965 letter complains that [Azerbaijani] Republican leaders rarely came to NKAO. When they did, for various formal events or Oblast Party conferences,

they did not meet with the workers.[124] 'At the meetings they [gave] animated speeches about brotherhood and friendship, promise[d] mountains of gold, and when they [left], they forgot everything'. Neither did the representatives of USSR Central Committee, who visited once or twice a year, spend any time with the workers. 'They [met] with the First Secretary of the Oblast and then left'.

Finally, the letter concludes that the bases of 'all these problems' are the policies of the authorities in Baku:

> Republican leaders at each public event do not fail to drum in the idea that Nagorno Karabakh is an indivisible part of Azerbaijan. This is political demagogy, perhaps going as far back as [Mirjafar] Bagirov, [the former leader of Azerbaijan].
>
> Azerbaijani leaders look at Karabakh as a place populated by foreigners. Do they think that a black dot on the map is sufficient reason to divide a nation, a nation with a millennial history, psychology and fate? — and this under socialist conditions, under the banner of Leninist nationalities policy.

The discourse that Armenians are 'foreigners' transplanted into Karabakh, continued well into the 1990s. Dan Fisher, a US journalist reporting from Baku in 1990, wrote:

> Highly educated and seemingly rational Azerbaijanis… extol the ethnic planks in their political platforms, then launch into a pseudo-scientific lecture on Armenian skulls and teeth, which prove, they say, that Armenians are late-comers to the region and should be expelled from territory under Azerbaijani administration'.[125]

Such "theories" are still current in present "academic" discourse in Azerbaijan. A propagandistic book, published in Baku in 1999, went

even further declaring the entire Armenian population in the Caucasus as "latecomers". One of the authors of the book is the former Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan, Tofik Zulfugarov. After affirming that 'Karabakh has been an inalienable part of *all* the state formations that have existed on the territory of the present-day Republic of Azerbaijan, *starting from 4th century B.C.*' (emphasis added), it states matter-of-factly: 'The influx of Armenian population in the Caucasus took place mainly after the Russo-Persian wars in the early 19th century'.[126]

In another propagandistic booklet, called 'Armenian Nazism' (Baku 1994), Zuar Gadimbeyov writes:

> When there was peace in our lands everybody knew that the Armenians can bear any climate, they have the skill of being everywhere where it is easy to live. They are not desired anywhere, but if they find the possibility to enter the country they will leave not a hole unsniffed [sic]. They act on the principle "If my finger passes through the hole, my body will pass through it, too". They stand waiting for their hunts like the savage beasts for a favourable moment. This is in their blood. But only when the machinery of the Gharabagh conflict started to revolve with its full strength… we awoke of our long sleep and looked around for help, for justice.

Then he goes on into explaining several conspiracy theories, such as:

> There is a global secret plan to help Armenia to seize the lands of other states… unfortunately, everybody in the world seems to be under the Armenian hypnosis.[127]

The authors of the 1965 letter refer to territorial claims in the final section of their document and remind the Soviet leaders that:

> Armenians make up 85 percent [as of 1965] of Nagorno Karabakh's population. They have been living on this

> land since time immemorial. And the land belongs to whoever lives on it. This truth was well understood by those who, in 1920, gave Nagorno Karabakh to the newly created Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic. But later the Nagorno Karabakh reunion with Armenia was broken by the weak hand of Stalin.

They argue that for 45 years (since 1920), 'having been cut off from the main part of their nation', Karabakh Armenians had been deprived of major possibilities of economic and cultural growth.[128]
They conclude with an appeal to Soviet internationalism, a key ideology of the Communist Party:

> It is the internationalist duty of the Azerbaijani people, its Party organisation and government to respect the rights of Karabakh Armenians: to return Nagorno Karabakh to Armenia. This is the decades-long longing of Karabakh workers. Ask each one of them (not the so-called 'leaders') and you will hear only requests and pleas for reunification.

The purpose of the authors of the letter is very clear: To demonstrate a pattern of policies which infringed upon their rights, not only as Armenians living in a constitutionally recognised autonomous state unit, but also as Soviet citizens. In view of the narrowing of economic, social and culture boundaries on the one hand, and the lack of an adequate response by the Azerbaijani authorities on the other, the authors called for a radical restructuring of NKAO: redrawing of territorial boundaries. Their '45 years of experience' in Azerbaijan gave them little hope that they could negotiate with the government in Baku or ameliorate their declining collective life. Thus, bypassing the administrative hierarchy of leadership, they appealed to the highest authority in Moscow where 'final decisions are made'.

However, predictably, the Azerbaijani officials, unhappy about such initiatives and implied prospects, labelled this demand for social-territorial restructuring as the growth of 'nationalism' or 'nationalist elements' in NKAO — an accusation of 'nationalism' was the worst indictment that a Soviet citizen could receive. Initially, given the general mood in the Soviet Union at the time,

the signatories 'were not convinced completely' that their appeal would get anywhere. 'But then', as one of the authors related to me:

> We thought that the evidence is so obvious and irrefutable, and that historically we were so right, [we] thought that perhaps Socialism could possibly resolved some of the pending nationalities problems in a positive way.

The Soviet Central government in Moscow showed a relatively 'mild' response to the letter protest. This was due to the fact that the signatories were all members of the Communist Party in good standing, and they were presenting their 'obvious and irrefutable' complaint within the rules of the Party. However, instead of dealing with the issues the letter had raised, the Centre chose to refer the 'case' to the Azerbaijan SSR Party Central Committee to deal with. At first, concerned that the situation might become explosive, Azerbaijani Party officials promised more 'solutions'. During questioning by an Azerbaijani Party official, one of the signatories declared: 'The baby [Armenians] is crying and wants his mother, but you are trying to silence him with toys' (Ulubabian 1994: 230).

After months of inquiries, investigations and intimidation by local and state authorities, the 1965 campaign came to a "conclusion": one leader received a 'severe reprimand' from the Party, 'with a note in his Party card'; four were dismissed from their work; and the rest received warnings and job transfers.[129] But the 'movement' did not end. The following year, a document demanding Karabakh's 'reunification' with Armenia SSR was signed by 50,000 Karabakh Armenians and sent to the USSR Communist Party Central Committee and the USSR Council of Ministers. Similar documents were sent from the Armenian SSR and other Armenian communities living in the USSR. In response to this mass campaign, the Secretariat of the USSR Party Central Committee instructed (8 August 1966) the leadership of Armenia SSR and Azerbaijan SSR to discuss the issue of Karabakh's reunification with Armenia and to present suggestions to the Central Committee (Ulubabian, 1994: 271). Armenian hopes were raised again. The collection of signatures continued and extended even to remote villages of Karabakh.

The Armenia SSR leadership was in favour of such a change and was

actively campaigning for it. But the Azerbaijan SSR leaders argued to the USSR Party Central Committee that Karabakh 'could exist only within Azerbaijan', otherwise, 'the entire population of Azerbaijan would revolt, especially against the authorities of the USSR, and the Moslem East would become hostile to the Soviet Union' (Ulubabian, 1994: 274).[130]

The case was closed. Tighter controls were established within NKAO and the slightest suspicion of dissent was dealt with immediately and severely. Nevertheless,

> generally, [Karabakh Armenians'] national spirit (*azgayin voki*) never declined. The methods of the struggle changed; there were different waves; as you know social movements are like waves; they go through stages of ascent and descent depending on the political conditions of a given time. During the Brezhnev era conditions were very tight. But, despite everything, the Armenian spirit was living in us. It was always a point of reference for us. It's true that people were being persecuted for this. For example, a young man was fired from his job because he had recited a poem about Mt. Ararat at a gathering. It had reached to such an extreme level. [However] the spirit was there, under the ash, and we maintained the sparks.[131]

The 'sparks' re-ignited the movement again when Mikhail Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika* provided an opportunity. Armenians — like the rest of the Soviet Union — believed and hoped that the time had come for fundamental changes. Thus, 1988 marked the beginning of a new phase in the continuing struggle in and for Karabakh, as discussed in the next chapter.

### 3. Abkhazia: 'Unhealthy political and cultural relations'

The Abkhazians' dissatisfactions were mainly in the political and cultural spheres. Unlike Karabakh, the economy of Abkhazia was one of the most successful in the Soviet Union. Abkhazia's modern economy was developed largely during the Soviet period. Given its geographic location on the eastern shores of the Black Sea and prime natural conditions, Abkhazia was one of the

most sought after health-resorts in the Soviet Union. As such Abkhazia had well developed tourist infrastructure and services. Indeed, up to 1.5 million tourists visited annually, three times the size of its population which numbered about 500,000 in Soviet times (1970-1989). Abkhazia was also among the best places in the Soviet Union with well-developed transport routes, roads and network of highways.

Subtropical agriculture, forestry, wood culturing and products, tobacco production and exports, and tea production in the rural areas constituted the other important sectors of the economy. For example, Abkhazia provided 20 percent of the Soviet Union's annual demand for tea. The standard of living of the population of Abkhazia during Soviet times was 'significantly higher than the average for the [Soviet] Union', possibly only lagging behind the standards in the Baltic states and large capital cities. 'The average per capita annual income in the 1980s was $800. But, 'the real income of Abkhazia's population was one and a half to two times higher than the average in the Union' as a 'private sector' existed unofficially, especially in the rural areas. Bargandzhia argues that this contributed to Abkhazia's higher standards of living and income, despite the USSR's centralised economic structure (Bargandzhia 1999: 157-162).[132]

However, against this background the process of 'Georgianisation' of Abkhazia was most alarming for the Abkhazians. Just as 1965 was a turning point in the Karabakh Armenians' struggle against their titular rulers, 1977 marked a new phase in the struggle of the Abkhazians. This important campaign took shape as the Soviet Union was preparing a new constitution under Brezhnev to replace the Stalin-era constitution of 1936.

In a letter of 10 December 1977 addressed to the central leadership of the Soviet Union, 130 Abkhazian intellectuals enumerated their dissatisfaction with Abkhazia's 'status of subordination to Tbilisi' and called for 'radical measures' to change the situation in their autonomous republic. The 'Georgianisation' of Abkhazia was the underlying issue behind their concerns. The authors of the letter were particularly critical of the First Secretary of the Communist Part of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze, who had become the leader of the Georgian SSR in 1972. They wrote:

> While delivering words in strict compliance with the spirit and letter of our Party and declaring an

> implacable and resolute battle both against all who failed to comply with the Party-line and against all manifestations alien to our society, in point of fact the leaders of the Georgian SSR demonstrate strictness only in pursuance of the very tradition they censure. The further course of events irrefutably shows that the new government of Georgia… is even further aggravating the already well and truly unhealthy political and cultural relations between Georgia and Abkhazia. With this aim in view it has outlined and is already carrying out a range of economic and socio-political measures. Today in the autonomous republic such a regime has been established, such reorganisations have been carried through, cadres have been put in place in such a way that Tbilisi can successfully and intensively effect as never before the georgianisation of Abkhazia (quoted in Lakoba 1999a: 97-98).

The alarm over 'Georgianisation' (like the alarm over depopulation of Armenians in Karabakh) was not a mere perception, but was based on objective factors, i.e., the policies set out by Tbilisi. The Abkhazian signatories, for example, highlight the case of Gagra, 'one of the main economic and historico-cultural regions of Abkhazia', to demonstrate their case.

> At the present time this historic region of Abkhazia has in practice been liquidated by the Order of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Georgian SSR of April 5th, 1973 entitled 'On the transformation of the regionally subordinate city of Gagra into a city of the Gagra District subordinate to, and governed by, the republic'. This was done without the involvement of any department of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Abkhazian Autonomous Republic' (quoted in Lakoba 1999a: 97-98)

Like their Karabakh counterparts, all the Abkhazian signatories were dismissed

from their positions. Minor incidents of protest followed — such as tearing down or painting over Georgian road-signs in Abkhazia — which continued well into 1978, when Shevardnadze visited Abkhazia. But, instead of addressing grievances, Shevardnadze further aggravated the situation. During a public address, he said: 'Dear brother Abkhazians! Apart from the secession of Abkhazia from Georgia, we shall do all you demand'. Shevardnadze was booed and heckled, and 'rushed to take refuge in his official car' (Lakoba 1999a: 98).

Almost a quarter of a century since then, and after a bloody war in 1992-1993, Shevardnadze's proposal for a solution to the Abkhaz conflict had not changed. In a radio interview in Tbilisi in August 2000, he stated:

> It is very hard for me to talk about [the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict]... It is impossible to change history, but we can learn from its bitter lessons. It must also be noted that enormous progress has been made in recent years. The entire world, without exaggeration the entire international community, actively supports us and favours *restoration of Georgian territorial integrity* [emphasis added]. This would also reflect the vital interests of the Abkhaz.[133]

## The politics of language

Language was one of the significant markers of both territorial and socio-cultural boundaries in Soviet nationality relations. In the early formation of the USSR, 'political boundaries… roughly corresponded to linguistically distinct peoples' (Horowitz 2001: 650). Even on the local level, titular administrative officials viewed language 'as the criterion for defining national frontiers' (Linevski 1956: 114).[134] While, politically, *denationalisation* of the "Soviet peoples" was a common policy for all nationalities in the USSR, native language and cultural production remained defining elements of the collective, ethnic boundaries, especially for minorities who lived under the rule of larger titular peoples.

On the micro-cultural and micro-social level, "cultural differences" were not defining markers of minority-majority interaction. But on the macro and collective levels, language and culture especially were elements that set the

minority apart from the majority. From the perspective of the minority group, the right to use and be educated in their native language, and opportunities for cultural production were seen as the "litmus test" of their "autonomy" and collective "minority" rights. However, for the titular states — which in the complex Soviet bureaucracy were entrusted with the duty to respect and provide such rights — the administration of language, education and culture was yet another "opportunity" to homogenize their population.

This politics of language is most prominent in the case of the Abkhazians. In the last century and a half, the Abkhaz language, part of the family of North West Caucasian languages, had gone through various changes under different regimes.[135] But the Soviet period was the most problematic.

In three decades, between 1925 and 1954, the orthography of the Abkhaz language was altered twice: the Abkhazian alphabet was changed into a Georgian-based orthography in 1937, then, in 1954, it was changed into a Cyrillic-based alphabet, which is still used today[136] These changes not only affected the teaching and learning of the language, but also the process of literary production and preservation of the "national memory".

The Soviet census of 1979 indicated that 96.1 percent of the Abkhazians considered Abkhaz to be their native tongue — even though a very small percent was fluent[137] — 2.4 percent Russian, and 1.5 percent Georgian. Like their Karabakh Armenian counterparts, the Abkhazians' knowledge of the "titular language" was extremely low. Only 2.1 percent of the Abkhazians indicated fluency in Georgian.[138] 'Russian was the natural second language for the Abkhazians' (Hewitt 1999: 174). Fluency of the Abkhazians in Abkhaz was extremely low, a reflection of the educational environment in the Abkhaz republic.[139] Published works and literature in the Abkhaz language were rare in Abkhazia. Even, the 'very terms "Abkhazian literature" or "Abkhazian writers" were not used'; instead, more clever terms, such as "Abkhazian group of Georgian writers", "literature of western Georgia", "autonomous part of Georgian literature", and other such expressions were used by titular writers and officials.[140]

**Education**

By 1946, all Abkhaz language schools in Abkhazia were replaced by Georgian language schools. After Stalin's death, and the relative political liberalisation that came with it, Abkhaz was reintroduced as a language of tuition, but only in elementary schools (cf. Avidzba 1999: 182; Hewitt 1999: 171; Hewitt 1996: 260-62). In general, education was divided between Russian language and Georgian language schools. (In Karabakh it was Russian and Azeri schools.)

Ostensibly, as a measure toward addressing the needs of Abkhazia, in the late 1970s, the local Pedagogical Institute in Sukhum was expanded from being a small provincial institution into the Abkhaz State University. However, despite the name, '[it] was designed to serve the needs of the whole of western Georgia'. Among the three sections of the University (Abkhazian, Russian, Georgian), the Georgian was the largest (Lakoba 1999a: 98, cf Hewitt 1993: 282).[141]

The implementation of such language and cultural policies was confirmed and condemned, at least formally, if not in practice, by Shevardnadze in June 1978, at the congress of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia. He stated:

> When we speak of such conditions and complex processes as those in Abkhazia, we cannot escape the conclusion that we have to acknowledge the participation of our own people in the relevant problem and try to make another's pain our own, and then we shall not fall into error — at any rate, there will be fewer mistakes' (Lakoba 1999a: 96).[142]

Beyond language and education, a more concerning element in the 'Georgianisation' of Abkhazia was the importation and settlement of non-Abkhazians into Abkhazia. Between 1937 and 1953, 'tens of thousands of Kartvelians were transplanted from regions of Georgia into Abkhazia, which significantly increased their share of the population of Abkhazia'. According to the Soviet census, between 1939 and 1959, the number of Georgians in Abkhazia grew by 72 percent, Russians by 44 percent, Armenians by 29.6

percent, and the Abkhaz only by 8.9 percent.[143] This demographic shift and inward migration was 'encouraged by Tbilisi', even in the post-Stalin period. The gradual influx of Kartvelians also put greater pressures on Abkhazia's resources. It created difficulties for the Abkhazians' 'access to higher education' and Abkhaz cultural production and preservation (Lakoba 1999a: 96, cf. Clogg 1995).

KGB reports in Abkhazia provide a flavour of the situation. A 'Top Secret' report (dated 24 January 1946) of 'People's Commissariat of State Security of the Abkhazian ASSR' provides a long list of Abkhazians' dissatisfactions and concerns over the settlement of Georgians in their republic. State security 'agents' and apparatchiks meticulously recorded 'anti-Soviet expressions' made by Abkhazian intellectuals, school teachers, farmers and ordinary people. For instance, Abkhaz poet Mikhail A. Lakerbal complained: 'Now Georgianisation is going on everywhere. Before people were different, the atmosphere was different. You can suffocate in this atmosphere. They're driving out Abkhazian cadres'. A village inspector, Khadzhagbat Gabniia, complained about the job market: 'A large number of additional Georgian workers are arriving from Georgia and are occupying all the jobs in the region held by Abkhazians. The latter are being sacked and sent to the kolkhozes… Before long the Georgians will take over Abkhazia once and for all, and there will be nothing Abkhazian left here' (Clogg 1995: 168, 169). [144]

The unresolved dissatisfaction of the Abkhazians — expressed in the 1977 letter campaign and subsequent efforts — were reiterated in 1985 in another letter of complaint. Three Abkhazian intellectuals sent a formal letter to the Communist Party's 27th Congress.[145]

The authors were alarmed that:

> Abkhazian children today are losing their native language within Abkhazia itself. It is almost never heard in the street and in the school (unless the lesson is on the Abkhaz language and its literature). It is almost never heard in state offices.

They point out that the Constitution of the Abkhazian ASSR provides guarantees for the development of the Abkhaz language and calls for its use

(as well as Georgian and Russian) 'in state and general organs, in institutions of culture, education and others.' However, all official 'correspondence, edicts and telegrams' are conducted in the Georgian language. This is despite the fact that knowledge of the Georgian language in Abkhazia is limited, except by those 'Abkhazians who learnt to read and write it under fear of repression'. The authors conclude that:

> 'Georgian nationalism, holding its ground even now, does a great deal even today to bring about a situation whereby the Abkhazians know their own history only in the form in which it is served up by certain 'scholars' from Tbilisi. (Lakoba 1999a: 101; cf. Hewitt 1996; Clogg 1995).

Predictably, none of these problems was addressed by Tbilisi. The last list of dissatisfaction in the Soviet era was articulated in the period of *glasnost* and *perestroika* in 1988. Sixty Abkhazian intellectuals sent an 87-page letter to Moscow on 17 June 1988. They called for the return of Abkhazia to its status prior to the 1920s (Lakoba 1999a: 101), as shall be discussed in the next chapter.

These dynamics observed in Abkhazia and Karabakh are also observed in other inter-ethnic relations and conflicts around the world. Gurr's 'global evidence' suggests that 'political and economic disadvantages motivate communal groups to demand greater access to the political system and greater economic opportunities, whereas a history of political autonomy leads groups to attempt secession' (Gurr 1993: 86). As in Abkhazia and Karabakh, significant demographic shifts contribute 'to demands for redress of grievances within the system', while 'cultural differentials are an antecedent condition that contribute substantially to social and cultural demands' (*ibid*).

Gurr provides (1993: 87) a typology of three alternatives that minorities choose: 'exit, voice, and loyalty'. All three alternatives have been variously employed by the Abkhazians and Karabakh Armenians: a) A move toward 'greater autonomy' (exist); b) protest with the aim of 'improving group status within state and society' (voice); and c) acceptance of 'situation as given' and search for opportunities in the future (loyalty). The Abkhazians and the

Armenians seized such 'future opportunities' during the *glasnost* and *perestroika* period in the late 1980s.

## Conclusion

Political, economic, cultural and educational discrimination in Abkhazia and Karabakh are further indications of the failure of autonomies in the Soviet south Caucasus. The legally and constitutionally stipulated "autonomy" granted to the Abkhazians and the Armenians by the central government of the USSR was eroded by the homogenising policies and machinations of their titular governments.

The politics of language and culture were part of a social control mechanism that the titular states used variously, starting in the 1920s, to keep their minorities under control and/or to lead them toward assimilation or migration.

For decades, the minorities' attempts to negotiate better conditions for their collective existence did not improve their situation. Yet, they hoped for better times and opportunities in the future. The titular authorities, on the other hand, were consistent and persistent in their policy: to resolve demands for social restructuring by a process of homogenisation of society (i.e., 'Georgianisation' and 'Azerbaijanisation').

This process was rooted in the Soviet 'nationalities policies' and historiography. The exclusion of rival ethnic groups (minorities) from the titular state's "national project" was seen as a legitimate means of safeguarding the dominant ethnic group's or nation's distinctiveness and peculiarities. The 'us-them' divide becomes wider and increasingly hostile, as 'previous rivalries are revived and catalogued in order to assess a group's current state of security' (Smith et al 1998: 49).

Whether intentionally or as a by-product of state policies, the alarm over "depopulation" and "cultural extinction" was perceived as real. When the components that defined the group were threatened, the national elites mobilised the groups toward protecting and strengthening those cultural, social and political structures that provide points of reference to their collective

existence. The titular states, who were to police and guard 'constitutional rights', instead weakened those structures.

The Abkhazians and the Karabakh Armenians were "undesired minorities" (nationalities) in Georgian and Azerbaijani 'ancestral lands'. The perception that the Abkhazians and the Karabakh Armenians are 'ungrateful foreigners' living in Georgia and Azerbaijan continues to have implications in the present, especially for the resolution of these conflicts in the south Caucasus. Nevertheless, both minorities perceived themselves not so much as citizens of their 'titular states', but as citizens of the USSR with 'constitutional rights' for at least cultural autonomy, if not full autonomy. Karabakh Armenians considered themselves the majority in a state sub-unit of the USSR, which was cut off from Armenia by Stalin. This formed the basis of their collective expectations and demands. The Abkhazians, while a minority in Abkhazia due to historical processes, saw themselves as the natives of their eponymous Autonomous Republic.

By 1988, the socio-political processes of the past had brought the minority-majority cleavage between the two Soviet autonomies and their titular states to a point where, to paraphrase Kapuscinski (1985: 104): 'Authority could not put up with a nation that got on its nerves; [and] the nation could not tolerate an authority it had come to hate… Authority had squandered all its credibility and had empty hands, the nation had lost the final scrap of patience and made a fist. A climate of tension and increasing oppressiveness prevailed'.

CHAPTER 4

# Mobilisation towards Restructuring

The previous chapter discussed the sources of conflict and how over time the cumulative result of unresolved issues in the minority-majority relations had drawn sharp cleavages among the groups. The exploration and analysis of the scale and depth of group mobilisation and strategic use of resources is critical to understanding not only the "genesis" of the conflicts, but also the intricacies of conflict resolution. This chapter will discuss the complex web of vertical and horizontal power relations and processes of mobilisation towards major social-political restructuring. It will suggest (a) four phases of transformation and redistribution of power and authority, and attempt to (b) explain the role of actors in bringing about changes. It will argue that when social restructuring is ignored or resisted by the dominant actors (group) over a long period of time, minority actors (groups) seek alternative measures either to force a change or to create a new social order. In effect, this means redrawing the minority-majority boundaries and redefining power relations.

## I. Transformation of authority

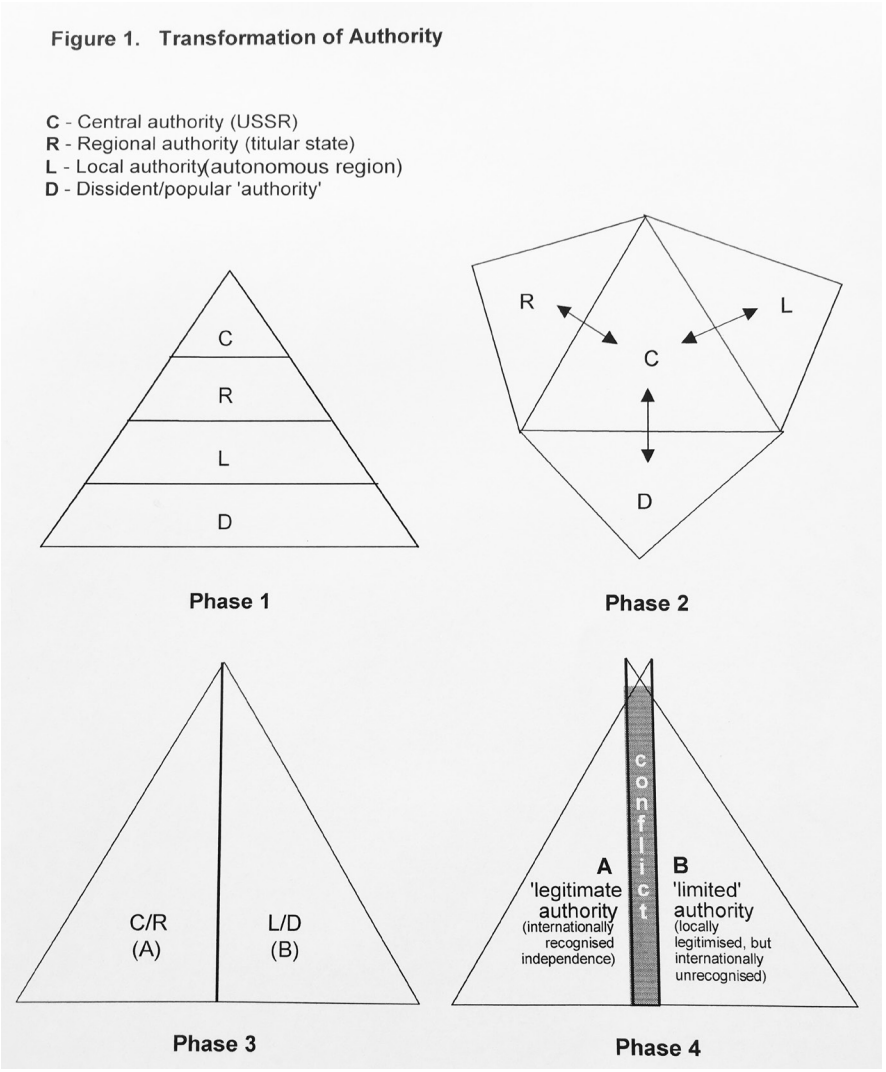
There are several key questions that need to be addressed here: How is power and authority transformed and acquired by the various actors (groups)? How is authority legitimised and used for group interests? And how do these processes create tensions among conflicting group interests?

This comparative case study suggests four phases in the process of transformation and restructuring of authority (see Figure 1).

In Phase 1 there is a clear hierarchy of authority, lines of demarcation and competencies. In this case study, Phase 1 represents the arrangement of

authority — i.e., the highly centralised, authoritarian and complex bureaucratic structure of the Soviet Union (see Chapter 3) — before *glasnost* and *perestroika*. On top of the pyramid is **(C) central authority** (Communist Party Leadership), followed by **(R) regional authority** (titular states), then **(L) local authority** (autonomies, such as Abkhazia and Karabakh) and at the bottom is **(D) dissident/popular 'authority'**.[146]

Phase 1 is characterised by a sharp vertical line of authority and command, where relations in the hierarchy are relatively predictable and



regularised. But the pyramid is transformed by a process of radical political restructuring (*perestroika*), exacerbated by abysmal economic conditions, social dislocation, and general revolt against the totalitarian system. In this process (Phase 2), as vertical authority weakens or gradually breaks down because of unpredictable and unforeseen outcomes, horizontal power increases. Power is a) redistributed among the lower levels of the pyramid and b) expropriated by intermediate actors in the lowest level (i.e., bottom up mobilization). Hence, Phase 2 is characterized by strong *horizontal* power relations: R, L and D compete for as much power as possible from the weakening C and C exploits the competing interests and rivalries among R, L and D to preserve its commanding role in the hierarchy. Relations among R, L, and D constitute the third dimension of the transformation in Phase 2. As C weakens, R attempts to appropriate C's powers to increase its authority and control over L and D. As vertical authority in Phase 1 erodes, in Phase 2, on the horizontal level, conflicts among R, L, and D increase — i.e., the parties pursue incompatible goals and try to undermine the potentials of the other.

**a) Empirical background**

The empirical bases of the vertical and horizontal dimensions of Phase 2 not only show the complexities of this transformation, but also provide an insight into the opportunistic ingenuity of the actors involved. There is already abundant literature on the internal and external processes that led to the gradual erosion and break up of the top tier of the pyramid — central authority (C) — and eventually the Soviet empire itself.[147] But let us briefly recap the main elements of the transformation which are relevant to our discussion here, and as they related to R, L, & D. The reformist and liberalising policies set out by Mikhail Gorbachev, when he became leader of the Soviet Union in March 1985, not only failed to save the system, but also caused the gradual breakdown of the system. Internally, the leadership (the central ruling authority) was divided over the scope, depth and tempo of reforms ushered in by the new policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. The divide was between the reform-minded and the conservatives within the Communist Party. What neither of the camps was able

to grasp was the extent of the structural weakness of the USSR. Gorbachev and his supporters were not sure where the new reforms were leading — one Party member described *perestroika* as 'an aeroplane that has taken off without knowing if there is a landing strip at its destination'.[148]

Most decisive was the gradual, albeit late, realisation that economic and social developments are closely connected to democratisation of the entire political system. The reformists were unable to calculate or predict the residual, but powerful, impact of the reform process on the lower levels of the hierarchical structure (i.e., R, L, and D). One crucial, perhaps unintended, defect of *perestroika* was methodology. The new reform policies, as Suny (1998: 547) articulates, 'attempted to coordinate complex policies of transformation from the centre through the instrumentality of the party while actually eroding central state and party power and authority; this in turn permitted regional and republic elites to grow more independent'.

As the ills of authoritarianism were exposed and publicly debated, calls for greater regional and local powers — self-determination — increased. The weaker central authority became, the stronger national movements for independence grew. But the process of erosion of authority (C) in the periphery (R and L) had started at least a decade earlier. A Soviet economist, who had worked at the republican Central Economic Planning (*Gosplan*) in both Baku and Yerevan, explained:

> Everything was going up in the air, there was no economy, it was over, it was not working effectively…. We say we received independence in 1990-91, but, in reality, these republics were already independent ten years before. They were in effect independent…. No one was afraid of Moscow, no one expected anything to be said from Moscow. Each republic had its own budget. They only thought about how to steal from Moscow. It was a mixed up situation. The republics were fighting with each other — Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, Armenia and Azerbaijan — over land, water, routes, they were in constant disputes. This process started in 1978-79. When Brezhnev died in 1982, the process picked up force, the infighting became stronger. And Moscow could not do anything, it did not want to.[149]

Indeed, such 'independence' had also spread to local areas with abusive consequences. In reference to Azerbaijan in the late Soviet period, Zinin and Malashenko write:

> Any top district executive (normally, a member of the Communist party) was a small local *allah*. With the ban on private trade, he was all-powerful in deciding whether or not to let a farmer set out to sell his harvest in another district or republic. If the farmer was not allowed to leave, his family simply could not make ends meet. This slavish dependence eroded society from top to bottom (Mesbahi 1994: 101).

On one hand, the internal struggle in the central leadership to push their reforms through, on the other, the emergence of a new political landscape, provided the long-awaited *opportunities* for regional and local officials (R and L) and 'dissident' groups (D) to exploit the situation and strengthen their positions vis a vis each other.

In this process the struggle for power is played out on the vertical-horizontal axis. While Central authority (C) attempts to exploit Regional, Local and Dissident authorities (R, L and D) for preservation of power, the Regional and Local attempt to preserve their power over the Dissident (D). The latter's (D) position, meanwhile, is strengthened by the transformations in the higher levels of the pyramid. By 1987-88, popular movements in the titular republics (R) — in this case Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia — were in the process of turning their virtual internal independence from Moscow into full independence and sovereignty. However, this process was compounded (and excited) by separatists' demands from autonomies (Local and Dissident) within their territorial boundaries.

**b) Transformation and Legitimacy**

*Perestroika* unleashed opportunities to resurrect and re-present all sorts of unresolved social, political and economic issues, but especially historical grievances (see Chapter 3). Above all, it raised the hopes of "peripheral"

individuals and groups, within both the formal structures of leadership and society, and informal ('dissident') circles. In the early period of this newly established environment of *openness* and *restructuring*, individuals exploited such opportunities. These were mostly political and social actors who had remained active in the pursuance of group interests and had, over the years, acquired valuable personal resources. Critical personal "assets" consisted of positions of influence, and networks and acquaintances in the various levels of authority and power structures. Such personalisation of a cause was also due to the fact that viable 'civic society' and independent institutions outside the control of state structures were absent or not allowed in the Soviet system. In such an environment individual actors played an important role in the transformation of the system. On the one hand, formally, activism toward group interests was presented to the official state and Party structures as "personal initiatives" of an individual or group of individuals. On the other, informally, at times secretly, individual initiatives were organised into larger group involvement in the pursuit of a cause. As more individual actors found commonalities in their aims, the initiatives (or the movements) became stronger.

Interestingly, ethnic (i.e., non-Slavic) Party members within the Communist Party structures carried out the most effective "lobbying campaigns". In the late Soviet period, as Gorbachev's policies were in full swing, such personal initiatives and activism of individuals prepared the groundwork for the creation of 'national movements' on a larger scale. Even though the success of such movements ultimately depended on the demise of central authority and the collapse of the Soviet system itself.[150]

Various actors in Phase 2 carried out intense lobbying in Moscow, the nerve centre of Soviet politics (C). On the titular republican level (R), for example, Heidar Aliyev of Azerbaijan and Eduard Shevardnade of Georgia were among the most prominent leaders of not only their titular states, but also the Communist Party and the Soviet government. Their close engagement in Kremlin politics and Party structures made sure that, for instance, any development regarding Abkhazia and Karabakh respectively did not infringe on the "national" interest of their titular republics. Still, other lower level apparatchiks and intellectuals from the titular states were involved in informal lobbying activities in pursuit of the preservation of Azerbaijani and Georgian control and authority in Abkhazia and Karabakh respectively.[151]

**c) From petition to political movement**

On the local level (L), intense mobilisation and lobbying efforts take place on two key dimensions: 1) direct dealings with central authority (C) to strengthen the bargaining position vis-à-vis R, and 2) minimising (or eroding) the effects of the more powerful influences of R on C and L. Abkhazian and Karabakh Armenian informal leaders put these strategies to the test. In October 1987 a group of 11 Karabakh Armenians went to Moscow to present their case to the Communist Party Central Committee. Party official Gryzin received the delegation. Azerbaijan's ambassador in Moscow was invited to participate in the meeting, but he declined.

> This was a small thing, but for Karabakh it has a great significance. This was the first time in 70 years that a delegation of Armenians from Karabakh was received by the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Moscow. This first meeting caused others to become active.[152]

A second delegation started to form, a much larger group of 22 people who represented the Communist Party in Karabakh, the Komsomol, the Trade Unions and the WW II Veterans Union. The group held a meeting with the senior leadership of the Party in Moscow. This included the Nationalities Questions Department, the Parliament, and the Vice President of the Supreme Council, Pyotr Demichev, who was also a member of the Politburo. This was also the first time that a Politburo member was meeting directly — without channels through Baku — with a delegation from Karabakh.

> Azerbaijan started to protest against us, with speeches and so on. Word went to Karabakh and Armenia that the issue had been put on the table; it's been discussed.
>
> With this we were able to organise a major provocation. No one could accuse us of being cut off from the people and their concerns. Indeed, under Soviet circumstances, we were, in effect, able to organise a referendum. This wasn't just collection of signatures, but a referendum where collectives participated in it

> 100 percent: unions, factory committees, village structures, and so on — all through official channels and means. Each organisation held meetings and officially accepted decisions and sealed it with their official organisational seals. We took such officially endorsed documents and decisions to Moscow asking for the unification of Karabakh with Armenia.[153]

Similarly, in the late 1980s, Abkhaz elites (activists) concentrated their lobbying efforts on Moscow demanding union republic status for Abkhazia. Like their Karabakh counterparts, Abkhazian intellectuals and activists conducted their campaigns within the formal Party channels and legal framework of the Soviet Union, as well as through their informal contacts in the academic circles in Moscow (cf. Chervonnaya 1994). Their modus operandi 'projected an image of loyal Soviet citizens resisting anticommunist Georgian nationalism' (Starovoitova 1992: 47). One well-known campaign in this regard is a letter sent to Moscow, signed by sixty Abkhazian intellectuals. The 87-page document, sent on 17 July 1988, argued the case for a return of Abkhazia to its 1920s status. Increasing nationalist fervour in Georgia had triggered the direct appeal to Moscow.[154] On 10 July 1989, a delegation of the Commission of the Supreme Soviet of USSR visited Sukhum but failed to resolve the differences between the conflicting parties.[155]

Whereas in Phase 1 legitimacy of authority flows down vertically, in Phase 2 — as the parametres of legitimacy change vis-à-vis transformation to stronger horizontal relations — the Regional, Local and Dissident authorities (R, L & D) vie for legitimacy (with conflicting interests) from the bottom. In this process, the source of legitimacy is no longer being part of the existing structure of authority (i.e., USSR), but the restructuring of relations that best serve the 'national' interests of a given group ("nationalism"). Thus, in Phase 2 popular support becomes a critical source of legitimacy.[156]

By mid-1991 the centre of power had already shifted from Moscow to the republics. Meanwhile, the elite of the Republics began to compete for 'greater control of the resources of their own territories, nationalism became a critical part of the vocabulary that justified this move toward sovereignty' (Olcott 2002: 55). Also significant were the vast resources that became available to regional and local leaderships. When the Communist Party was banned, after the failed coup of August 1991, properties and vast resources

worth millions of dollars were transferred to republican and local authorities, which increased both their material and political assets enormously.

**d) Bottom up mobilisation**

An intricate episode from the early stages of the 'Karabakh movement' — when it was not yet a Movement — provides a concrete example of the vertical-horizontal relations, struggle for power, and pursuance of group interests.[157]

In the spring of 1987, three Armenians filed a legal petition with the Prosecutor General of the USSR against Heidar Aliyev, the Azerbaijani leader serving in the highest body of the Soviet Union.[158] This was the first incident in Soviet history when Soviet citizens were suing a sitting member of the Politburo of the Communist Party. In a 250-page document they accused Aliyev of 'national discrimination against the Armenians living in Karabakh and Azerbaijan'. As my informant, Igor Mouradyan, who was one of the petitioners and author of the document, explained:

> About 20-25 days after we filed the legal petition, two KGB commanders came [to Yerevan]. For hours and hours, for two days, I answered their questions. There were about 140 proofs in the document [we submitted]. At the end, they said fine, but we have to investigate every single claim, it is a major task, we need to organize a team to investigate this. But they were astounded and said that for the first time ever a member of the Politburo was being sued.

Noteworthy is the fact that the three individuals who filed the legal petition were Party members in good standing and were 'very loyal' to the USSR. Two of them had been awarded medals for their services to the country.[159] 'We utilized the elderly well' Mouradyan reported. 'The old people were not afraid of anything, they were 75-85 years old'.

> They could not accuse us of being dissidents or people opposed to the Soviet Union. We were all loyal people…. [As such]

> Commander Illiyin [of the KGB] started to soften it up. He said, "there is no need for such things", and so on. He said, "Well, illegal things are happening [in Karabakh], what can we do?" and so on.

The Prosecutor General in Moscow did not formally accept the legal petition. Instead, he 'made copies of everything' submitted, and returned the document to the authors.

> They wrote me a letter, signed by Commander Ninachev, a judicial advisor and high-ranking official of the Court. This official wrote, "We thank you" and accept this as information [not legal petition]. I still have this letter. [But] I wrote several letters back, "No," I said, "We ask that you look over this case", so on. But the same type of answers came back. "Thank you for the information you provided" etc.

In late May 1987, Gorbachev called Aliyev 'and presented him everything that was written about him' in the legal petition.[160]

> Gorbachev told him that this is the first time that we are receiving complaints about a Politburo member. You need to give an answer. I don't know if this was the cause or not, but Aliyev suffered a heart attack and disappeared for three months. He appeared [again] in September at a book exhibition in Moscow.

Aliyev was dismissed from the Politburo on 21 October 1987. At the time he was responsible for transport and social services, two traditionally troublesome areas of the Soviet economy that had failed to meet Gorbachev's demands for increased efficiency. More significant, Aliyev, along with Brezhnev's former allies in the Central Committee, was considered part of a core of resistance to Gorbachev's calls for radical reform.[161] Tass, the official Soviet news agency, reported that Aliyev had resigned from the Politburo for health reasons. The Communist Party Central Committee accepted his resignation at a surprise meeting in the Kremlin.

The episode is illustrative of how the interests of C and D coincided

in reducing the power of R (and by extension L), although for very different reasons. While the legal petition of the three Armenians in and of itself might seem a 'banal' political act, it played into Gorbachev's hand as further political ammunition against his opponents.[162]

As for the Armenians (D):

> What was our intention [with the lawsuit]? We realized that as long as Aliyev is in the Politburo nothing will work [for Karabakh's case]; we would not be able to put our case as a political issue. Aliyev was a member of the Politburo and we had to hit him, absolutely. This was very important. Of course, it is possible that Moscow exploited this case, or if it didn't, what is important is that we dropped our penny in the kitty in order to remove him.

The intention of the Karabakh activists to 'remove' or weaken Aliyev is further explained by his 'legacy' in Karabakh. Aliyev became the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan on 12 July 1969. He was also the chief architect of 'Azerbaijanisation' of Karabakh — a role widely praised in the post-independence Azerbaijani media. In an article entitled 'Nagorno Karabakh: Mission of salvation began in the 1970s', *Bakinskiy Rabochi,* the official government newspaper in Baku, wrote:

> … Taking a consistently uncompromising stance in his policy in Nagorno Karabakh he [Aliyev] put a halt to Armenian nationalism in the area. Despite pressure from [the] Kremlin, the region was cleansed of Dashnak elements [sic].
> … In other words, we have to recognize that the years of Heidar Aliyev's leadership began a new era for Azerbaijanis in Karabakh. Without exaggeration, it should be said that only after Heidar Aliyev's accession to the leadership of Azerbaijan, Azerbaijanis in Karabakh felt as real owners of their native land.
> … This created conditions for the inflow of Azerbaijani population from neighbouring regions…. Azerbaijanis, who resettled into Nagorno Karabakh, were registered there, without the usual hindrances…. [these measures] helped in strengthening ties between the [Karabakh] autonomy and the regions of

> Azerbaijan and inflow of Azerbaijanis (*Bakinskiy Rabochi* 14 May 1999).

In *Yeni Azerbaijan*, the newspaper of the ruling party, praises for Aliyev's leadership were even more flattering. On Liberation Day, an official holiday celebrating Aliyev's return to power in June 1993, the paper suggested that 'the Azerbaijan of the 1970s and 1980s should be named "Heidar Aliyev's Azerbaijan"'.[163] The religious leader of the country, Sheikh-ul-Islam Haji Allah-Shukur Pashazade, even proposed during a meeting with Heidar Aliyev to rename Stepanakert (Khankendi) *Heidarabad*.[164]

Affirming Aliyev's key role in the exacerbation of the Karabakh conflict, Gorbachev (1996: 335) wrote: 'If Aliyev had conducted a valid internationalist policy, a catastrophe could have been prevented. By 1988 it was already too late'.[165] After Aliyev's removal from the Politburo, Karabakh activists started to seriously organise a movement. 'We started to organize a delegation, we collected money for the delegation, and, by October [1987], we had completed the signature campaign'. The new movement collected 125,000 signatures, four-fifths of it in Karabakh.[166]

> Once they removed Aliyev, we realised something — very interesting: Moscow was showing activism, Moscow started to take notice more actively. Officials, Central Committee members and ministers started to come to Stepanakert; and everything they were investigating was in accordance with our letters. It might be true that they wanted to put pressure on Azerbaijan, it could be that they wanted to dismiss some people from their jobs in Baku, everything is possible, this is politics, but our intention was to keep the issue alive, the political issue, not the economic or the social, but the political issue.[167]

In the case of the Abkhazians the situation was different. Shevardnadze's alliance with Gorbachev generally favoured the Georgian position. However, Moscow was appreciative of the Abkhazian position of "loyalty" to the USSR, just as Gorbachev was weary of Georgian nationalist forces undermining his reform policies.

**e) Restructuring of authority and conflicts**

The internal and external processes of Phase 2 gradually obliterate Central authority (C) from the picture. C collapses under the weight of structural and systemic problems, and increasing pressure from the Regional, Local and Dissident forces (R, L & D), which sap C's power and authority through a process of appropriation.[168] Thus, Phase 3 is characterised by a process of consolidation of authority and restructuring of relations. C and R are consolidated into C/R, i.e., the powers and functions of central authority are transferred or appropriated by R — we shall call this entity **A** (Tbilisi and Baku). L and D are consolidated into L/D, i.e., local and dissident authority merge into a single "national authority", backed by "popular support" — we shall call this entity **B** (Abkhazia or Karabakh).

The parameters of the vertical-horizontal axis of authority relations also go through a radical reconfiguration. The depth and scale of this change radicalises the existing relations and sharpens the conflicts among the "newly emerged" (i.e., redistributed authority) entities in Phase 3.[169] The fundamental conflict in Phase 3 is the question of legitimacy of authority that each entity claims or holds. **A** claims authority over **B** based on precedent (former arrangements, Phase 1); **B** claims authority based on the emergent new configuration after the Centre's (C's) demise (Phase 2). While **A** insists on the preservation of strong vertical relations, **B** insists on largely horizontal relations with **A**. This basic difference of perception, interpretation and expectation becomes one of the most contentious issues of their relationship, with dire consequences. Correspondingly, Tbilisi and Baku have so far rejected any horizontal relationship of authority and have insisted on the vertical. For example, until 1999, Abkhazia had not declared full independence from Georgia, pursuing a horizontal relationship with Georgia in a federative arrangement. Karabakh has also insisted (and continues to insist) on horizontal relationship with Azerbaijan. However, Azerbaijan has not only insisted on granting *only* 'highest form of autonomy', but has refused to formally recognise Karabakh Armenians as a side to the conflict.

As fundamental differences over authority are not resolved and the conflict continues over an extended period of time, the lines of demarcation of authority in Phase 3 become more self-defined and the cleavage between them

becomes deeper (Phase 4). In Phase 4 both **A** and **B** achieve independence (*de facto* or *de jure*) recognized by their respective constituencies. However, the conflict over power and legitimacy continues and is further exacerbated by external factors: when outside actors (the international community) recognise one entity (A) as a "legitimate" authority and the other as a "deviant" entity ("limited authority"). Against the background of these four phases of transformation of authority, the next section will focus on the role of various actors in the process of mobilisation toward major social and political restructuring.

## II. The Process of mobilisation

We could suggest four main 'ideal' groups of actors (see Figure 2) engaged in the process of mobilisation toward major restructuring: *Formal leaders, Informal leaders, Militiamen* and *"Ordinary" citizens*. While there are diverse levels of interaction and some complementarity among them, the particular interests of each group are not necessarily congruent. They use various methods and means to achieve certain or expected results and legitimise their actions based on broadly defined premises. Figure 2 presents the 'ideal type' of vertical-horizontal interactions and processes, but there are asymmetric interactions as well.
The four categories of actors are defined as follows:

> **Formal Leaders:** This group is made of state political leaders, Communist Party bureaucrats and apparatchiks. As appointed officials of the state, on one hand they represented the interests of the Communist Party of the USSR and, on the other, the interests of the titular nation vis a vis the other nationalities and autonomous regions under their administrative control. The primary interest of this group was to hold onto power and maintain full control (authority) of developments in the titular state or administrative unit. Formal leaders pursued their interest — based on a dubious premise of "stability and prosperity" — by utilising the coercive levers and bureaucracy of the Party and the state.
>
> **Informal Leaders:** This group of leaders (elites) consists of

**Figure 2. The Processes of Mobilisation**

| ACTORS | GROUP INTEREST | METHOD | PREMISE | MEANS | EXPECTED RESULT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Formal (titular) leaders*** government & 'elected' officials) | power | use of state bureaucracy and infrastructure | stability and "future prosperity" | coercive levers | full control ('authority') |
| **Informal (local) leaders**** intellectuals, activists, professionals, etc.) | political change | intellectual production & utilisation of personal contacts, social networks, etc. | national rights | allocation and use of human and material resources | collective self-determination and restructuring of political order |
| **'ordinary' citizens** | security & freedom | engagement in process of change | 'human rights' | participation and 'investment' of personal resources (material and non-material) | change for the better |
| **Militiamen** | defence, security and protection of land & people | armed resistance | national defence | from home-made weapons to acquisition of heavy artillery | physical security and creation of new levers of influence |

*R in Fig. 1; **L & D in Fig. 1.

intellectuals (i.e., recognised writers, poets, artists, academics, etc.), professionals (e.g. engineers, doctors, etc.) within public institutions, and activists in various state institutions (e.g. the Komsomol, workers' unions, etc.). During the Soviet period, members of this category were most likely members of the Communist Party. However, in the transitional period of *perestroika,* they left the Party, or remained nominal members, exploiting their personal assets or leverage within the Party for their own 'national cause'. The key interest of this group was political change.

**Ordinary citizens**: this category refers to members of society in general — the 'person on the street' — who are not covered in the above two categories, but have a stake in the outcome of restructuring.

Individuals participate in the process of change, willingly or under pressure from others, with the expectation of basic security and freedom.

**Militiamen:** The core of this group is made of army veterans, former members of local police forces and new recruits of "freedom fighters" (or "rebels"). The primary interest of this group was defence of "national" territories, and the security and protection of their "national" population. This group, in effect, constituted the nucleus of the armed resistance (and later formal armies) of the non-titular groups against their titular rulers. Under the banner of "national defence", militia leaders mobilised armed resistance among their co-nationals and foreign sympathisers (or diasporas) and armed themselves ingeniously — starting with homemade weapons and pistols to gradually acquiring heavy artillery.

It is difficult to draw an exact pattern of interaction among the actors, especially in view of asymmetric, cross-relations among the various categories. However, the main axis of mobilisation is the relationship between the *formal* and *informal* leaders (i.e., the elite being the "driving force" behind mass mobilisation).

### a) Setting the stage

In the *perestroika* period, formal and informal leaders played a critical role in setting the stage for the creation of a *national movement* for change or restitution, which started with intellectual and scholarly production. While formal leaders had state bureaucracy and infrastructure at their disposal, informal leaders utilised personal contacts and informal social networks to give currency to their national ideology. For instance, the Abkhazian elite's 'patriotic tendency increased strikingly' in Abkhazian literature. The legitimacy of territorial boundaries drawn during the Stalin era was one of the main themes of such literary and scholarly production. In earlier Soviet times, such explosive and 'nationalistic' subjects were intertwined in 'allegorically coded sub-texts' of

literary works. In the late 1980s and early 1990s 'patriotic thematisation took an open, journalistic character' and was hotly debated in the Georgian and Abkhazian press. This political struggle in the literary arena was an attempt by the Abkhazians 'to put flesh on their aspirations and dreams' (Avidzba 1999: 186-87). Nationalistic 'thematisation' among Georgian intellectuals and historians, supported by formal leaders, had begun much earlier.[170] Armenian intellectuals in Karabakh and Armenia were engaged in similar literary and scholarly endeavours.[171] Likewise, in Azerbaijan academics and intellectuals engaged in the exploration of the 'unopened pages' of Azerbaijan's history and literature. They 'rapidly produced [material documenting] Azerbaijan's historical cultural, and political claims of Karabakh', which was 'regarded as a cradle of Azerbaijani art, music and poetry' (Altstadt 1992: 207).[172] Such national (and nationalistic) discourse produced by *informal leaders* provided the intellectual rationale and justification for the restructuring of the political order. The groundwork was already in place when independence movements — for exit from both the USSR and titular states — started in the late 1980s.

In the case of Abkhazia and Karabakh, informal leaders engage in three main stages of struggle for change: a) presenting a political and legal case for restructuring of minority-majority relations through official and formal channels of authority (as discussed above); b) mass mobilisation of movement to support their case and to force action; c) military mobilisation when military solution is imposed by titular authorities.

**b) Mass mobilisation**

**Abkhazia**

In Abkhazia, a major turning point that emboldened the Abkhazian movement was the gathering of a national assembly in March 1989 in the village of Lykhny. The assembly, organised by the National Forum of Abkhazia (*Adygylara,* 'Unity') — a coalition of non-Georgian ethnic groups — appealed to the leadership of USSR, demanding the restoration of Abkhazia's status as a Soviet Socialist Republic.[173] Meanwhile, Georgia was involved in its own struggle for independence from the USSR. In April 1989, Soviet troops in Tbilisi forcefully

suppressed a peaceful demonstration of Georgians demanding secession from the USSR, killing several protesters. The violence triggered wider popular anticommunist feelings and created a momentum for independence from the USSR. In October 1990, Georgia held free parliamentary elections and the secessionists won.[174]

The Kremlin was silent over the events in Abkhazia. But, Georgian reaction (by formal leaders) was quick — in the name of preserving "stability" in the country and asserting authority. Dzhumber Patiashvili, the head of the Communist Party of Georgia, harshly condemned the demands of the Lykhny assembly at a session of the Supreme Soviet of Georgia. This was followed by the dismissal of the First Secretary of the Abkhazian Regional Committee of the Communist Party, Boris Adeliba, who had also supported Abkhazians' demand for change of status. The Abkhazian demands poured further fuel into the Georgian national movement, which advocated the creation of a single and indivisible Georgian state. The Abkhazians, along with the Communist leadership in Moscow, became key targets of Georgian nationalists (cf. Anchabadze 1999: 132). Encouraged and supported by Tbilisi, Georgian political organizations within Abkhazia started their own 'anti-Abkhazian' campaign. They held, along with local Kartvelians, continuous mass meetings, sit-ins and demonstrations from late March to July 1989. As Anchabadze describes (1999: 133), 'a constant stream of "guests" [came to Abkhazia] from Tbilisi, principally representatives of the national-chauvinist wing of the Georgian movement, including its leaders, Merab Kostava, a Mingrelian, and Zviad Gamsakhurdia, whose extremist statements inspired new waves of anti-Abkhazian hysteria'. An Abkhaz teacher adds:

> The Georgians, particularly the Zviadists… substantially contributed to the development of the Abkhazian national movement…. There has always been this issue of Abkhazian identity, there were always clashes over history, books on history, and who is native to this land and where did the Abkhazians came from in the 19th century, from the mountains, whatever. So this polemic — [which] had been broadcast on TV, published in the newspapers — was pouring [further] fuel, since, I think, *perestroika* began and since Gamsakhurdia came to power.[175]

Inter-communal relations in Abkhazia further deteriorated in July 1989

when Georgian officials and staff members of the Abkhazian State University unilaterally decided to break away from it and form a rival branch affiliated with the Georgian State University in Tbilisi.[176] Earlier, during a visit to Sukhum to investigate the situation, a Commission of the Supreme Soviet of USSR had decided against the partition of the university based on 'nationality' (Popkov 1999: 102).[177] Since its establishment in 1978, the Abkhazian State University had three sectors — Russian, Abkhaz, Georgian — among which the Georgian was the largest (Hewitt 1999: 174).[178] The division of the university sparked wider inter-communal fights in Sukhum between the Abkhazians and the Georgians. In an attempt to prevent the escalation of the conflict, the National Forum of Abkhazia appealed to the official leaders of Abkhazian SSR and Georgian SSR to introduce preventive measures, but to no avail. Instead, militia units from Georgia were dispatched to Abkhazia, which only inflamed the crisis. The incident at the university was not an isolated development. In effect, it had become a matter of assertion of ethnic identity and control. For the Abkhazians, the issue was 'crucially linked with the question of preserving their nationality' — as the Georgians had 'assigned to the Abkhazians the role of poor adoptive children forgetful of kindnesses shown to them' (Popkov 1999: 105). When the Georgians occupied a school building to house the new branch of Tbilisi University, the crisis went out of control as Abkhazians en masse surrounded the building to protest. Popkov, a Russian eyewitness, writes:

> Very soon a mass of them [Abkhazians] filled the surrounding streets, enveloping the school, the first ring of blockades and the cordon. When the blockade started, there were in the building not more than 50 teachers and students of the Georgian sector. Later, some of these decided to leave and were let out unhindered, leaving 12 inside (Popkov 1999: 105).

By the time the military restored order, 11 people had been killed during the inter-communal clashes. Similar incidents spread to other areas. Georgian and Abkhazian 'residents in various places [were] affected by the general atmosphere and start[ed] to threaten their neighbours or unwarrantedly holding up transport' (Popkov 1999: 109).[179]

**Karabakh**

The popularisation of the Karabakh movement had started earlier than in Abkhazia.[180] Building on the momentum of earlier lobbying efforts in Moscow (in October 1987 and January 1988), a group of nine Karabakh artists (informal leaders) formed the nucleus of what would become a larger movement. On 6 February 1988, they embarked on a two-week visit to Moscow from Stepanakert, on their way stopping in Yerevan to meet with 'like-minded people', as one of the delegation members put it. In Moscow they held meetings with various Communist Party officials. They presented another 10,000 signatures from Karabakh, asking for unification of Karabakh with Armenia. This was part of the signature campaign started in 1987. During their meeting with Vladimir Mikhailov, Nationalities Minister of the USSR, they presented 40 questions to him. Mikhailov told the delegation that Moscow was also receiving signatures from official organs in Azerbaijan.[181] At the end of their meeting, one of the Karabakh activists asked:

> "Mr. Mikhailov, tell me the truth, is there a small, little, pink hope [for Karabakh]?" He smiled and said, "You are a poet and you're asking me a poetic question and I'll try to give you a poetic answer". He said, "Why small and pink hope, there is big and red hope... struggle (*baygaretsek*)". Having heard this remark, we called our guys in Karabakh and I said we are given such hope.[182]

The Karabakh delegation interpreted this remark as a green light from Moscow officials to press their demands. Earlier, prior to their meeting with Mikhailov, Karabakh Armenians had detected another 'positive sign' in a statement made by Gorbachev on 6th February. Gorbachev expected to resolve the Karabakh problem 'in the spirit of the policy of perestroika' (Chandler and Furtado 1992: 403).[183] Moreover, during earlier meetings of other Karabakh activists in Moscow with Pyotr Demichev, First Deputy Chairman of the Central Committee of the USSR Communist Party (1985-88) and Politburo candidate member, they were given assurances that Moscow would not intervene in their struggle.[184]

> They had discussed with Demichev if [Moscow] would see the

> struggle as nationalism, and would there be a possibility of us being persecuted or arrested as nationalists. Demichev said that this wouldn't be the case; that now there is *perestroika* and such persecutions would not take place, otherwise perestroika wouldn't mean anything.[185]

Having received a go-ahead signal from the Armenian delegation in Moscow, a few days later, on 13 February, the first popular outburst, a mass protests took place in front of the government building in Stepanakert, with an unprecedented crowd of 7,000. As one activist described it, 'People started to call for national rights. This was the first anti-Azerbaijan, anti-Kevorkov [Party First Secretary of NKAO], anti-Aliyev protest. We were very excited about this in Moscow'. A 60-year-old woman, a former factory worker, underlined the role of women in the process:

> When the Karabakh movement started, I was among the first people who went to the square and participated in the demonstrations. At the time the majority of the demonstrators were women, because men were being arrested…. Sometimes I would come home at three or four o'clock in the morning… Women were very active in the movement.[186]

The protests continued around the clock for days until the delegation returned from Moscow. Meanwhile, large popular protests had began in the other districts of Karabakh (except Shushi, a mainly Azeri-populated town). Baku and local Karabakh officials were unable to disperse the crowds. As gradually more and more local Armenians joined the protests, the government's loss of control over the situation became more apparent. In Moscow, Karabakh intellectuals, academicians and activists continued to plan strategies for action. They surmised that the movement was irreversible and decided to take full advantage of the presented opportunities and exploit all available resources.[187] Moreover, Armenian intellectuals enjoyed close and warm relations with their Russian counterparts.[188] Pavel Palazchenko (1997: 99), Gorbachev's long-time interpreter, wrote in his memoirs: 'Almost all of my friends among the Moscow intellegentsia took the side of the Armenians [regarding Karabakh]'. When the delegation returned to Karabakh to cheerful mass protesters on 19th February,

'The crowd outside [the government building] was like benzene-soaked dry grass that would ignite any moment', described one delegation member.

> We were led to the tribune, where Lenin's statue was, and told the people what happened in Moscow. I was the first to speak. I told them about the difficulties we went through, how we were greeted and the questions that we dealt with. And I told them about the "pink hope".[189]

Meanwhile, Baku had sent V. N. Konovalov, the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, to Stepanakert to sort out the problem, but it was too late to control the situation, as Azerbaijan had not anticipated the scale of the disturbances.[190] As the situation turned into a crisis, Azerbaijan's top Party leadership could no longer ignore the Karabakh problem. Kiamran Bagirov, the leader of Azerbaijan (First Secretary of the Party) and Azerbaijan's Politburo members came to Stepanakert to deal with the crisis and try to prevent popular participation in the growing movement.[191] 'They wanted to pressure us or convince people to disperse'. But, this was an impossible task. 'The Party was relying on intimidating the public, but people were no longer afraid' (Rost 1990: 14).

The protesters surrounded the government building — where the officials from Baku were meeting with the local authorities, headed by Boris Kevorkov, First Secretary of the Party in Karabakh since 1973 — and did not allow anyone to come out. They kept them inside for a whole day. They were released only after one of the activists pleaded with the crowd to let them go. Neither the majority Armenian deputies in Karabakh's Soviet nor the crowds were satisfied with Bagirov's promises for economic reforms and solutions to the Oblast's problems. Bagirov had strongly rejected any territorial changes. But under pressure, on 20 February, as a crowd of 40,000 stood outside the government building in Stepanakert, a formal meeting of the Soviet of the Autonomous Oblast, the highest governing body of Karabakh, took place. Bagirov and Kevorkov left the meeting. The overwhelming majority of the Soviet voted to unite Karabakh with Armenia.[192] 'That decision was the beginning of this revolution', said Gabrielian. (It should be noted that at this point the 'Karabakh Committee' in Yerevan was not yet in existence.)[193]

The following day, on 21 February, Armenian activists — the leaders of the movement whose roles were legitimised by public addresses[194] — created the Krung (*Crane*) Karabakh Committee at the Actor's Square (renamed Freedom Square).[195] The Committee turned the "spontaneous" popular protests into an organised and sustained campaign for unification with Armenia SSR, which was (and remained) its sole purpose.

> [When the crowd started to gather in large numbers], it was necessary to create an organ that would control the crowd, so that there wouldn't be any provocation and inappropriate acts, and which would take responsibility for all this because the situation had already grown out of the control of the government. No longer did the police, KGB, or the Central Committee (*gentkom*) have the ability to rule over the people; instead, we were the leaders.[196]

Other activists joined the Committee. Unlike in Yerevan, 'the movement in Stepanakert was clearly defined from the start, with an objective, a battle plan, and a population ready for its marching orders' (Malkasian 1996: 44).[197] Soon Krung activities expanded beyond Karabakh as they mobilised support in Armenia and the Armenian diaspora. They 'sent people to different regions of Armenia to awaken people and make the Armenian nation adopt the Karabakh problem'.[198] Several prominent Armenian scientists and artists, such as famous astronomer Victor Hambartsumian, lent support to the movement and spoke publicly about it. Contacts were established with Armenian diaspora groups, especially the Dashnak Party, which lent financial and political support to the key leaders of the movement.[199]

In Abkhazia, the leadership similarly sought support from outside Abkhazia. Faced with the much larger and more aggressive Georgian nationalist movement, the Abkhazians received the assistance of ethnic and tribal organisations in the North Caucasus, where public opinion and political goodwill towards the Abkhazians was high. As an expression of this much needed support, the First Conference of the Peoples of the Caucasus was held in Sukhum in late August 1989. The conference established the Assembly of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus.[200] Its primary goal was the political unification and the co-operation of all the peoples of the region (cf. Anchabadze

1999: 133-34). This support was also vital in the early period of the Abkhazian-Georgian war as North Caucasians fought on the Abkhazian side (cf. UNPO 1994: 13).

It became apparent that protests alone were not enough to change the status of Abkhazia or Karabakh. As one activist put it, 'In meetings you can raise questions, but you cannot solve them. Problems were resolved either in cabinets with the signatures of both sides or on the battlefield'.[201] Both in Abkhazia and Karabakh formal leaders struggled to preserve order and retain full control of the situation.

In Karabakh, neither the local government, headed by Boris Kevorkov (who, instead, 'was trying to suffocate such aspirations'), nor Yerevan, under Karen Demirchian, would endorse the movement for unification with Armenia (cf. Malkasian 1996: 33ff).[202] Inter-communal clashes between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Karabakh, after the unification decision, reached a new level. As early as 22 February, a mob of 8,000 Azeris from Aghdam on their way to Stepanakert destroyed factories, offices and equipment. Local police were unable and unprepared to stop the march. As the mob reached Askeran, clashes with local residents resulted in 25 injuries on both sides. Two Azeris were killed in the mayhem, one reportedly by a Soviet soldier from an army garrison, which had been called to restore order.[203]

The spiralling crisis forced Gorbachev to appeal directly, on 26 February, to the Armenian and Azerbaijani people. He urged them 'to act only within a legal framework and within boundaries of democratic process'. But, 'I did not succeed', Gorbachev (2000: 91) said later.[204] Clashes spread to Baku and other cities of Azerbaijan where there were Armenian communities. The violence escalated into pogroms — in Sumgait, Kirovabad (Ganje) and Baku — where scores of Armenians were killed and injured by angry Azerbaijani mobs.[205] Meanwhile, large-scale strikes, mass meetings and demonstrations took place in Baku in response to the unification decision of the Karabakh Armenians. Indeed, the Karabakh issue sparked the creation of a national movement in Azerbaijan. 'This not only advanced counter-arguments against the Armenian claims, but gave vent to the whole range of Azeri national issues' (Herzig 1999: 11), which turned into a national independence movement.

The Karabakh 'problem' transformed into an inter-Union conflict when, on 14 June, the Armenian Supreme Soviet, under pressure from

continuing street demonstrations, endorsed the unification resolution of the Karabakh Oblast soviet, based on Article 70 of the Soviet Constitution's right of self-determination. In response, Azerbaijan's Supreme Soviet rejected Yerevan's decision, as it was 'contrary to the wishes of the majority of [Azerbaijan's] population' (Chandler and Furtado 1992: 408). Thus, the resolution of the conflict rested in the hands of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

Moscow, after months of reluctance, finally declared that the nationalities question was on the Soviet leadership's main agenda. But, 'rather than incorporating the nationalities question into the reformist programme, Moscow simply dealt with each crisis as it arose on a case by case basis in an attempt to contain events in the regions' (Merridale and Ward 1991: 209). In the case of Karabakh, rather than taking decisive measures, Moscow first offered a development package. When the offer did not satisfy the political grievances of the population, Karabakh was put under Moscow's direct administrative control in January 1989. Only ten months later, Moscow ceded control to Azerbaijan, which made the situation even more untenable. In the end, what Moscow's involvement amounted to was 'partial satisfaction and partial punishment for both sides, corresponding to President Gorbachev's idea: "neither any winners nor any defeated"' (Nadein-Raevski 1992: 127)

### c) Ordinary Citizens: from neighbours to enemies

None of the main actors — whether in the Party leadership in Moscow, or in the titular leadership in the republics, or among the activists — anticipated such forceful and mass popular participation in the movement. As one eyewitness described it, 'In a very real way, the people defined the movement' (Malkasian 1996: 41). One of the least explored areas of the study of the conflicts in Abkhazia and Karabakh, especially in its beginning stages, is the process of engagement of "ordinary citizens", a critical category of actors (as included in Figure 2). From a sociological perspective, as the conflict is radicalised by the rapid political and administrative transformations, a gradual breakdown of micro-social relations is observed. Even if those relations had been formed over a long period of time, micro-social interests and stronger ethnic group identification seem to take precedence. This process is accelerated to a crisis

or to a lethal degree when major political transitions change the existing social 'agreements' and the accepted norms of co-existence.

Political crisis not only affects the lives of ordinary citizens, but also makes them active participants, willingly or unwillingly, in the process of transformation. The stories of ordinary people affected and involved in the crisis provide further insight into the lasting effects of these processes — in which long-time neighbours could become "enemies". (Longer than normal length of quotations from interviews are used here to highlight, in their own words, how the activities of various actors in the mobilisation process affect the lives of ordinary citizens in different ways).

Speaking in the context of the dispute over the university in Sukhum, an Abkhaz resident of the city explained:

> In the neighbourhoods people were very close to each other, like in many Caucasus countries. But, [since] it was such an intense dispute on television, everybody was politicised. For example, I didn't have problems with my neighbours, but once when I came to a birthday party and they started to discuss [these issues] we quarrelled. It was a Georgian party. We tried to avoid the subject, but when we started arguing, it ended up very [unpleasant]… everyone was really hurt. The same happened at the university, for instance. I had a course in which half of the students were Georgian students. And I was supervising some of the Georgian students preparing their thesis. When the university split, many of them moved to the Georgian branch. They felt very awkward, they didn't want to leave me, I was their supervisor and we had a very good relationship, they were my students, they respected me very much, but they were under such heavy pressure from their own community, that they came to me and said, we have to go, but we are really sorry, we have to go. Some of them did not want to go at all, and they said, no we are staying, you are our teacher, we're staying with you, we got a lot from this university, we don't want to go to that branch. So, it was a personal drama for a lot of people.[206]

The conflict not only affected professional relationships, but also soured long-held friendships among colleagues. My informant adds:

> These [university teachers] were my close friends, we spent

> holidays together. And from then on, we said hello to each other on the street, but we never had a cup of coffee together or socialised. That was how [the conflict] affected people.

Workers in various institutions, virtually overnight, found themselves in precarious situations. An Abkhazian dentist was dismissed from his job by the head of a dental clinic in Sukhum, where the majority of the staff was made up of Georgians. A Georgian working in an institution with a majority Abkhazian staff would be pressured to leave, because of the existing conflicts between the two communities. And in a 'such a small society' such dismissals and pressures became 'immediately known to everybody'.

The break up of micro-social and professional relations was also prevalent in Karabakh and in other parts of Azerbaijan.[207] The Sumgait tragedy was a major turning point. Following the first trial of the massacre of Armenians in this industrial town north of Baku, Azerbaijanis started to harass and intimidate the 2,000-strong Armenian population of Shushi (Shusha). As the news reached Stepanakert, populated by a majority of Armenians, Azerbaijanis living in the capital of the Oblast felt unwelcome and gradually left the city. Many moved to Shushi, into the houses left behind by Armenians.[208]

The story of a nurse in Shushi:

> I was working in Shushi as a nurse in the boarding school, which was an orphanage. The whole collective [staff] was made of Turks [i.e., Azeris]; there were only two Armenians — the washing lady and myself. We were very respected. We took care of the children like our own. Sometimes, even after work hours, we would take care of the children who were ill or needed special attention, whether day or night. We took care of them no matter what.
>
> When the events started [in February 1988], they dismissed all the Armenian workers. I continued to work until the school year started. On 1st September [the beginning of the academic year] the head teacher asked me, "Haven't they told you anything?" I said, "No. What is it?" She said, "You have to leave your work. No Armenian is allowed to work anymore". The Director called me and said, "We ask you to leave for now, for a couple of weeks, until we see what happens with the talks [re: settlement of the problems in Karabakh]. When the talks are over, we call you back to work". There was another doctor who was dismissed from Stepanakert. She came to Shushi and

> told me the same story. She was also a very caring and hard working person. The director told me "go home and wait". I came home and sat there. On 18 September, we realized that they are trying to kick the Armenians out. They started to enter the houses and intimidate people by destroying their property and making a mess of the house. There was not any killing. They just wanted to scare us so that we would leave on our own. That day they burned four Armenian houses. We were all scared to death.[209]

Another example is the case of an Armenian engineer:

> I was born in Shushi, in 1934, and lived there for 56 years… I was working in the Department of Construction. One day when I reported to work, a Turk [i.e., Azeri], who was my engineer, came to me and said, "I want you to go home now". I said, "Why should I go home?" I couldn't understand why he wanted me to go home. I thought something had happened at home, I didn't know what was really happening at the time. This was in 1988, the meetings [protests] were taking place in Stepanakert. We didn't know anything about it. For us there was nothing unusual. The radio wasn't saying anything. We were living in Shushi, comfortable, orderly, nothing out of the ordinary.
>
> I was the head of a team (*brigad*) in the Construction Department [of Shushi], most of the kids [subordinates] were Turks and a few Armenians, whom I knew…. We were working together [Armenians and Azeris] and there were no problems. As their superior, whatever I said, they did it and carried out the tasks that I assigned them. They gave me yet another team, but all of the team members were Turks.
>
> One day I came to work and saw that these men were in their plain clothes. They weren't wearing their work clothes. I greeted them with a hello and said, "Aren't we working today?" They said no. They said let's go eat and drink today. I knew something was going on, but I was dealing with the situation in such a way that they would be satisfied with me. So I said, okay, let's go eat and drink today. One said let's go, the other said, no wait, there are things we need to talk about. I said what's wrong. They said, from now on we cannot work with you. I said, whoever wanted to work with me let him work, whoever does not wish, he was free. These were people who had worked with me for 16-17 years.
>
> … We didn't know what was going on. I asked a Turk, isn't there anybody or an official in town who could control the situation and help stop the conflict? He said, "There is nobody.

> In fact, he said, "The end of this is war". Imagine that this man was a simple labourer (*banvor*). He wasn't an official or anybody important. He said, "This would end with war". I said, how come? Are you out of your mind?

The growing inter-ethnic tension also led to rare cases of cooperation. When the Armenians were driven out of Shushi and the Azeris out of Stepanakert, an Armenian family exchanged their house in Shushi with an Azeri family's house in Stepanakert.

> When we couldn't live in Shushi anymore, I came to see [an Azeri's] house [in Stepanakert] where he was living with his son. Then we came to Stepanakert and discussed exchange of houses with the Turk living here. He said, "I'll go to Shushi and take a look at your house, if I like it, we'll exchange". He went there for two days, stayed in our house… and upon his return, agreed to exchange. Then we prepared the documentation [and the legal procedures]—he went to Shushi and we've been here ever since. We were very respectful toward each other and very harmonious (*hamerashkh*). If fact, in the beginning, when we first came to Stepanakert, we did not have any flour, sugar and other foodstuff. He would get them from Shushi and bring them to us. I will never forget this, never'.[210]

Before the conflict, Armenian and Azeri neighbours and friends shared each other's happy and sad occasions, such as births, weddings and funerals.[211] Allakhverdi Poladov, an Azeri from Baganis-Ayrum, affirming this social amity, said: 'We went to their [Armenian] weddings, and they came to ours'. But, after all that has happened since 1988, when asked if he would permit his daughter to marry an Armenian, 'he laughed harshly and replied, "God forbid"' (Cullen 1991: 55-76).[212]

Along with possessions and careers, close neighbourly relations were destroyed as well.

> When the attacks on the Armenians in Shushi started… At night we went to our next-door neighbour's house, but we were not welcomed. As he was a Turk, he was afraid that we would endanger his life as well. We went to an Armenian's house [which had] tall walls. We stayed there for the night. The Turks, their

> militiamen, were patrolling the Armenian neighbourhood — probably they were out there to destroy and ravage the Armenian houses….
>
> [As we were being transported to Stepanakert] I gave our house keys to our Turk neighbour, and said, "Nesib Bey [form of address in Azeri] here are the house keys, do whatever you want with our house". And we left.
>
> [Her husband adds] We left everything in Shushi — our cow, our house, our wealth, everything in the house!
>
> On our way to Stepanakert, you know those bad roads, the bus got stuck at the edge of the cliff. We were almost getting killed. We could see the valley below. This happened near the prison building. We didn't know what to do. Then the officials showed up — the Regional [Communist] Secretary of Shushi, the militia, all the big shots came to see what was going on. I said to him [to the Azeri official]: "Shame on you! We have worked with you all these years, we have suffered with you, is this your honour, your respect, your humanity, your grace?" He said, "Anya Khala [form of address in Azeri], what shall we do, the Armenians are doing this to us in Stepanakert". He was just telling us one lie after another.[213]

In this confusing and rapidly changing situation, the conversation of an Armenian woman over coffee with an Azeri neighbour captures the feelings and thoughts of the 'ordinary' people caught up in the conflict. As they were sitting in the Armenian woman's garden, the son of another neighbour passing by yelled to the Azeri woman: 'We are going to drive all the Armenians out of here'. My informant continued:

> I was at a distance and the young man did not see me. I said to my guest, "Ay, Sarder, we don't know how God works. Only God knows who is going to suffer and who is not. It is in God's hand whether we are going to escape or you are going to escape. Nobody knows. Whatever our fate is will happen.[214]

More than a decade after the beginning of the conflict, it is still difficult to imagine how former neighbours could reconcile.[215] But, at least one European official was hopeful when he said: 'I hope that Shushi becomes a town symbolizing conciliation and cooperation just like Strasbourg'. Walter Schwimmer, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, was referring to the city — which at different times had been in French and German hands —

where the Council headquarters are located, symbolising a new era of German-French amity after World War II. 'Imagine if one day a regional organization would be founded in the South Caucasus, and Shushi would be chosen as the central place of that organization,' Schwimmer told students in Yerevan.[216]

**d) Politicisation of the population**

As, on the one hand, formal leaders struggled for full control and, on the other, informal leaders had succeeded in making "national self-determination" the focal point of the restructuring of the political order, the engagement of ordinary citizens in the process of change increased. The emerging social crisis — the breaking up of old neighbourly and professional relations among the various ethnic groups — led to the radical politicisation of the population. Decades-long grievances against the government or the majority ethnic groups received renewed attention and urgency. For example, when asked what was the main reason for the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, the Armenian nurse quoted above, who had never been involved in politics or 'nationalistic' causes in her life, replied: 'The Turks wanted to hold all the power in their hand'.[217] In a way, she had internalised the political-ideological discourse prevalent in the movement at the time.

An Abkhaz teacher provided further explanation:

> Until 1989 I was not really interested in politics. I was a student and had just come back and started [teaching] at the university. The first time I started to think about these things was when there was a conflict over the university. And because I was working there, I got involved.
> … On the one hand, I do understand the way a lot of Georgians, a lot of my neighbours and my colleagues were brought up, but also it was somehow [pause], I don't know, some of them became irrational when you tried to talk sense. It was totally irrational. For instance, I could never understand how there could be two natives to the same land, who lived there for many, many centuries and never merged and retained their separate language and traditions and everything. But that was what they were seriously pursuing, yes. If it was too much to say that Abkhazians lived in Abkhazia,

> how come the country itself is called Abkhazia? Then they invented a theory that the true Abkhazians are the Georgians, well they used our self-name [sic] *Apswa*, and we are the Apswan, nonsense like that. What shocks me is how easily, for instance, my colleagues and friends jump up on those ideas; to somehow justify the more common Georgian rhetoric. Very few Georgians were opposing this nationalist stream of lies, very few. Only one person opposed this publicly, he was a Mingrelian; he was promoting the Mingrelian language. They were furious at him. And there was one person at the university who didn't speak on TV, for instance, but who went to a Georgian meeting and spoke publicly there and condemned the whole thing. They just beat him up. And nothing happened.
>
> When the war broke out, a lot of Georgian people didn't want to fight, not because they were pacifists, some of them maybe just didn't want to die, but many of them didn't want to fight against the Abkhazians. Also, there were a lot of mixed marriages. It was very, very painful.[218]

**f) Militarisation of the Conflicts**

Even as the decision of Karabakh for unification with Armenia had introduced unforeseen consequences to Gorbachev's entire restructuring programme in the USSR, the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia, on 25 August 1990, passed a resolution on the State Sovereignty of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia, within the structure of the USSR. The events in the USSR were unravelling quickly and uncontrollably. In October Zviad Gamsakhurdia, having become the non-Communist leader of Georgia, announced Georgia's exit from the USSR. All the autonomies within Georgia were denied their rights of self-determination. Gamsakhurdia led an ultra-nationalist campaign, which, ultimately, not only brought an end to his reign, but also embroiled Georgia in civil war.

Against this background, when on 17 March 1991 in a last ditch effort Gorbachev tried to save the USSR through a Union-wide referendum, Abkhazians and the non-Georgians in Abkhazia voted overwhelmingly in favour of preserving the Soviet Union. The election of 45-year-old Vladislav Ardzinba as chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia on 4 December 1990 placed the Abkhazian national movement on the path of 'a new political

future for Abkhazia' (Anchabadze 1999: 136). Ardzinba, a charismatic historian of the ancient Near East, enjoyed wide popular support, especially as he was not a member of the Communist Party nomenklatura. He was sensitive to the interests and expectations of the various non-Georgian communities in Abkhazia and, as such, included representatives of other nationalities in his new administration — for example, a local Mingrelian was made deputy chairman. But striking a balance in interethnic relations in Abkhazia was much more complicated. The fact that the Abkhazians were a minority in Abkhazia made power-sharing arrangements contentious (and continue to present difficulties to the Abkhaz leadership). The Kartvelians (as the Abkhaz refer to the community that Georgians refer to as Georgians) rejected the Abkhazian leadership's plan, which would have given the Abkhaz minority larger representation in the proposed new parliament of Abkhazia (Abkhazian Supreme Soviet). After intense and arduous negotiations, an agreement was finally reached among the various ethnic groups in Abkhazia. They agreed that in the new parliament the Abkhazians, as the autochthonous population, would have 28 seats, the Kartvelians 26, and the rest of the ethnic groups 11 seats in total. The new parliament convened for the first time on 5 January 1992. Ardzinba was elected chairman of the Abkhazian Parliament.

Soon after Georgia's exit from the USSR, new authorities in Tbilisi unilaterally restored Georgia's pre-Soviet constitution of 1921 and declared the 1978 Soviet constitution null and void. Abkhazia's status as an autonomous republic within Georgia was also put under question, as it was not part of Georgia under the 1921 constitution. The constitutional change alarmed the Abkhazian authorities. In response, in an attempt to forestall a legal crisis, the Abkhazian parliament passed a resolution, on 23 July 1992, replacing the 1978 Constitution with the 1925 Constitution of Abkhazia, in which Abkhazia had a confederative, rather than subordinate, relation with Georgia

The constitutional change triggered intense political activism by Kartvelians in Abkhazia, demanding the dissolution of the Abkhazian parliament and removal of Ardzinba as Abkhazia's leader. By August 1992, the Abkhaz-Georgian political crisis turned into a military conflict, when Georgian troops entered Abkhazian territories with tanks, heavy armoured vehicles and helicopters. This was seen as a clear message to the Abkhazian leadership that the Tbilisi authorities, led by Shevardnadze, were not interested in resolving

the conflict through negotiations or through federative arrangement. Tbilisi thought that it could resolve the conflict swiftly through military force. The objective of the military incursion into Abkhazia was to put an end to Abkhazia's autonomous statehood and the establishment of full Georgian control over Abkhazian affairs. With this aim, on 14 August, Georgian forces occupied the government and television buildings in Sukhum, and took control of Abkhazia's lines of communication.[219] But, one of the most tragic acts of the Georgian military incursion into Abkhazia was the deliberate destruction of the national archives of the Abkhazian people. In October 1992, Georgian troops burned to the ground the National State Archive of Abkhazia and the Abkhazian D. Gulia Research Institute of Language, Literature and History. Thus, all documentary evidence of the history and cultural heritage of the Abkhaz people was irretrievably lost.

The Abkhazians responded to the military attacks by organising volunteer resistance groups — made up of anyone willing to fight for Abkhazia.[220] Already, in the wake of earlier street and neighbourhood clashes, individuals had started to fend off attacks by using household "weapons", such as knives, or gardening instruments.

In Karabakh, for example, one leader of the movement recalled how 17 to 19 year old young men spontaneously volunteered to 'wipe out Shushi' after hearing about the killing of dozens of Armenians in Sumgait by an Azerbaijani mob. 'These guys are our army commanders now (*zoravarner*), among the most famous commanders', he added. Another leader of the movement prevented the angry young men from conducting such an operation, arguing: 'This is not possible. This would hurt our struggle'.[221] The state was unable to provide basic protection to its citizens. Even more, in many cases, for example, Tbilisi and Baku turned a blind eye to violations and criminal activities.

The leaders of the movement brought together individuals who, independent of each other, were involved in "self-defence" activities. The consolidation of such individual activities turned into the formation of more organised militia groups, which eventually became the core of the Abkhazian and Karabakh armed forces.[222] In the initial stages of the armed struggle, the Abkhazians received vital assistance from the Confederation of the Peoples of the Caucasus, which sent fighting divisions to join the Abkhazian military

struggle.[223] Karabakh Armenians received volunteer fighters (*fedayees*) from Armenia and a small number from the diaspora, while Azerbaijan hired mercenaries from other states.[224]

Initial attempts to agree a ceasefire in Abkhazia failed and the war continued. By the time a final ceasefire agreement was signed on 4 April 1994, under the auspices of the UN and Russia, the Abkhazians were in full control of Abkhazia and had expelled Georgian forces from the territories under Abkhazian control. In June, some 3,000 CIS peacekeeping forces, made up mostly of Russian soldiers, were deployed to maintain the terms of the ceasefire. In addition to the enormous human and material loss resulting from the war, some 200,000 refugees and IDPs fled or were driven out of Abkhazia.[225]

### g) 'Operation Ring' in Karabakh

Isolated clashes between Karabakh Armenians and Azerbaijanis from 1988 to 1990 turned into a full-scale war when Azerbaijan launched a military campaign, known as 'Operation Ring', in April-June 1991. The aim of this military-political campaign, first disguised as checkpoints for identification of citizens, was the 'ethnic cleansing' of Karabakh of its Armenian population, by evicting Armenians from villages on the periphery of Karabakh. Meanwhile, tens of thousands of Azerbaijanis living in Armenia had been unofficially deported from Armenia and had become refugees in Azerbaijan. With 'Operation Ring', Baku, taking advantage of the weakening Soviet Union, wanted to 'break the Armenian population's spirit and to encourage them to leave the area or, at least, abandon any hope that NKAO [Karabakh] would ever be ceded to the Armenians' (Murphy 1992: 80-96). In this operation, the joint forces of the Soviet 4th Army's 23rd division and the newly created units of Azerbaijan's Interior Ministry special forces (OMON) deported some 5,000 Armenians, virtually the entire population of 19 villages. A CSCE fact-finding mission reported that the campaign was 'executed with extreme violence'.[226] Azerbaijanis argued that the operation's purpose was to 'disarm' the local Armenians, who, for example, in the town of Chaykend (Getashen), put up self-defence resistance against the operation — fighting with revolvers, hunting rifles and shotguns.[227]

As Moscow found itself increasingly embroiled in the armed conflicts in the Caucasus, public protest about the wisdom of military engagement in the region became louder. A letter to Gorbachev by mothers of Russian soldiers captured the popular mood:

> Writing to you are mothers of frontier guards doing their military service in the Lenkoran unit. In fact, they are hostages of two peoples — the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis — involved in a conflict. Please explain to us why this conflict should be resolved at the cost of the health and lives of our children? We and they do not need the land of Armenia or Azerbaijan. Wouldn't it be better to have volunteers do the job?[228]

In 1992-1993 fierce battles between Armenian and Azerbaijanis forces, with outside military help, devastated much of Karabakh and surrounding Azerbaijani areas. Nearly 20,000 people were killed and some one million refugees stranded.[229] When in May 1994 a ceasefire agreement was signed among the parties, Armenian forces were in control of not only Karabakh but large swathes of Azerbaijani territories around it.[230] Most critical, beyond the physical devastation, the war caused almost irreversible damage to Armenian-Azerbaijani relations — on the level of ordinary citizens. It has left an extremely negative imprint of the "other" in the minds of those who lived through it. The admonishment of one informant in Karabakh, a 60-year-old former factory worker, is telling:

> I want you to go and tell people out in the world that a woman called Babo [grandma] Seda told me that life was very difficult in Karabakh. During the war, when the GRADs were being dropped all over Stepanakert from four sides, we were sitting in shelters scared and in the dark. There was no food…. People were dying left and right… just in our neighborhood everyday 10-12 people were dying. We were hearing about the dead after they were buried…[231]

Whereas the relentless shelling of Stepanakert and massacre of Armenians in Sumgait, Ganje and Baku are among the defining events in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, the massacre of 613 Azerbaijanis in Khojaly

(according to official Azerbaijani figures)[232] — a village six miles north of Stepanakert — by Armenian forces, is a defining incident in the national consciousness of Azerbaijan. Even as the details of the 26 February 1992 incident are disputed, the 'Khojaly genocide' is commemorated annually in Azerbaijan as an official national day of mourning.[233] In the Abkhazian-Georgian conflict, too, there were anti-Georgian violence by Abkhazian troops, which included 'extra-judicial killings, burning and looting of houses and of property, particularly following the taking of Gagra by Abkhazian troops in October 1992'. Later when they 'entered Sukhum many civilians were killed' (UNPO 1994: 14).

Indeed, the militarisation and the resulting material and human devastation of the war have further hardened the positions of the parties in the conflicts. For the Abkhazians and the Karabakh Armenians it is a very high price they have paid for their (albeit unrecognised) independence. For Tbilisi and Baku it is a loss difficult to explain and justify to their societies. As the long impasse in the resolution of the conflicts continues, the facts created on the ground — both during the war and in the post-ceasefire period — have introduced further complications into the settlement process.

## Conclusion

As Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika* ushered in an "historical opportunity", the minority groups in this case study engaged in the process of elimination of the real or perceived threat of extinction in their homeland. The boundaries that were once a permanent feature of being a minority changed: they become the majority within their claimed territorial boundaries. Subjective and objective threats to their collective existence were replaced with a new order — self-determination.

This major and radical restructuring process toward self-determination is achieved through transformation, redistribution and legitimation of power and authority. With the demise of the central stabilising force (the central government), formal and informal groups compete for power and legitimacy

by mobilising mass popular support.

Attempts are made to resolve the crisis through legal, political and administrative measures. However, once the centre collapses, the crises turn into large-scale inter-ethnic conflicts, with military consequences. The radicalisation of the political-territorial problem also causes a breakdown of macro- and micro-social relations among the ethnic groups who had lived together for a long time.

The peaceful protests which started in 1988-89 turned into a protracted inter-ethnic conflict and devastating wars. Neither the leaders nor the population could predict the consequences of the political movement they started. By and large, it was thought that the conflicts would be resolved within months as part of the restructuring process taking place in the USSR under Gorbachev.

The possibility of war still looms over this region. Positions have hardened. Much 'blood has been spilled' among former neighbours. And the future is still uncertain. But one thing has become certain: neither the Abkhazians nor the Karabakh Armenians would accept a return to their status as subordinates to Georgia and Azerbaijan. Since 1994, they have established facts on the ground. And as they have achieved de facto independence, they are engaged in a state-building process that they believe will lead to their full and recognised independence. These issues will be discussed in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 5

# Religion: sustaining the 'new order'

The previous chapter discussed the processes of mobilisation toward change and radical restructuring of the socio-political order. This chapter will discuss one of the least examined aspects of the conflicts in Abkhazia and Karabakh: the social location of religion, in general, and the role of religion in the maintenance of the new social order. In other words, how a 'meaning system' — the broad frame of reference for interpretation of events or situations — sustains the new social order and provides both the bases of social association and expression of shared meanings. In this discussion, religion is defined as a complex meaning system (or worldview), rather than a set of dogmas or theological principles.[234] Thus the focus is on the functional role of religion (i.e., what religion *does*) instead of a substantive definition of religion (i.e., what religion *is*).[235] In this regard, Berger and Luckmann provide a useful conceptual framework.

Berger suggests three processes, *externalisation, objectivation*, and *internalisation*, 'the sum of which constitutes the phenomenon of society' (Berger 1967: 81). Through these processes, human beings engage in a 'world-building' activity, which includes the ordering of life. Society, through its constructed social culture, provides a meaningful order to reality.[236] Thus, living in a social world means living an ordered and meaningful life. As human actors 'pour out meaning into reality' (externalisation), these processes are taken for granted and legitimated, 'and explain, for the individuals concerned, *why* social orders are the way they are and what they *ought* to be'. While this legitimated 'objective knowledge' acquires normative and cognitive value for the group, it is internalised by the individual as 'objectively valid and available definitions of reality' (cf. Berger 1967: 21-81; Berger and Luckmann 1966).

Religion plays a critical role in the process of legitimation of social

reality by locating it within a sacred frame of reference. In other words, while religious legitimation originates in human activity — through which a complex meaning system is instituted in the life of the group — religion attains a degree of autonomy from this activity. It sets the norms of a meaning system upon which individuals identify themselves — objectively and subjectively. The meaning system is maintained and supported by plausibility structures, which make the world *real* to the members of the group. Within this conceptual framework, the first part of this chapter will present a) the personal dimension of religion in Abkhazia and Karabakh and b) the interaction of religion (meaning system) with other social-political forces on the collective level. The second part will focus on the role of organised, institutional religion in society and in the ongoing conflicts.

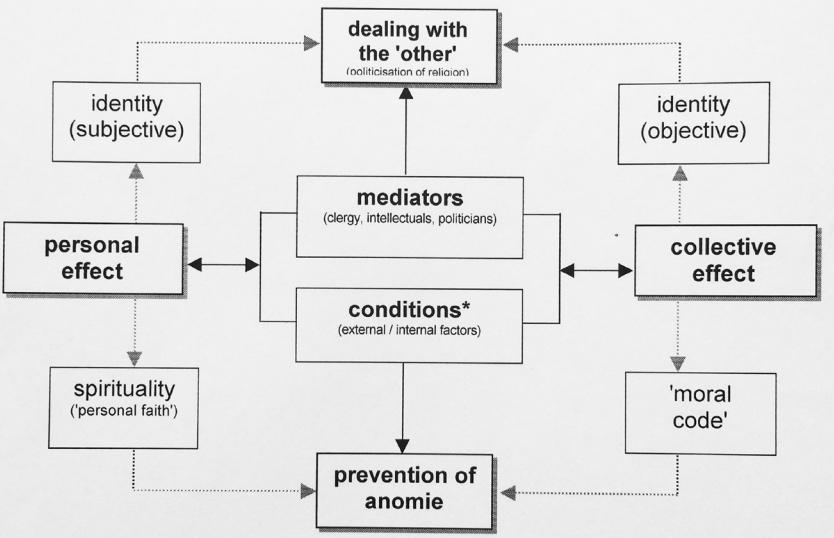
## I. Personal and Collective dimensions of religion

The complex interaction and social processes in the religious sphere are presented in Figure 3. In this case study, two basic functional axes of religious interaction emerge: on the vertical level, *prevention of anomy* and *religious mobilisation as a mean of dealing with the 'other'* (which involves *"politicisation" of religion*) and, on the horizontal level, *personal* and *collective effects*. These axes revolve around two important variables: *mediators* (or key social actors) and *conditions* (external and internal factors that have an impact on society), or what Weber calls *breakthroughs*. That is, certain (historical) circumstances in the development of a society where there is 'a *break* in the established normative order'. Such *breakthroughs* are characterised by a movement toward a new way of action or toward reaffirmation of the old way (Weber 1963: xliii-iv; 260-261).

### Prevention of anomy

Anomy, as explained by Berger, is the process of disintegration of the 'fundamental order in terms of which the individual can "make sense" of his life and recognise his own identity'. There are varying circumstances of anomy,

**Figure 3. Personal and collective dimensions of religion**




*or what Weber calls *breakthroughs* — periods in the life of a society where due to circumstances society or the social group engages in a new way of action or reaffirms the old way.

i.e., disruption of order (nomi), for example, 'the loss of status of the entire social group to which the individual belongs' or, on the biographical level, 'the loss of significant others by death, divorce, or physical separation' (Berger 1967: 22-23). Durkheim (1952: 382) adds that anomy 'springs from the lack of collective forces at certain points in society; that is, of groups established for the regulation of social life'.

In the case of Abkhazia and Karabakh, religion plays a critical role particularly in three major anomic conditions faced by society:

a) the collapse of the Soviet Union, which, in addition to causing major social-political disruption, marked the end (and failure) of an ideology;

b) protracted conflict with titular states and titular nationalities, on the legal, political, social and cultural levels (as discussed in Chapter 3)

c) a devastating war and the possiility of resumption of hostilities.

These are what Berger calls 'massive threats to the reality previously taken for granted' by society or a social group. And, as discussed below, it is at such critical times that 'religious legitimations almost invariably come to the front' (Berger 1967: 44).

When limitations on religious freedom were lifted, starting with *perestroika* in the mid-1980s, most countries that were under the influence of the Soviet empire saw a resurgence of religious faith.[237] For instance, among the Armenians, the sudden return to religion and the subsequent ritual catharsis sought by the people caught the established Church in Armenia by surprise. The late Catholicos Vazken I of All Armenians admitted, 'We never anticipated that the freedom of religion that was granted would create such a situation for which we were certainly not prepared' (Tchilingirian 1992: 7). The Church was ill prepared to deal with this phenomenon. It did not have the resources, the personnel, or the leadership to respond to the growing interest of people in religion. As in the case of other Churches in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Republics, the Armenian Church 'was also faced with the problem related to the anti-religious socialisation and ignorance of the flock, and with accusations of collaboration with the communist regime' (Barker 1996: 25).[238]

Starting in 1988, the earthquake in Armenia, the Karabakh movement and the struggle for independence, the war, and the blockade of both Armenia and Karabakh have all shaped the public and private lives of Armenians. In Abkhazia, as well, religious revival was accentuated by the fall of the Soviet empire, and especially due to 'the brutality of the war' and the isolation of the country from the rest of the world (Krylov 1999: 115, cf. Anchabadze 1999a: 248, Clogg 1999).[239] Parallel to the political, economic and social factors of these events, a religious perspective had been added to public discourse in this troubled region.

However, some significant differences between Karabakh Armenians and Abkhazians should be noted. While Karabakh Armenians are all Christian, at least nominally, in Abkhazia, unofficially, 80 percent of the Abkhaz population is Christian, and 20 percent Sunni Muslim (Clogg 1999: 217).[240] Secondly, throughout the Soviet era, the Abkhaz — both Christians and Muslims — continued to publicly practice their indigenous religion (popularly referred to as the Abkhaz pagan religion), while the Armenians were deprived of even one functioning church in Karabakh. Third, in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict,

religion has remained a factor (as discussed in Part II below), though less prominently than other factors.

The Karabakh conflict has been variously presented, especially in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and largely by the media in the West, as an ethnic rivalry between 'Christian Armenians' and 'Muslim Azerbaijanis'. Over the years, both sides have persistently rejected such characterisations. On numerous occasions, Armenian and Azerbaijani government and religious leaders have stated that the war in and for Karabakh is not a 'religious war'. The Abkhazian-Georgian conflict, especially in the initial stage of the 1992-93 war, was also presented as a 'struggle between Orthodox Christians in Georgia and the secessionist Muslim Abkhaz', particularly by the Georgian media, which was "oblivious" to the fact that Georgian Muslims living in Georgia outnumbered the entire Abkhazian population.[241] The media and 'the first informal Georgian political organisations unanimously characterised the Abkhazians as Muslims who were eager to unite with other anti-Georgian forces under the green banner of Islam' (Smith et al 1998: 58); that Abkhazia was turning into 'a stronghold of Muslim fundamentalism' (UNPO 1994: 14). In 1990-1992, this image of the 'enemy of Christianity in western Georgia' became a dominant element of 'radical "othering"' under ultra-nationalist President Gamsakhurdia (Smith et al 1998: 58).[242] However, in reality, religion did not play any part in the conflict. Others believed that this was a 'myth created by the pro-Georgian lobby in the Moscow press' and was 'intended to play on Western geopolitical fears of the spread of Islamic influence in the post-Soviet space' (Clogg 1999: 214, cf. Smyr 1994, Lakoba 1995: 102). In short, Georgian attempts to mobilise "Orthodox Christian support" for their cause did not find currency. But the Azerbaijanis, despite their insistence on the non-religious nature of the conflict, were able to mobilise "Islamic support", especially in the political arena, as shall be discussed later.

Still, European volunteers working for international NGOs in Karabakh, for example, had difficulty seeing the wider context of the conflict. Their western perceptions about religion, and in particular Christianity, with which they were most familiar, did not quite fit the 'type' they found among the population. One French NGO-volunteer was surprised to see other aspects of religiosity among Karabakh Armenians.

> At the beginning when I arrived here, I thought Karabakh was very religious because it is in a 'war' with Muslims… when I visited people and spoke with them, I noticed some crosses or religious images in their homes, but when you speak about religion, they would say, "Yes, I believe in God, but I don't really know [about] Jesus Christ." Most people said the same thing. They don't meet regularly [for religious services]. Of course, when the Catholicos is here, everybody goes to see him because he is a personality. But that's the extent of it.[243]

As a westerner, her understanding of Christianity differed sharply from that of Armenians in Karabakh:

> If you believe in God, for example, or if you have a church in your village, you do not store wood and other kinds of *zeebil* [colloquial term for rubbish] in the church. [NB: In Soviet times church buildings were turned into warehouses or storage spaces.] Well… I'm not particularly a believer myself, but I don't put *zeebil* in the church. This is not possible… I mean it is a cultural thing… it is the same among the Azeri people. [244]

Other westerners working in Karabakh did not see major differences between Armenian and Azeri 'cultures', viewing them both as part of 'Middle Eastern' culture. Another Swiss volunteer expressed bafflement about Armenian Christians in Karabakh who did not fit his 'ideal type' and was surprised to see that religiosity in Karabakh could be or is similar to that of any other society in any Western country. He said:

> I think all people, who are like me, are not very religious or are not practising their religion. I don't know anyone who has said, "I go to church and … ". But I think they have feelings about their religion. They feel they are Christian, but more in opposition to Muslims. Well, they say we are Christian, but what exactly is that? You try to discuss and they are a little lost… I think Christianity is understood

> as more of integration into the concept of Armenians as Christians…. But what does it mean to be a Christian? I suppose you could ask the same question in France, they are Catholic, but….? I'm not sure if religious feelings or Christ's teaching are widely known in Karabakh.[245]

Religious reductionism to Christian-Muslim relations in this region fall short of providing an adequate understanding of the diverse layers of religious perceptions and practices. Religion, especially in this region, is a matter of both "spirituality" and ethnic identity. In Karabakh, for example, a distinction is made (although not always clearly) between personal faith or belief, on the one hand, and religion as a social "ideology" on the other — a distinction between faith (*havadk*) or spirituality (*hogevor*) and religion (*gronk*).[246] Organised religion is associated with dogma or teaching, while faith is associated with personal spirituality and identity. As one resident of Stepanakert put it, 'Rituals, forms, systems are made by man, but faith is not man-made—it's communication with God'.[247] In Abkhazia, religion is almost exclusively a matter of identity. As Christian, Muslim and pagan rites and observances are 'so closely interwoven… the notion of "religion", which has always been approached somewhat idiosyncratically by the Abkhaz, has merged to a great extent with the notion of *'apswara* (i.e., what is it to be an Abkhazian)' (Clogg 1999: 201, 217). To a lesser extent, religion has become a strong identity marker for Karabakh Armenians as well. The 'rehabilitation' of religion in Karabakh coincided with another major change: the transition from Communist to "Christian Armenian" ideology, which has not been a smooth one.

Until the collapse of the Soviet system, communist ideology, as a system of ideas and values, explained and legitimated the actions and interests of Soviet societies. It is often thought that only a small percentage of Soviet citizens "believed" in Communist ideology. However, rural and agrarian societies on the periphery, such as Karabakh, embraced Communist ideas with less scepticism than their urban industrialised counterparts in the centre. Several intellectuals in Karabakh pointed out that, ironically, Karabakh's Christian background helped Communist ideology lay deep roots in their society. This is a problematic description, but is an attempt to find continuity between ideologies. The former head of government in Karabakh explained:

> Communist ideology is a diluted form of Christian ideology… people [Bolsheviks] took Christianity and constructed a false ideology out of it… And because the roots of Christianity were deeply established in our society, the introduction and establishment of Communist ideology in Karabakh was quite successful, people embraced it.[248]

Over the decades, through the process of state-sponsored indoctrination, many Karabakh Armenians came to believe in Communism with the hope that it would eventually usher in a better future for their society. But starting with *perestroika* — when an effort to reassess and expose the 'shortcomings' of the ideology became a public preoccupation — the suspicion of those who 'believed' in Communism were confirmed: that indeed it was 'an adulterated ideology… and its preachers were deceiving the people'.[249]

Many have not yet become reconciled to their disappointment in Communism and the realisation they have been cheated for so many years by the Communist Party and its leadership. While today most people (now nearing retirement or already retired) in Karabakh would rather not talk about their communist past, an intellectual and member of the 1965 protest group (see Chapter 3), provides insight into a reality shared by many:

> My father was a devout Communist all his life. He used to come home from eight-hours of work, eat a bit, pick up his shovel, and go to work for four more hours at a government plot for free. He believed in the ideology. I myself used to believe in socialism, in the ideals of Communism. I used to think that the day would come when goods would be abundant, people would be comfortable and boundless. So it was our ideology that collapsed at first and then everything else followed.[250]

Whereas Marx used the concept of 'alienation' to analyse the 'false consciousness' that religion created, many in post-Soviet Karabakh, disappointed with Marxist-Leninist ideas, have embracing religion again. A former Communist-turned-Christian observed:

> You have to remember that Communism was our religion; Lenin and Marx were our Christ. As a nation, we are a passionate people. When Communism came, we completely embraced it; now that Communism is gone, we are returning to Christianity, we are seeking God again. A man has to believe in something, he has to have a purpose. We were atheists and now we are believers. The war in Karabakh did not have a major effect on our faith. In the fourth century, we accepted Christianity without thinking whether Christ was good or bad for us. We are not a 'thinking nation'; we are a passionate nation.[251]

However, despite the demise of the Communist regime,

> the mentality is still there, the way of thinking is still there. Today people are confused and don't know how to behave or sort things out. Communism is out and Christianity is reintroduced. People don't know how to deal with this new situation. It is difficult. Over the decades, the roots of Christianity had been weakened and people are having hard time grappling with the Christian faith again.[252]

The ideological vacuum that western observers often spoke about in the former Soviet Union is only one aspect of the transition experienced by former Soviet societies. It could be argued that there is no ideological vacuum in Karabakh and Abkhazia. Communism as a regime collapsed, but the *system* is still largely in place. As one Armenian intellectual put it:

> Communism is not an object, like a chair, that we would point to and say, "Here this is a chair, this is Communism"…. that it was here and now it is gone… Communism was a way of thinking, an ideology, and it would take decades to change that.[253]

Unlike, for example Armenia, the complete absence of the Church or any other religious institution had its lasting impact on Karabakh society. The need to 'believe in something' was partially fulfilled by Communist ideology,

on one level, and Armenian national aspirations on the other. Many are still convinced that Communism, its basic tenets of equality and shared material wealth, could have benefited society if it were not for the corruption of the leaders. In the end, Communism failed to deliver its promise. Today some are sceptical about any ideology, including democracy and capitalism, and are wary about accepting any 'new' teaching — even Christianity.[254]

Such transforming processes are also observed in Azerbaijan (cf. Adams 1994 & 1996; Swietochowski 1994; Tohidi 1996). As one Azerbaijani scholar described:

> Avec la chute du regime communiste, la religion a pris une place notable dans la sociéte… sans que l'on assiste pour autant à une renaissance religieuse. Comme le faisait remarquer M. Rasul-zadeh, l'athéisme soviétique a peut-être contributé au retour du religieux, mais pas à celui de la *charia* (Hadjy-zadeh 1999: 45).

**Individual Faith**

During the Soviet period, despite the efforts of the state to re-socialise the population in atheistic ideology, faith and belief continued to be part of individual "religiosity". After the collapse of the Communist regime, those who were believers "in secret" (especially the elderly) were able to express and practice their faith in public. With the collapse of the system, the possibility of being exposed to religion increased — enhanced through evangelism by the clergy and lay preachers, rituals, church services and public commemorations — and so did the number of believers. For example, a mother in Karabakh, who claimed to be an unbeliever (nowadays they do not call themselves atheist), complained that her son was praying at home before meals and at bedtime. She said:

> I do not believe in the existence of God… granted I accept that a child should be educated so that he does not steal or get involved with bad things… but to have him wake up every morning with prayer, saying prayers before going to bed and so on… it is driving me crazy, but then he is just a 10-year-old kid.

When I asked her how her son had learned to pray, she said 'at school and from his friends'. The child was being religiously socialised at school and outside the home. In Soviet times, the home was virtually the only place for religious socialization. Even more revealing is the mother's reply to my question as to what her son was praying about. She said:

> I normally don't understand what he is saying…but he would pray wishing that he would have a good day, he would pray for the resurrection of the soul of the martyrs killed in the war and things like that. And now he is praying for me that I may convert and become a believer so that we may live together in the afterlife.[255]

Another young mother, who has a 4-year-old son, affirmed that 'Children are more educated in faith and religion than adults'. While she had her son baptised, because 'he knew more about Christianity', she explained: 'I am not baptised myself, because my faith is not enough and I don't know enough about Christianity. I want my son to be a believer (*havadatsyal*)'. Like many others who had embraced *spirituality* and had become more familiar with Christianity after the end of Communism, she was sceptical of "organized religion".

> I don't believe in the clergy, but I believe in God. I don't accept the [idea of] mediation (*michnortutyun*) of the priest. For me faith is personal…. I don't believe in dogmatism and liturgical practice. You can communicate or talk to God on your own. If you talk with God sincerely, from your heart (*srdants*), God gives you what you ask. I think confession is wrong.
> …. When my husband was martyred (*zohvadz*) my faith became stronger. I know that his soul is not lost and I know that he is with God, because I feel his presence in my life.[256]

The collapse of Communism did not cause a religious revival, per se, but it increased the potential of religious expression being another means of living out a meaning system. Starting with *perestroika*, new 'converts' became

believers through a process of socialisation with 'old believers' and because of events that followed, namely, the struggle for self-determination and, subsequently, the war. For Karabakh Armenian society the war is not a single event. It is a process that started in 1988 with the formation of the Karabakh Movement, then the war in 1991, and continues until today as the war has not ended. Likewise, for the Abkhazians the military conflict with Georgia is not a single event, but the culmination of intermittent conflicts in the past, and is part of the wider struggle for independence. The formation or reshaping of religious thought is part of this process. As Anchabadze (1999a: 248) put it, 'in general, the Georgian-Abkhazian war, which was a huge shock for Abkhazian society, exerted a massive influence on its moral consciousness'. Smyr adds that, in the wake of the hostilities with Georgia, there was 'increase in the religiousness of the population' in Abkhazia.[257] Indeed, in the post-Soviet period, where "life and death" issues are part of daily concern in Karabakh and Abkhazia, religion provides an important meaning system to individuals and the collectivity.

On the individual level, faith in some idea or purpose — whether religious, political or otherwise — is considered an essential part of life in Karabakh and Abkhazia. It is generally believed that a person should have a point of reference and a goal in life and should walk toward that goal. For many Karabakh Armenians that "point of reference" and "goal" was thought to be Communism. However, when through experience 'it became obvious that all this is a lie — that there is no equality, there is no justice in national, individual and inter-state, inter-government relationships, that there is only human egoism' — faith in Communism was lost.[258]

For many former Communists, the return to God, to religion, was also a rational choice, that is, a choice to adopt 'new' ideas in place of 'old', failed ideas. One Karabakh poet explained:

> A man should believe in something and, in the final analysis, we said there is God and we need to have spiritual reliance, especially under these conditions where ideological confusion is apparent. Whether we wanted it or not, we leaned toward God.[259]

Others see the return to Christianity as part of reclaiming the Armenian identity of Karabakh, which had been eroded through the decades. In this context the terms "Christianity", "religion" and "Armenian Church" are often used interchangeably in common parlance.

> The return to our Church was due to the fact that the Church is part of our national makeup, and it was in response to, first, the Azerbaijani discrimination based on our national identity, and second, to the Communist totalitarian pressure. As such, the return to our Christian past was also a political expression—that is, we are Armenian and we are returning to our national roots, we are establishing the uniqueness of our national identity. Therefore, religion, or faith, was a medium to affirm this identity.[260]

**'New' religious expressions**

The war and its consequences are significant *mediating factors* or *conditions* in the personal and collective effects of religion. Instances of "instant" conversions during the war, whether in shelters or in dangerous situations are telling examples. The principal of a music school in Stepanakert recalled:

> I was a non-believer in those days, but during the war, one time we were escaping by a helicopter and the Azeris were shooting at us… I prayed, for the fist time in my life, and asked God to help us, at that moment I became a believer. I promised God that if he saved us from this danger, I would believe in Him forever….
>
> Today we need religion more than ever. In Soviet times the worst thing one could do was to remember or mention the word God.[261]

Another widow recalled:

> When the war started, my husband started to read the Bible. Many soldiers were putting their faith only in God — they had nothing else to rely on to protect (*abahovel*) their lives…. I know a lot of soldiers who read the Bible during their free time.[262]

Similarly, during the war in Abkhazia religion provided 'psychological refuge'. As described by an Abkhazian teacher, it was common for people 'to go somewhere and pray and light a candle… Even the president [of Abkhazia] went to one of the sacred places [shrines] where they had a ritual and were praying for justice and victory. This happened several times'.[263] Indeed, in November 1992 as the Abkhazians were in a critical situation in the war, a large gathering, including high-ranking government officials, took place at the shrine of Dydrypsh. The officiating priest beseeched the deity Dydrypsh:

> We did not conquer this land. God gave it to us. And if it is truly ours, leave it to us, and if it is theirs, give it to them, but torment us no longer. If you respond to our prayers soon and clean our land from the Georgians, we shall slaughter bulls for you and we shall thank you! (Krylov 1999: 122).

Religion, as a meaning providing and coping mechanism, has also given rise to new 'religious experiences' and expressions in society. One large-scale example is the case of hundreds of women (mostly young) in Karabakh, who have become widows as a result of their husbands 'martyrdom' in the war.[264] There is what could be called a new *spiritualism* in Karabakh. Widows, mothers and sisters believe that their martyred husbands, or sons, are still alive, in spirit, in their daily lives. At times the belief and the obsession is very strong to a point where the deceased control the lives of the living (i.e., social control). One medical doctor explained the spiritual phenomenon reported by other informants as well:

> I would say that the majority of the women [widows]

> are living with the thought that their husbands are not dead. Though physically they are not here, they are very much alive in spirit. For example, one woman says that her husband is alive and that he hears them when they sing, talk, etc. She is raising her children with this spirit, with this faith.[265]

Another 24-year-old widow who feels the presence of her husband's spirit in her daily life, explained in detail how her husband 'communicates' with her or sends messages to her as proof of his existence as spirit. She 'checks' with him on all important decisions she has to make, such as changing jobs. In the public sphere, pictures or posters of martyrs or 'memorial walls' dedicated to those who fought for the nation are common features in Karabakh and Abkhazia. (In Karabakh (and Azerbaijan) the soldiers killed in the war are generally referred to as 'martyrs', in Abkhazia they are referred to as 'heroes'). For example, schools have 'memorial walls' dedicated to the martyred teachers and students. Normally, a prominent location at the entrance of the building will have the framed photos of the victims surrounded with religious symbols (with an icon of Christ or a cross) and a quotation or saying in large letters. These memorials, in addition to their national and religious symbolism, have didactic value as well. For instance, in Abkhazia,

> Teachers would guide the students, telling them about the history of the war and the biography of these young people [who were killed in the war], they will invite the parents [of the soldiers to speak to the students]. Particularly around certain dates, for example, Victory Day in September, the dates when, for instance, there were [military] offensives or failed [campaigns], and where a lot of people were killed, such as one in March and one in January.[266]

There are similar 'memorials' in homes as well. Virtually all homes in Karabakh have their religious corners or small-scale 'memorials', resembling the altar in a church, which consist of such items as photos or posters of martyrs (normally in groups), icons of Christ or the Virgin Mary in a corner

of the living room, with Bibles or other religious literature placed on a small table or shelf against the wall where the photos are displayed. One of the most common 'memorials' found in Karabakh homes during a field trip in 1995 was a large calendar-poster (1994-1995, about two metres in diameter) depicting images of 125 martyrs arranged around a map of Armenia and Karabakh. The most widely used expression on such memorials is 'Conscious death is immortality, unconscious death is death'. This is a quotation from the speech of commander Vartan Mamikonian, who in the 5th century, on the eve of the great battle with the Persians, explained to his soldiers that they were fighting to defend the Christian faith of the Armenian nation. They knew the purpose of their battle; they died 'consciously', for their faith.[267]

New religious expressions are also created through religious myths — constructed and externalised based on the war experience. A telling example of this new genre of literature is a narrative by a well-known native poet. It is based on a true story about an air missile fired by the Azerbaijani army on the monastery of Gandzasar that did not explode. The poet explains why the missile did not explode: 'it was made by Christian Russians'.

> You know Russia and Ukraine are giving arms to the Turks [i.e., Azeris], and it was a miracle from God that this missile did not explode in the church, it just reached there and fell on the ground. The idea is that the people who made the missiles knew that these are going to be fired on good, working Armenians and made them in such a way that it would not explode — these are Christian people. The other thing is that if this missile were made by Christian hands, it would not destroy a church. It's providential. There is a God.[268]

No stories or explanations are given when Azerbaijani bombs or artillery simply malfunctioned during the war. Another legend about two soldiers is well known in Karabakh. Two Armenian soldiers fighting in the war are killed and fall on top of each other in the shape of a cross. The Azerbaijani commander of the tank orders the tank officer to drive over them. The driving officer refuses explaining that he would not drive the tank over a Cross. The poet insists,

> This is a true story. The tank driver was a Russian mercenary working for the Turks. When he sees the bodies of the Armenian soldiers in the shape of a cross, his conscience does not let him drive over them. The Turk commands him to crush them, but he couldn't, he was a Christian. So the Turk shot him in the head because he was a 'traitor'.[269]

Perhaps the most vivid expression that combines the national (nationalistic) and the religious is the meticulously compiled (and constructed) hagiography of the martyrs. There is a vast literature documenting the lives of the soldiers who fought for the liberation and freedom of their "sacred land". Both in Karabakh and Abkhazia, especially on significant dates, television programs and documentaries are dedicated to biographies and heroism of the martyrs. For example, there is a regular column in the *Republic of Mountainous Karabakh*, the official organ of the Karabakh government (and until 1999 the only daily newspaper in the country), called 'Mah Imatsyal' [Conscious Death] that records (with photos) and retells the story of martyred soldiers and their bravery in the national struggle. This column started to appear in 1992. Such hagiographic accounts are written by poets, intellectuals, colleagues or family members of the deceased and published in various form, from newspaper columns to multi-volume publications.[270] At the time of a field trip in August 1995, a photo exhibit entitled 'Legendary Struggle of Artsakh' was being held in Stepanakert. The exhibit consisted of hundreds of portraits of martyred soldiers (I counted at least 240) and personalities or heroes of the war. A statement prominently placed above the photo panels, in large, red letters, 'echoed' the martyrs' voice: 'We are your children, do not forget us!'.

Another interesting phenomenon in this "non-religious war" is the exchange of religious insults between Armenian and Azerbaijani soldiers during the early stages of the war. Armenian soldiers recount that during radio communications with their Azeri counterparts they would insult their 'Mullah' (Muslim religious leader) and the Azeris would insult 'Vazken' (the Armenian Catholicos-Patriarch). Such exchange of insults was also used during military reconnaissance. When Azeri teams passed the Armenian-held border lines they would write 'Vazken' at a prominent location in order to indicate their penetration of Armenian positions, and the Armenians would write 'Mullah'

in order to indicate their penetration of Azerbaijani positions.[271]

**Collective faith and religion**

These religious experiences and personal religiosity — or what Durkheim calls 'the reality of religious forces' — are rooted in the real experience of social life (cf. Durkheim 1995). As such, the personal effects of religion — mediated by social actors and conditions — interact with the collective effects of religion (as shown in Fig. 3). The 'objective' identity references of society and the collective 'moral code' provide the normative framework of individual religiosity, i.e., the internalisation of the meaning system, as shall be discussed in more detail below.

**1) Abkhazia's traditional or 'pagan' religion**

The syncretic indigenous religion — or pagan religion as it is commonly known — of the Abkhazians is based on ancestral shrines (a'nyxa) located in high mountains, forests, near rivers or springs, and in natural settings. Each shrine has its own god.[272] There are also other sacred places related to lineage or clans in a particular locality. The worship of a'nyxa is traced back to ancient cults of fire and metal. Indeed, in the pre-Christian period, 'totemic and animistic beliefs and superstitions were at the foundation of the polytheistic religion' of Abkhazia.[273] Ancestor worship and human links to nature (e.g., animals, plants) are among the dominant features. Virtually all the deities worshipped are 'associated with the natural world, or certain animals, or elements within it'. But 'the "god of gods" is An'twa, the creator, in whom all the other gods are contained' (Clogg 1999: 213).[274]

Today, 'though few families now have a specified god to whom they pray, in the past each lineage had its own protective spirits to whom sacrifices and prayers were made at an annual gathering'. Significantly, the Abkhaz religion is 'inextricably linked to the structure of the extended family or lineage (all those who share a surname)' (Clogg 1999: 211) and is a considerable marker of Abkhaz ethnic identity. Each locality has its particular festivities and rituals,

administered by a priest from the clan. Indeed, in post-Soviet Abkhazia, the Abkhazians like to boast religious pluralism in their republic, where pagan religion, Christianity and Islam co-exist seamlessly.[275] While, due to history Islam is marginal, there is 'a peaceful synthesis of Orthodoxy and traditional pagan attitudes, [which] remains the fundamental element of the Abkhazians' religious sentiment' (Anchabadze 1999a: 248). The history of the introduction of Christianity and Islam in Abkhazia further explains this religious 'synthesis'.

## 2) Religious history of Abkhazia

Traditionally, it is believed that Christianity was brought to Abkhazia through the missionary activities of Apostles Andrew and Simon in the first century. The oldest churches in the Pitiunt area date back to the fourth and fifth centuries. However, Christianity gained deeper roots in Abkhazia from the sixth century, with the rise of Byzantine influence in the region, when the Orthodox brand of Christianity became the official religion of Abkhazia.[276]

In the late eighth century the Abkhazian Church became autocephalous. However, starting in the tenth century, the Georgian Orthodox influence increased over the Greek Orthodox ethos of the Abkhazian Church. The language of worship and theological literature gradually changed from Greek to predominately Georgian. Despite this change, in 1390, a separate Patriarchate was established in Abkhazia, with jurisdiction over western Georgia and the western Caucasus. It was at this period (14th-15th centuries) that 'the influence of Christianity was most widespread among the population of Abkhazia', though indigenous pagan rituals continued to be practiced (Clogg 1999: 207, 208).

The Abkhazians came into contact with Islam during the Arab invasion of the region in the eighth century. But it was during the Ottoman period in Abkhazia, starting in the mid-15th century, that Islam became a dominant religion. As Ottoman influence grew in the 16th-17th centuries, so did the spread of Sunni Islam. 'This was a period of dramatic decline of Christian culture in Abkhazia, although in the early 17th century the Abkhaz were still paying the "kharaj", a duty paid to the Ottoman Empire by non-Muslim subjects'. Travel

accounts from the period indicate that Islam in Abkhazia 'was more apparent among the higher levels of society by the end of the 18th century than among the population at large' (Clogg 1999: 208). On the popular level, Abkhazian Muslims — who continued to practice the rituals of their native pagan religion — 'interpreted Islam rather freely… most would drink wine, many continued to eat pork… they would celebrate Christmas, Easter and other Christian festivals as well as Bairam [Muslim feasts], and [would] fast both for Ramadan and Lent'.[277] Such religious eclecticism still continues today. A young Abkhazian woman, who was baptised during the Abkhaz-Georgian war in the early 1990s, and whose 'father's side come from the Muslim' tradition explained: 'I eat pork, my father ate pork, but my aunt will never eat pork. But she will paint eggs for Easter, because everybody does this. I am baptised Christian, so it's a very strange situation.'[278] Another Abkhazian Muslim explained this "ecumenism": 'Allah is the main God of all peoples, but for us the main God is Dydrypsh, who lives near our village, on the mountain Dydrypsh-nakha' (Krylov 1999: 116).

When in 1810 Abkhazia became a Russian protectorate, once again, Orthodox Christianity became the predominant religion in Abkhazia. Islam gradually declined. Indeed, a return to Christianity was a condition of the Russian protectorate. The Abkhazian ruler, who was a Muslim by birth, converted and agreed to resume the 'creed of our former faith'. Disused churches were reopened, a diocese was established in 1885, and the main cathedral of Myk was restored. 'The Tsarist Government set about reviving Christianity in Abkhazia'. And toward this end, the authorities established a "Society for the restoration of Orthodox Christianity in the Caucasus" (Clogg: 1999: 209; cf. Lakoba 1999: 87).[279] The Society engaged in aggressive proselytisation in Abkhazia and in efforts to uproot Islam. New religious centres were established, such as the New Athos Monastery (1875), and religious and theological literature was actively produced. In 1907, for the first time in centuries, the liturgy was celebrated in the Abkhaz language. But Russian political aims played their role as well underneath the new religious reforms (cf. Lakoba 1999: 87).

The Russian authorities, especially after the Crimean War (1853-56), closed the mosques in Abkhazia, and banned Muslim practices and preaching by mullahs. Even inter-religious marriages between Muslims and Christians were forbidden. Many Abkhaz Muslims fled to the Ottoman Empire 'lured

by false promises of better treatment' by their religious kin. However, 'a sense of religious affiliation with the Turks may have been a motivating factor for some, the event of the 'exile' [to Turkey]… also served further to Islamicise many of the exiled Abkhaz. The territory which was left vacant by the Abkhaz was settled' by other Christian peoples, 'another factor in the consolidation of Christianity in Abkhazia' (Clogg 1999: 209-110).

Several attempts were made by the Abkhazian Orthodox Church to become independent of the Georgian Church, but political upheavals and wars in the region rendered such attempts fruitless. One last attempt before sovietisation was in 1917.

> In the wake of the February Revolution in Russia the question of the autocephaly of the Abkhazian Church was decided in Sukhum in May 1917 at an assembly of the clergy and voting laymen of the Abkhazian Orthodox population. The assembly appealed to the [Russian Orthodox] Synod as well as the transitional Russian government. However, the autocephaly of the Abkhazian Church, proclaimed in May, took no further shape (Lakoba 1999: 88).

By 1918, remaining mosques were closed or destroyed by Georgian authorities, which controlled Abkhazia during the short-lived independent Georgia (until 1921).[280] Islam was not the only victim. Virtually 'all ecclesiastical literature in the Abkhaz language was destroyed' and the clergy of the Abkhazian Church 'were excluded from the church'. Subsequently, during the 1930s-1940s purges, the Bolsheviks, under Stalin and Beria, destroyed what was left of religious life and persecuted the clergy. After Stalin, restrictions on religion continued, albeit less devastating, under Soviet atheism. There were no seminaries or religious centres to train future priests and the limited rituals that were allowed to be practiced were conducted in Georgian.[281] Thus, the Abkhazian Church increasingly came under the influence (and control) of the Georgian Orthodox Church. The situation for Islam was even worse. 'By the end of the Soviet period, there were no mosques in Abkhazia, and no overt practice of Islam, though some mullahs were left in the villages' (Clogg 1999: 210-11).

Most Abkhazians 'completely lost all basic knowledge about the fundamentals' of the Christian and Muslim religions (Krylov 1998). Indeed, 'the majority of Abkhaz defined themselves as atheists by the later stages of Soviet rule' (Garb 1987: 24). Muslim Abkhazians, for instance, did not have basic knowledge of the Quran 'and did not show any interest in studying it'. Ritual circumcision was not practiced; on the contrary, it was considered unnecessary (Krylov 1998). Nevertheless, while 'official' religion declined, traditional pagan practices and rituals, 'already a fairly unobtrusive private affair, continued fundamentally unaltered, despite the recorded prevalence of atheism among the Abkhaz' (Clogg 1999: 211). Even Abkhaz atheists took part in pagan rituals. Krylov (1998) adds that 'all attempts by the Soviet authorities to combat Abkhazian traditions declared as reactionary remnants were entirely unsuccessful'. This was due to the Abkhazians' 'extremely effective means of consolidating the cohesion of family and clan' through centuries-old religious rituals and ceremonies.

Our case studies indicate that religion plays an important role in the maintenance of a meaning system (as discussed below), both for individuals and the group, and provide further insight into the functional role of religion in society. Even as the religious biography of the Abkhazians and the Armenians are different, there are significant functional similarities that are relevant to our discussion.

### 3) 'Civil religion' in Karabakh

While Karabakh is an ethnically and religiously homogenous society, religion is not a coherent set of beliefs or dogmas and practices, but an eclectic phenomenon, or what could be called *Armenian religion* or 'civil religion' comparable in many ways to the Abkhaz traditional religion. As such, like the Abkhazians (and, for example, the Jews) religion is incorporated into the national ethos and self-identification of the Armenians.[282] Traditional beliefs, rituals, language, land, history and symbolic representations are among the key elements of this "Armenian religion" — i.e., an Armenian meaning system or worldview. This also constitutes a significant element of Armenian identity.[283]

**a) 'Traditional' beliefs and rituals**

The belief system of Karabakh Armenians are preserved and transmitted primarily through the family and its extended network of relationships. This is true in Abkhazia as well (Krylov 1998). Starting in the 1930s, the closing of churches and legal prohibition of religious practices in Karabakh gradually reduced religious beliefs to the private sphere of individual life. Religious rituals that were prevalent in the region before Communism continued to be practised in 'secret', at times with amendments and adjustments, within the nuclear family. However, within two generations, rituals related particularly to birth, marriage and death lost their religious significance and retained only cultural significance.

For example, according to Armenian tradition, it is customary to baptise a child forty days after birth, known as *k̇noonk̇* (chrismation). In Karabakh today, when a child reaches forty days old, a *k̇noonk̇* festivity is prepared by the parents of the newly-born. While they use the term 'chrismation' to refer to this festivity, the ritual does not involve baptism, nor has any religious significance. Family and friends gather at the home of the newly born child for a festive meal and celebration whereby the child is formally introduced into the life of the community. Another interesting example of loss of religious symbols is the worry-beads, which are called 'Der voghormia' ('Lord have mercy') in Karabakh dialect. When at a gathering in a home I asked why was it called 'Lord have mercy', there was a long silence. They did not know the answer. I also sensed that this was an odd question from a foreigner. But two women came up with explanations. A 19-year old woman said: 'In the past when people prayed, every time they would flip a bead, they would say "Lord have mercy"'. The 60-year-old grandmother added: "When elderly men used it, they used to say "kher, shaar, kher, shaar, Der voghormia" [goodness, evil, goodness, evil, Lord have mercy]'.[284]

There are a host of ritual practices which are unique to Karabakh Armenians, and which are unlike those in Armenia or the diaspora. For example, when the coffin of a deceased member of the family, normally laid on a table in the house, is removed to be taken to the cemetery, a piece of rock is placed on the table where the coffin was.[285] 'I don't know why they do it,'

said a 31-year old doctor. 'I don't know the meaning of it. My mother would know'. According to the mother, after a long silence, 'the rock is placed on the table when the coffin is removed with the wish that this death would be the last in the family'.[286] Lalayan, the 19th century ethnographer, writing about Armenian rituals in Karabakh explains that a rock is placed on the table 'so that the memory of the deceased would remain unshaken in that house' (Lalayan 1988: 147).

One of the most widely practised 'religious' customs in Karabakh (and Armenia) is the offering of *madagh* (sacrifice). It is a traditional ceremony in the Armenian Church with roots in pre-Christian Armenian religion. The ritual entails the slaughter of doves, chicken or lamb at a church or a special 'holy place'. People offer a *madagh* for a number of reasons, such as on the occasion of a wedding or on a birthday or to honour a special guest, as a memorial to a loved one on the anniversary of his death, or for thanksgiving when "prayers are answered." (It should be noted here that the purpose of the *madagh* is not atonement for sins — as sometimes observers link the ritual with the Biblical sacrifice of animals — but it is for thanksgiving, healing and charity—feeding the less fortunate). Almost every Karabakh Armenian knows about *madagh* and has participated in or offered one at least once in his or her lifetime. During more than sixty years of Soviet rule in Karabakh, the offering of *madagh* was among the few rituals that provided the Armenians a link with their history and identity. The memory and practice of rituals and traditions in Karabakh, besides being a link to history, provide a collective 'morality' and an Armenian 'cosmology' (Durkheim 1995: 379) wherein the individual — beyond the religious dimension of the ritual act — reaffirms his/her Armenian identity through the practice.

Far from being a neatly organised set of 'teachings' and practices, the beliefs of Karabakh Armenians constantly interact with various social institutions and forces and, as such, remain a dynamic process rather than a static corpus of dogmas. One generalisation that could be made is that, since the war, belief in God is taken for granted in Karabakh, even by those who are not well versed in the details. A journalist explained:

> To tell you the truth, I don't know it myself, whether I'm a believer or not, but I know one thing: that God's hand

> was in our victories. It is not possible not to believe in this. For sixty, seventy years, they [Azeris] constantly tried but could not break our spiritual defence and because of this they could neither break us physically.[287]

Another example of this is the explanation of a young woman, whose husband was killed in the war:

> Christ was an individual who had led a virtuous, clean life. He could have been God or human. I'm not sure. I consider him God for the life he led, independent of whether he was born of God or not. His life was God-like.[288]

As in Abkhazia, the belief that God has been with them during the war and the continuing crisis in Karabakh has become a central tenet of faith for Karabakh Armenians. Since the war and its horrific experience, religious belief in Karabakh is also apocalyptic in some circles.[289] Zori Balayan, one of the early activists of the Karabakh Movement and a controversial intellectual, speaks of the faith of Karabakh Armenians as a universal phenomenon with far reaching implications for the rest of the world:

> Man's bitter experience will never allow him to resign from faith again. Because the soul is that 'holy place' which never 'stays empty'. When faith in God fades away, Satan immediately takes its place. Probably it is because of this very reason that Karabakh survived, for having lived all the horrors of hell in God's created heaven [Karabakh], she never sold her soul to Satan. By making physical stoicism and Christ the shield of her soul, it could be said that [Karabakh] saved the world from a big disaster. Nevertheless, if and when, according to the Bible, the pressing forces of Satan are established on earth, people will remember Karabakh's Divine achievements and deny [Satan] his rule. And according to the Bible, peace shall rule for a millennium (Balayan 1995: 568).

**b) Language**

The Armenian language is considered one of the definitive expressions of 'Armenianness', not only in Karabakh, but in Armenia and the Diaspora as well.[290] The Armenian alphabet, created in c. 406, is believed to be divinely inspired. For Armenians, their language is as 'sacred' as the Ten Commandments of Moses; beyond its role as a mean of communication and literary creativity, language has been a significant identity reference for Armenians.[291] A centuries-old hymn of the Armenian Church, dedicated to the inventor of the alphabet, St. Mesrop Mashtots explains the theological and national significance of the language:[292]

> Like Moses, O lord teacher-priest, you brought the letter of the law to the land of Armenia, through which the children of Torgom's tribe were illuminated.
>
> He [Moses] became worthy to see the glory at Sinai, and receiving the life-giving commandments he gave it to the army of Israelites, through which the children of Jacob's tribe were illuminated.
>
> And now, O teacher-priest, we beseech through your humility, intercede on our behalf, your celebrants, to the Father in heaven, because through you the children of the holy church were illuminated.[293]

The reference to 'Torgom's tribe' in the hymn alludes to the ancestors of the Armenians, who are believed to be the descendants of Noah whose arc rested on Mt. Ararat — the 'holy mount' of the Armenians.[294] Indeed, comparisons between the Armenian and the Jewish nation in the Bible are used in other respects as well.[295]

The bishop of Karabakh further explains the "theology of the language":

> I believe that our language has a unique role. I have my personal approach to the Armenian language. St. Mesrop Mashtots received divine letters from God. The language

> plays a miraculous role. As such, [during the Soviet period] we should not have changed our spelling system or any aspect of our language. This caused a lot of harm to our nation. We need to preserve the language as much as possible. …Primarily, I mean preserving Classical Armenian (*Grapar*) if we cannot do that, then Modern Armenian. The Classical language is quite different from Modern by its strength and structure. What is *Grapar*? When you look at the word closely, it means "naturally created letter", or "letter that has nature" [*bnakan araradz gir*], i.e., the letters that God gave to Mashtots. *Ashkharabar* (modern Armenian) on the other hand, means "word of the world", it is "of the world". When you look at the terms we use to refer to both languages, you can clearly see their conceptual difference (Tchilingirian 1994: 8).

There is a regular column in the *Republic of Mountainous Karabakh* daily, called 'Our language is our History', where stories and commentaries discuss the 'historic' and 'salvific' role of the Armenian language in preserving the Armenian nation.[296] Literature — poems, prose, songs, essays — dedicated to the Armenian language, the *mother* tongue, is plentiful. For example, the renowned poet Hamo Sahian wrote:

> Our language is our conscience, our compassion.
> It is our table's holy bread.
> It is the just voice of our spirit;
> flavouring every thought that's said.
>
> […]
>
> It is our first and last love.
> What more in this world is so much ours;
> what else belongs to us alone?[297]

The Armenian language is also a sacred symbol. It is believed that each letter of the alphabet represents a concept or a virtue. A poster published by the Gandzasar Theological Centre of the Diocese of Karabakh shows and explains the concepts or virtues associated with each letter of the alphabet. The first letter *ayp* stands for 'Asdvadz' (God) and the last letter *ke* for 'Kristos'

(Christ). (It is very common to see the Armenian alphabet framed as pictures, 'icons', in Armenian homes, especially in the diaspora, along with key rings, mugs and a range of household decorations).[298]

In extreme cases, the language is 'divinised' and made an 'object' of worship.

> Our deep Eternity, the Language is beyond the emptiness and commotion of time, and especially beyond its maids and disciples. It demands worship day and night from its servants and lowly [followers].
> … And we, the sowers of our Lord Language [*Der Lezou*].... Let us not sin against our Lord God, against our unmatched Language...[299]

The language is a primary identity reference for Armenians and both its secular and religious significance are intertwined. Armenians consider their language as the most unique characteristic of their identity par excellence.[300] The language has temporal and eternal attributes. In the villages of Karabakh, where textbooks or Armenian schools did not exist, parents made an effort to teach their children by other creative means. As one man remembers, "My mother taught us the alphabet on a large white tray. She used to write with black coal and teach us each letter".[301]

While Karabakh Armenians speak in their own dialect, many prefer to hear the church liturgy conducted in classical Armenian, which is difficult to understand even by those who are fluent in modern Armenian.[302] It is commonly held that changing the language would take away the 'mysticism' in the liturgy. The language provides an unbroken bridge that connects the faithful to their ancestors. Similar to the Abkhazians (and the Jews in Israel), the language has a 'strategic' significance for Karabakh Armenians as well. As former Israeli Prime Minster Shimon Peres wrote:

> The Jewish People's challenge in today's world is to defend its unique heritage… Preserving the Hebrew language in the world of today and tomorrow is as much

> a strategic undertaking as guarding the borders has been until now. The test is how to ensure that our children remain Jewish—Jewish not merely by their ethnic origin, but by their self-identity and sense of mission (Peres 1995: 356).

Catholicos Karekin II of All Armenians stated, during a visit to the tomb-sanctuary of St. Mesrop Mashtots:

> It is our prayer that our people always visit this holy place, by means of which the faith, the spirit and the character of our people had been created. Let the sacred language of St. Mesrop Mashtots always be on our lips, let us preserve it in our souls and let us create our ecclesiastical-national life in the spirit of St. Mashtots.[303]

**c) Land**

*We are our mountains* is an expression Karabakh Armenians love to use to describe themselves. In fact, a massive sculpture in Stepanakert, carved out of mountain rocks, depicting two faces, a Karabakhtsi man and woman in the shape of two shouldering mountains, has become a national symbol of Karabakh. The monument is called 'We are our mountains' (popularly referred to as 'Papik and Tatik').[304] According to a local tradition, at the end of every school year, 10th grade students gather at this monument at dawn to take an "oath" and meet students from other schools in the area. Karabakh Armenians believe that their land is sacred, consecrated by hundreds of churches, monasteries and 'holy places' and by the 'blood of the martyrs', who were killed in the recent war and throughout the centuries in defence of Karabakh. Besides the churches, there are thousands of rocks and old trees that serve as places of 'pilgrimage' which people visit to offer their *madagh*. Their land is a sacred space where 'God performs miracles' for and through the people of Karabakh. Karabakh is 'heaven on earth' (Balayan 1995: 568; 572-6).

This is not much different from the Abkhazians' beliefs. Zuar Chichba, a priest of the Dydrypsh-nykh shrine in Abkhazia, described his land's sacredness as follows:

> Abkhazia is the country that was chosen by God for its beauty… When God was distributing land among various peoples, he had originally planned to leave that piece of land for Himself, but eventually decided to give it to the Abkhazians. Thus, God was kind to the Abkhazians and made them His chosen people, and this is because they were remarkable among other peoples not only for their hospitality, but also for their morality… After God had seen all these, he decided to give that piece of land to the Abkhazians, although originally it was His land (Krylov 1999: 120).

In every village of Karabakh there is a 'holy place', which is usually a rock or an old tree, (e.g., a two-thousand year old tree in the village of S'khdorashen). In those villages where there are no holy places, the *tonir* in the house—an oven or a pit dug about one meter into the ground—is used as a substitute.[305] On major occasions, especially weddings, people visit these holy places to take an oath and "bless" the marriage, or at times of danger and disaster, people offer prayers and *madagh*. These practices are at least two centuries old (Lalayan 1988: 98ff). Normally a holy place is a church or the ruins of a church or a *khachkar* (cross-stone). In the past, in the absence of a church, one house in the village was designated as a 'holy place', normally the house of the village elder. Not all holy places have a religious background. Some places are associated with local legends or 'miracles' and the story is passed down from generation to generation. At times the stories are forgotten, but the place is remembered as somewhere special. (It should be noted, the Azerbaijanis also have similar 'holy places' for pilgrimage and rituals, which were 'more significant than the few working mosques' in Soviet times.) (Lemercier-Quelquejay 1984: 48).[306]

During sixty years of Soviet rule, members of the family learned the

traditions by observing their elders. For example, as recalled by an elderly man in Stepanakert:

> I remember when I was a child my parents would cross themselves whenever they passed the *Khach* (cross, a holy place) in the lower section of our village. This holy place has its story. There were two *khachkars*. Whenever my father passed them, he would say, "I place my face under your feet, O *jukhdag* [twin] cross". It is said that there were twin brothers who fought for the liberation of our village and these crosses were built in their memory. My father would say, 'O *jukhdag* cross, protect my children and give me strength to care for them.
>
> During the war [WWII] years, when my two brothers and sister were studying abroad, every time my parents passed that holy place, they would pray that my siblings would come home safe and sound. As I was the youngest child, it seemed to me and I thought that it was because of my parents beseeching prayers that God brought my siblings back home safe. Having seen this, I started to believe in the power of that Khachkar, that holy place. Since my childhood I was a believer.[307]

Another 32-year-old man recalled his mother asking for John the Baptist's help during difficult times in their village. The monastery of Gandzasar, with a church named after St. John the Baptist, is located in this village. Once during a heavy storm and hail, the mother sighed, 'O John the Baptist please save our crop'. As a curious little child, he asked his mother who John the Baptist was. She said, 'I don't know who he is, *bala djan,* but I've heard it from your grandparents. He is the one who protects us'. Today, her son is a priest serving in their village, at the monastery of Gandzasar. At ordination, he was renamed 'Fr. John'.

The national anthem of the Republic of Mountainous Karabakh (written after its declaration of independence) further describes the people's

relationship with the 'sacred land' and its determinant role in the collective meaning system.

> [Karabakh] you are an invincible fortress/ holy peak, exalted name/ divine relic/ we are eternal through you/ and together with the mountains, rivers and … with our mountain-protecting monasteries, [we are] an invincible small land (or country).[308]

**d) History**

History is an extension of territory for Karabakh Armenians, "to be claimed and defended with fortresses of facts. Who did what, when, means nothing unless you know… who did it first." (Marsden 1993: 109) Since 1988, especially, history has acquired an added importance as the continuum of Armenian struggle for independence through the ages. References and accounts of national crisis and heroic acts dating back to the fifth century (the Armenians' struggle against the Persians), the Meliks of Karabakh and their efforts to preserve Karabakh's independence and the turn-of-the-century freedom fighters are widely recounted in public speeches and private conversations. Armenian church buildings, spread throughout Karabakh, are seen as witnesses and preservers of that history. Inscriptions on church walls, khachkars and tombs tell the story of their time —sometimes they are the sole record of an event. In some regions, churches and monasteries or their remnants are the only "record" that testify that Armenians lived on that land for centuries.

Karabakh Armenians proudly mention that the first Armenian school in history was established in Karabakh, in the fifth century, at the monastery of Amaras by Mesrop Mashtots, the inventor of the Armenian alphabet himself. Fidelity to the past and preservation of the Armenian heritage is an essential aspect of being Armenian. In this context, recording the contemporary history of Karabakh (especially of the Movement) is also a part of the unfinished and ongoing national history of Armenians. As such, history is also being constructed (and reconstructed) and is being objectified as part of the meaning system. Zori Balayan suggests that the writing of the history of the

contemporary struggle of Karabakh is 'instructed by God himself' (Balayan 1995: 571). Historians, chroniclers, poets, artists and others have written and continue to record the 'history of the modern struggle' for the generations yet to come.[309] Most often leaders are evaluated based on their sense of responsibility to and for history — indeed, a common standard of judgement in Armenian national discourse.

Against the background of this *informal* Armenian civil religion, which is a significant constituent part of the meaning system in Karabakh, we shall now turn to the role of *formal* religion in Karabakh society — the established Armenian Apostolic Church.

### 4) The historical roots of the Church in Karabakh

In the fourth century, soon after Armenia's conversion to Christianity, the Kingdom of Albania (not to be confused with Albania in the Balkans), which included the provinces of Artsakh (the future Karabakh) and Utik, converted to Christianity through the efforts of St. Gregory the Illuminator, the evangeliser of Armenia (cf. Akopian 1987: 124-7).[310] Grigoris, the grandson of St. Gregory, was appointed the head of the Albanian Church around 330 A.D. He was martyred in 338 while evangelising in the north-east region of the country near Derbent (currently Dagestan).[311] His body was brought to Artsakh and buried in a church in Amaras (Martuni region). In 489, King Vachakan the Pious renovated the complex and built a special chapel dedicated to Grigoris (Mkertchian 1985: 140-142). Until today, the monastery of Amaras has remained one of the most important shrines in Karabakh and is considered a holy site for pilgrims.

The Albanian Church, like that of Iberia (until 608), having been established by Armenian missionaries, pledged canonical allegiance to the Armenian Church. At the wake of the controversy over the 'dyophysite' Christology of the Council of Chalcedon, the three churches jointly convened the Council of Dvin in the sixth century and rejected the decision of Chalcedon. In 552, the seat of the head of the Albanian Church was moved from Derbent to Partav and an Albanian Catholicosate was established. The patriarch of the

Albanian Church was given the title 'Catholicos of Aghuank' (Artsakh and Utik) and received his ordination and canonical authority from the Catholicos of Armenia (Ulubabian 1981: 201-4).

From the 11th to the 13th century, more than forty monasteries and major religious centres were built in Karabakh through the patronage and efforts of the 'Armenian princes of Artsakh'. In time these monasteries became

> chimneys of enlightenment and a warm hearth of Christianity, incense-full houses of worship, protectors of faith, hope and love, defenders of nationality, language, literature, and holy places that unwaveringly defended the unique and orthodox doctrines of the Armenian Church (Parkhoudariants 1902: 193-5).

One of the most famous clans to have contributed to the revival of the Church and piety in Artsakh is the Hassan Jalal princely family who, besides building the famous monastery of Gandzasar, have given several Catholicoses and bishops for the service of the church in Karabakh. The epitaph of Metropolitan Baghdassar, the last clergyman in the Jalal clan, who is buried in the courtyard of the monastery of Gandzasar, reads: 'This is the tombstone of Metropolitan Baghdassar, an Armenian Albanian, from the family of Jalal the great Prince of the land of Artsakh, dated 3 July 1854'.[312] Prince Hassan Jalal was also buried in the same monastery in 1261.

Starting in the 15th century, the monastery of Gandzasar became the seat of the native Catholicos of the Albanian Church. The existence of a separate Catholicosate in Karabakh, with its own autonomous religious institutions, attests to the importance of the region as a religious centre.

In the 19th century, the status of the native Catholicosate was drastically reduced. When tsarist Russia liberated Karabakh from Persian domination, Catholicos Sarkis of Karabakh, upon his return from exile, was demoted to the rank of Metropolitan by a decision of the imperial authorities in 1815. Metropolitan Sarkis headed the See until his death in 1828. After his death, upon the request of the Meliks (princes), Catholicos Yeprem of Ejmiatsin, in 1830, ordained Baghdassar, a nephew of Sarkis, Primate of the

Diocese of Karabakh. He was ordained in the Cathedral of Ejmiatsin (Ter Danielian 1948: 62-67). Thus, the Catholicosate of Karabakh was reduced, first to a Metropolitan seat and then to a diocese of the Armenian Church under Ejmiatsin.

Between 1820 and 1930, Karabakh was a hub of vibrant religious and cultural life. The Diocese of Karabakh and Swiss missionaries — the Basel Evangelical Association — operated ten schools in Shushi alone and founded the first printing press in the region in 1828.[313] Church and privately owned printing houses published over 150 titles on biblical, theological, philosophical, scientific and literary subjects. More than a dozen newspapers and journals were also published in Shushi, such as ethnographer Yervant Lalayan's *Ethnographic Journal* (the first volume).[314] A remnant of this religious-cultural renaissance is the famous Cathedral of Our Saviour (built between 1868 and 1887) in the Kazanchetsots neighbourhood of Shushi (cf. Lalayan 1988 and Ter Gasbarian 1993).

Prominent scholars and teachers taught at the diocesan school in Shushi, among them, the well-known monk-teacher Hovsep Artsakhetsi. He was the first Armenian philosopher on Synthetic Logic after the German school of philosophers, and wrote on logic and epistemology. His first work — *First element of Philosophy: Logic* — was published in 1840. Interestingly, there were also women monastics and deaconesses in Shushi, a rare phenomenon in the Armenian Church, who were involved with social and pastoral work under the aegis of the Diocese.[315]

**a) The Church in the early Soviet period**

In 1923, when Soviet rule was established in Mountainous Karabakh, the Armenian Church was the first national institution to face monumental obstacles as a result of the growing Soviet pressure on the church.
A 85-year-old man recounted how his village 'operative' dealt with the church:

> When the Communists came, they brought a "Gorbachev"[316] to our village, just like the one who destroyed Russia. This Gorbachev destroyed our village.

> When that *seriga* [bastard] died, the entire village got some rest.
>
> I have visited many villages and regions in Karabakh and have seen how the church buildings are still standing, but this *seriga* destroyed our village church. In many villages they didn't bother with the priests, but in our village, that *seriga* was so cruel that our *terter* [priest] committed suicide by drinking poison. Our priest, Fr. Ohannes, realized that he was going to be sent to Siberia and he thought it was better to drink poison and die. That's how our priest died in 1923 or 1924.[317]

Another 78-year old man described what happened to the churches in their village:

> We had two churches in our village, I was anointed and christened in the church. But over the years, because of the policies of the *seriga* government, both churches were turned into ruins.
>
> …This was between 1928 and 1932. I remember while studying in the seventh grade, people from the top [leadership] came to our school to establish an atheistic *organizatzia*. This seemed very unpleasant to me. Up to that point, I had wanted to become a *komsomol* [member of the Communist Youth League], in fact I went to their meetings and used to like them. But then they started to deport the saints [priests], started to destroy the churches, the tombstones…. Those ungodly, useless people… that Soviet system… these were cursed policies.

And when asked how the villagers reacted to this policy, he said:

> In their hearts, people did not accept this, but the Communists at the top ordered [it]… people continued to believe in God, in the church. Yea… they had faith and continue until today.[318]

The situation was not different in other parts of the Soviet Union.

An 83-year-old Armenian, Antranik Baghdasarian, in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, remembered that 'the Soviet authorities shut down' the Armenian Church in 1937 and sent the priest to Siberia after accusing him of embezzlement. 'We did not see Father Soghomom again', said Baghdasarian.[319]

In 1924, the Armenian prelate of Baku, Bishop Mateos, in a letter dated 3 November, addressed to the Supreme Religious Council in Ejmiatsin, reports that despite the 'state's general decree on freedom of conscience and religious services', local communist leaders are taking violent and extreme measures against the priests and the church. The people and the priests, 'ignorantly thinking that these are state laws are not daring to complain to the higher authorities… They have neither protection nor chief-prelate, they are left in doubt'. At the end of the letter, Bishop Mateos urges the Supreme Religious Council to send a prelate to Karabakh without delay and, in the meantime, asks them to write formally to the central authorities in Karabakh 'to bring to their attention the illegal acts of the regional officials' (*Documents* in Behbutian 1994: 55-56).

In response to the recommendation of the prelate in Baku and in view of the growing persecution of the church in Karabakh, in 1925 the Catholicos in Ejmiatsin appointed Archimandrite Vertanes (later Bishop) as the prelate of the Church in Karabakh and dispatched him to the region to oversee the administration of the Church. Since the city of Shushi was out of bounds—the Armenian neighbourhoods had been burnt down and the Diocesan headquarters closed — the new prelate chose the monastery of Gandzasar as his diocesan centre. He visited the churches and monasteries in Karabakh and sent several reports to Ejmiatsin about the worsening conditions of the Church and the pressure on his own activities (*Documents* in Behbutian 1994: 171-2; 241-2). The Commissar for Internal Affairs of Mountainous Karabakh closely monitored his activities.[320]

In 1929, the now Bishop Vertanes, in a letter to the Catholicos, Kevork V (1911-1930) in Ejmiatsin, laments the situation of the Church in Karabakh. 'Everyday dozens of churches and monasteries are being closed, clergymen are being imprisoned and exiled. …Please help us in this dire situation… all we are left with is 112 functioning churches, 18 monasteries, and 276 priests'.[321] Meantime, the efforts of Ejmiatsin to negotiate with the authorities over the plight of the church in Karabakh did not yield any results. On 7 February

1930, Bishop Vertanes was arrested and jailed. Having spent almost two years in prison, he was released on 1 January 1932, as 'the Supreme Court did not find [him] guilty of any crime'. Upon his release, he returned to Ejmiatsin 'to recuperate' and was never allowed to return to Karabakh (*Documents* in Behbutian 1994: 242-3). Thus ended the activities and formal existence of the Armenian Church in Karabakh.

There were 250-300 priests serving in Karabakh and its regions from the late 19th to the early 20th century.[322] In 1996, there were only six clergymen in Karabakh, including the prelate, Bishop Barkev Martirossian. For more than fifty years, there were no functioning churches or clergymen in Karabakh.

**b) The return of the Church to Karabakh**

In March 1988, in an effort to pacify the popular uprising and demonstrations in Yerevan and Stepanakert, which had been held during the previous month, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union issued a decree on social-economic developments in Nagorno Karabakh. This also created a climate for a cultural and religious revival in the region. Prior to the formal opening of the church, a renewed interest in religion and the church was created by the visits of preachers belonging to the Church-loving Brotherhood of the Armenian Church,[323] who, starting in 1987, attracted a group of people who later 'converted' and became 'committed Christians'.[324] This coincided with the time at the beginning of the 'national liberation movement', when, secretly, protest signatures were being collected in Karabakh. In early 1988, these new converts started to collect signatures secretly to have churches reopened in Karabakh (this was in addition to the larger signature campaign taking place for political and territorial changes). The signatures were presented to the Soviet authorities and a copy was given to the Catholicos in Ejmiatsin. One of the converts describes the conditions of the time:

> The KGB was chasing us for doing this. They were threatening us, and all sorts of things. But we didn't pay much attention to it. We collected the signatures and went to see the Catholicos with a delegation from Karabakh.[325]

This campaign of the 'believers' in Karabakh provided Catholicos Vazken I with additional leverage with the authorities to re-establish the long-defunct Diocese. In November 1988, he appointed Barkev Martirossian as Prelate of Karabakh. However, prior to the announcement, he had sent a young native-born priest, Fr. Vertanes Aprahamian, to Karabakh with the returning delegation that had visited Ejmiatsin. Fr. Vertanes (renamed after the last Bishop of Karabakh) was the first clergyman to visit the enclave in decades. He stayed with believers and 'secretly baptised people in homes, because the OMON forces [Special Forces of the Soviet Interior Ministry] were spread throughout the regions and were chasing the youth who were active [in the Karabakh movement] and arresting them'.[326] About seventy people were baptised, creating the core of workers who would later help in the reopening of the churches.

Soon after, the newly appointed Prelate, together with four priests, came to Karabakh to establish the Diocese. The first church was formally reopened on 1 October 1989 at the Monastery of Gandzasar, after six months of preparatory work and reconstruction.[327] On that day, the Bishop declared in his sermon: 'Today is the beginning of our victories'. The head of RMK Radio and Television Broadcasting who was present at the opening and the inaugural Divine Liturgy described the significance of the event:

> [This] was the first Divine Liturgy in Gandzasar, celebrated for the first time in sixty years. …I remember there was a Russian reporter who was filming the event and I approached him and asked what was his impression of this event. He had captured our ethos, he said, 'A people whose faith is impossible to kill, murder, or destroy, is invincible. You are such people'.
>
> …. From the very beginning they were trying to take away not our land, but our faith. And they thought they were successful, because for sixty years there weren't any functioning churches in Karabakh. They had turned the churches into animal barns. This was part of the Communist propaganda and its atheistic ideology. All of us, including myself, were cut off from all that. It is now that every Saturday and Sunday—in any given church in Karabakh, even

> the ones that are not functional—people go there, not only to light candles or pray for the sake of praying, but go there as believers, even if they don't know what exactly that entails.[328]

The first task of the church leadership in Karabakh was to renovate churches and provide places of worship. Special attention was given to the opening of historically important monasteries, such as Amaras and Gandzasar. Between 1989 and 1991, the clergy were involved in active evangelisation throughout Karabakh. Sunday Schools were established, teachers were trained to instruct the children and prepare them for baptism. Weekly lectures on religion and Christianity were presented by the Bishop at the Stepanakert Institute (later the University of Mountainous Karabakh) and other schools where several hundred students would gather to hear the lectures. During the 1989-1990 academic year, a seminary was opened by the Diocese, with 12 students, but it closed in less than a year because of the war. Since all male citizens of Karabakh between the ages of 17 and 45 are required to serve in the army, all the students were conscripted. This has greatly affected the Church's recruitment efforts to secure priests to serve the growing needs of the Diocese. The bishop was allowed to keep only three young deacons in his diocese by special permission of the RMK Defence Minister. Another significant project of the Diocese of Karabakh was the establishment in Yerevan in 1990 of the Gandzasar Theological Centre, which produced en masse literature and religious publications for both Karabakh and Armenia. At least until 1995, it employed more than forty scholars, theologians, experts and support personnel and is the publisher of the first *Theological Journal* in Armenia and Karabakh.

Within three years of its re-establishment, the Armenian Church had regained its legitimacy not only as religious institution, but also as a national institution that fought alongside the people of Karabakh. Freedom of religion, ushered in by the collapse of the Soviet Union, coincided with the struggle for liberation. The evangelistic efforts of the church were eclipsed by the national aspirations of the people and the mass mobilisation process for Karabakh's independence. The Church was one of the first national institutions that was 'reclaimed' by the people, even by those who were unbelievers, as a historically significant source of their religious and national identity.[329] The functioning of their 'mountain-protecting monasteries' and churches provided hope for

Karabakhtsis who were facing uncertainties in their struggle, while the prospect of war with Azerbaijan was increasing.

In the early days of the Karabakh Movement, until the declaration of independence in 1991, the Church played a surrogate role as the advocate of the people and their rights, similar to the role of the churches in Poland and East Germany. In the absence of recognized political leadership, the Church became the unofficial representative of the people of Karabakh to the outside world.[330]

## II. Religious Discourse and institutional religion

So far we discussed the processes on the horizontal level of religious interaction (Fig. 3) and how, on the vertical level, religion is employed as one way of preventing anomy and in sustaining the collective meaning system. This second part of the chapter will focus on the role of religion in the perception and representation of the 'other', the language of religious discourse — especially how religion is used as a mobilising force — and the process of politicisation of religion in Azerbaijan.

### The role of the clergy

In a larger sociological context, Berger suggests that 'whenever a society must motivate its members to kill or to risk their lives, thus consenting to being placed in extreme marginal situations, *religious legitimations become important*' (emphasis added). This '"official" exercise of violence' is legitimated through religious symbolisation: 'men go to war and men are put to death amid prayers, blessings, and incantations' (Berger 1967: 44). The role of the clergy in Karabakh and Abkhazia in this legitimating process is significant. The young and charismatic Bishop of Karabakh, Barkev Martirossian,[331] and his five priests, despite their small number, have established a theological context for the war and have rendered vital pastoral service to the people, especially the soldiers. The Bishop explains:

> [The Azeris] are forcing us to go to war. They are forcing us to use our weapons. Their desire is to destroy Karabakh by force—to occupy our land by force. That is evil. This is the work of the evil one. This is very clear. When you are unable to stop the evil through prayer and by words, and he is coming to devour your body, by raping and perpetrating immoral acts to your sister and mother, to your daughter and children, it is your duty to protect and safeguard their lives. …When you are defending [the innocent], it does not mean that you are killing [your enemy] and doing evil. That's your moral obligation. Secondly, when there is evil, evil has to be uprooted. … Morally, we are obligated to do this, all of us (Tchilingirian 1994: 6).

Along the same lines, Chachkhalia, a chronicler of the Abkhazian Church, wrote:

> God was with us in the cruel war for our country against the Antichrist. Our Saviour helped us! Let us confirm our faith in him, pray for salvation and the strengthening of the Christian church in Abkhazia. Amen! (quoted in Clogg: 1999: 215).

While expressing regrets for the large human losses during the War between Georgia and Abkhazia, priest Chichba saw the war and the 'fleeing' of Georgians from Abkhazia as something which was determined from above.

> [God] Dydrypsh allowed Georgians to settle in Abkhazia at the time when this land became empty. However, the Georgians behaved badly and caused much damage to Abkhazia. For this, they were punished by God, and Dydrypsh expelled them from Abkhazia (Krylov 1999: 122-23).

This moral code provides the Abkhazians and the Karabakhtsis with

a basis to deal with the inevitable immorality of the war. At the height of the fighting in 1991-1993, in the face of destitution, fear and isolation, the clergy would provide hope and spiritual strength: 'We cannot rely on anybody in this war and struggle', pronounced Martirossian. 'There is God in Heaven and there is us, Karabakhtsis, here on earth. Whatever God's will is, it will happen.'

Most often the role of the clergy in Karabakh is compared with the role of the clergy during the Battle of Vartanants in the fifth century, that is, providing spiritual counsel, encouragement and offering prayers for the soldiers. Many remember especially those times when the priests were with the soldiers during the fiercest and most crucial battles (for example in Martakert and Shushi). Scores of soldiers would come to the priests before heading to the battlefield to be baptised. One priest described:

> The soldiers used to come to the priests or the Bishop in large numbers, 30, 40, 70, 100 of them, get baptised and go back to the front. They wanted to have some holiness with them, they wanted to receive strength from God, they wanted to receive God's blessings. They wanted to fight with a Christian vocation.
>
> The priest and the soldiers were together. Those days, those experiences created a bond between the church, the soldiers and the authorities, it was a unifying bond. It was like Vartanants.[332]

There were instances, especially when churches were bombed or attacked, when the priests were caught in the fire but continued to provide pastoral care to the people and the soldiers. The priests' presence and witness in the battlefield, facing the same dangers and consequences with the soldiers, have accorded the clergy the same status as those who are honoured for defending the land. One of the experiences of the pastor of the monastery of Gandzasar illustrates the level of involvement and the difficult role of the clergy during dangerous situations. (The large quotation here from the interview is to provide a glimpse of the "shocking" experiences of the war and their impact on personal and collective perceptions, which in turn have an impact on the ultimate resolution of the conflict):

On 20 January, the Turks [i.e., Azeris] have a holiday, called *Gara Janvar* [Black January], commemorating the massacres of the Turks by the Soviet Army.[333] On that same date, 20 January 1993, the Turks launched a major attack on us. They attacked from the air our field hospital, which was also a military post. There were 150 soldiers there and a few medical support personnel. Eight soldiers were killed and 17 were wounded at once. In fact I was going into the hospital and out of the blue a man stopped me and said, 'Father, I want to tell you something'…. right at that very moment, the missile hit the exact place were I would have been if it weren't for this man who stopped me on my way. I used to go there everyday and park my car at that exact place; that 30-second delay saved my life. I drove right into the rubble and started to rescue people who were buried under the ruins. We tried to rescue the wounded and sent them off to our field hospital 15km away.

There was a woman under the rubble…. People were scared and fleeing, there was big commotion, screams and crying…. The military plane appeared again. Everyone escaped for shelter. I didn't. I wanted to carry that woman out of the rubble. Her head was crushed under the rocks. The plane fired another missile… the pressure-wave of the explosion knocked me away 3-4 meters against the wall and a piece of shrapnel cut my ear. But I didn't feel the pain. I wasn't aware that I was wounded. But I felt an excruciating pain on my arm and shoulder… imagine being knocked against the wall in a four-metre range. I got up and saw two soldiers running… another missile was fired…. one of the soldiers was hit so badly that his lungs were hanging out, it was a horrific scene. Finally I was able to rescue that woman from under the rubble, but she was already dead. …

The plane fired another missile…it snatched a soldier's leg away and threw it up, hanging on a tree… that kid died. It cut off another one's head away leaving a headless body bleeding on the ground… the brother of that soldier was crying and running around like a mad man screaming, 'This is my brother's body'. Try to picture the whole scene…. I cannot describe it to you with words. …

For a month I couldn't lift my arms or move my shoulders. Even in that state, I used to go and visit the guys in their

> posts, joke with them, encourage them…that everything would be fine. They would say, 'How could you speak about being fine when the Turks are right here near the village'. I would say, don't worry, it will be fine, they cannot take our village. Nowadays they tell me, "Father, you were right, you said they cannot take Gandzasar and they couldn't". I said to them, "The Turk doesn't have a cross, the cross is ours. They cannot take our cross away. Gandzasar is our protector, they cannot touch her". I used to tell them, "Armenian rivers do not tolerate foreign bridges and Gandzasar would not bow before the Turks". Gandzasar has never been in slavery in her entire life, throughout the centuries. She has never been occupied by foreign forces. This was proven again.
>
> Thank God, now we are able to reconstruct and build, we are able to defend her, our Gandzasar. And if, God forbid, the possibility of attack lurks again, we are ready to fight and defend; defend our lands, not to take someone else's land, but defend what is ours.[334]

The Bishop and three other clergymen have recounted similar experiences of 'life and death' situations. These experiences have become part of the language of religious discourse and narrative used by the clergy.

## The language of religious discourse

The inter-ethnic conflict, the war and the consequent uncertainties have had significant influence on the language of religious discourse in Karabakh and Abkhazia. It is quite different, say, from Armenia or Georgia. While, for example, in Armenia one barely hears about 'miracles', in Karabakh 'there are a great many miracles taking place'.[335] The perception that God is "present" and "visible" in Karabakh and Abkhazia constitutes the basis of religious discourse. As one Abkhaz priest explained, in the early stages of the war,

> 'there were beams of light coming from Dydrypsh mountain and pointing towards Gagra [a major city in Abkhazia], which had been taken over by the Georgians… After Gagra was liberated, the beams

> changed their direction to point towards Sukhum, which was still occupied by the Georgians' (Krylov 1999: 120).

The war has a definite theological implication too. The Bishop of Karabakh articulates this theology: 'our movement is holy and just. God has created us as Armenians and we have been baptised Christians and he has given us this land and we are obligated to preserve it in the best way we could'. This perception is accentuated by the use of symbolic religious language. Hence, there are no victims, but *martyrs* and death is considered a *sacrifice* for the welfare and 'regeneration' of the people; *sinners* are defeated by the determination of *saints* who are willing to be killed for the greater 'glory of God'. The soldiers 'realise that in order to attain victory, they need great spiritual power. …They need God's power' (Tchilingirian 1994: 4-8). In June 1995, during his first pontifical visit to Karabakh, Catholicos Karekin I reaffirmed this theology:

> Blessed be those who sacrificed their lives so that our nation might live on. … Brave servicemen of Artsakh…prepare for our struggle, namely the defence of the homeland. We ask only one thing—that no one try to usurp our lands, the lands of Artsakh and Armenia, the sacred inheritance from our forefathers.

Karekin I stressed that the Armenian people face an 'invisible enemy', that is. 'the temptation to be soft, to be weak and to retreat from our principles'.[336]

The theological dimension of this religious discourse is further expounded in a booklet by Bishop Martirossian, where he presents a 'theology of liberation' (not to be confused with the one in Latin America) and deals with the problem of 'just war'. War, like other catastrophic phenomena in life, creates not only physical and material destruction but also a moral crisis in the life of a society. The over a decade long military confrontation and struggle — and the uncertain prospects of the future—have had an impact on the bases of the moral and social orders in Karabakh.

Bishop Martirossian in *Divine Help for the Christian Solider* — a pocket-size booklet prepared especially for the soldiers of Karabakh[337] — attempts

to provide a meaning system and a basis for distinguishing between "right" and "wrong" ways of behaving under war conditions. Religion, in its capacity as a response to crises of moral meaning, is employed to address the moral dilemma faced by the soldier in particular, and society in general. The Bishop exhorts the soldiers to 'be ready to welcome death with dignity'. Martirossian's eclectic approach to the problem of 'just war' and military ethics interweaves Biblical, patristic and national historical meaning systems with the new realities of life resulting from the war. He affirms that the struggle of the Karabakhtsi soldier is 'righteous', giving extensive quotations from the Bible. He writes: 'There are numerous accounts — both in the Holy Bible and in our history — that confirm the presence of divine help for armies that carry out righteous struggles, especially when they appeal to God with faith, and accept the blessings of His faithful servants, [the priests]'. He then shows how military successes could be achieved in Karabakh, if the soldiers put their faith in God rather than solely in the strength of their arms. He gives several anecdotal examples of how, during the most crucial battles in Shushi and Martakert regions, the entire population of Karabakh, 'young and old, were sitting in shelters because of the shelling and — under the candle light — were unceasingly praying to God, beseeching His Almighty power to help [the] young and brave fighters'.

Public prayers offered in Abkhazia are also believed to have been answered. For example, during the first Abkhazian-Georgian clashes in 1989, when people came to the shrine of Dydrypsh in Achandra, seeking assistance from their ancestral God, priest Chichba called upon Dydrypsh:

> You know that this is our land — we did not conquer it, but you gave it to us. Look at him [Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the then president of Georgia who had declared 'Georgia for Georgians'], and if this is his land, give it to him, but if ours – leave it to us'.

The people of Achandra believe that this prayer led to the eventual coup in Tbilisi, when Gamsakhurdia was overthrown and later died under suspicious circumstances (Krylov 1999: 121-22).

In the case of Karabakh, Martirossian provides an elaborate religious rationale to the complex issue of the "ethics of war". He exhorts that 'a

Christian soldier will be exposed to acts of violence and destruction'. God, on Judgment day, will ask the soldier to account 'for the possessions [he] ravished from the poor unjustly and forcefully, or for the things [he] robbed from [his] masters'. He then outlines the 'spiritual values' of a Christian soldier: obedience and order, unity, humility and prudence, being mindful of delinquency and sinful deviations, and reconciliation. He affirms that 'the awareness of divine assistance greatly reinforces and strengthens [the soldier's] faith and reliance on God. But that reliance could be superficial if it is not coupled with a genuine Christian way of life'. He then goes on to explain the 'spiritual fortification of the soldier'. In order to 'take up the armour of God', the soldier is asked to be mindful of a) prayer and thanksgiving, which should accompany the Christian soldier, just as 'all military training and combat exercises'; b) honouring the Holy Cross, as 'an enemy-chasing power in the war'; c) bavery, because 'God is the Lord only of the brave'. Martirossian concludes his exhortation by urging the soldier to 'remember [his] glorious ancestors and the achievements of today's heroes'; and assures him that 'the nation is praying for [him]… so that [he] may be a loyal fighter and a true soldier of Christ'.

Durkheim argues that 'every religion is also a means enabling men to face the world with greater confidence' (Durkheim 1972: 227). In *Divine Help,* Martirossian uses Armenian Christian religion to give the Karabakhtsi soldiers this 'greater confidence' to face the world — their world under war conditions. The 'sacred cosmos' that Martirossian draws in *Divine Help* transcends and includes the soldier in its ordering of reality, thus providing him an 'ultimate shield against the terror of anomy' (Berger 1967: 27). Martirossian provides a clear reference to a meaning system that is particular, as well as universal in its scope.

An important difference between the Armenian and Azerbaijani religious discourse (discussed below) is that the former is not directed towards the Azerbaijani people, but against a regime and a nationalism that calls for the 'expulsion of Armenians from Karabakh' (Murphy 1992: 84-86; Helsinki Watch 1991: 6). The Armenian religious discourse is 'introspective', that is, the awareness of 'the evil' within and without; that without 'purifying' the soul from the evil within, the evil without cannot be overcome. 'Disloyalty to God' would bring down God's wrath upon the nation. The principal tenets of

this religious discourse are: the eradication of evil (both within and without) and the protection of the land that 'God gave' to Karabakhtsis. Based on this theology, it is hoped that, ultimately, 'Karabakh will become a unique country, where people will live piously and according to very high moral standards' (Tchilingirian 1994: 18).

Indeed, the Church in Karabakh has assumed the responsibility to set a certain moral and ethical context to the war on the one hand and the nation-building process on the other. This is done by finding a balance between the national aspirations of the Armenians and their religious values. However, since the declaration of independent statehood in Karabakh and the relative peace in the country the role of the Church has changed. A priest surmised that between 1989 and 1991, 'the Church was much more significant, was much more valuable than perhaps it is today'.[338] This is also due to the fact that at least since the ceasefire in 1994, there is no urgent "anomic crisis" in Karabakh, and thus a lesser role for the institutional church. Nevertheless, the Armenian Church in Karabakh is still considered an important moral and spiritual source, both as a national and religious institution. In fact, the institutional church/ religion, in both Karabakh and Abkhazia, through the patronage of the state, have also become the 'guardians' and defenders of the particular 'moral code' of their societies. The deliberate exclusion and intolerance of 'non-traditional' churches or religions — or the so-called 'cults' as they are locally referred to — in society is but one important example.[339] Surely, this is not unique to Karabakh and Abkhazia. In the republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia all 'unorthodox' religious organisations have faced legal difficulties and society-wide intolerance. While the international obligations of the three recognised republics provide certain legal rights to such religious groups, in Karabakh and Abkhazia, for example the Jehovah Witnesses and the Krishnas, are completely banned without any legal recourse.[340]

## 'Islamic responses' to the Karabakh conflict

As alluded to earlier, to present religion as a significant factor in the Abkhazian-Georgian conflict was not plausible, although it is intermittently mentioned

as a factor.[341] In the case of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, the religious dimension is more complex and politicised. While to speak of the "Islamic responses" in this conflict is not considered "politically correct", nonetheless, there are certain groups inside Azerbaijan for whom Islam provides a 'meaning system' for political and military mobilisation. It is true that the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict is not due to religious differences of the conflicting parties, but interestingly, especially in the early stages of the conflict, there has been a vocal Islamic response to the Karabakh conflict outside Azerbaijan. This section will further explore some of these issues and processes.

Approximately 90 percent of Azerbaijan's population is Muslim, at least nominally (70 percent Shi'ite and 30 percent Sunni).[342] While Islam was introduced in the area in the seventh century through Arab invasions, Shi'a Islam was established as state religion in the 16th century under Shah Ismail I (1501-1525) of the Persian Safavid dynasty. Conflicts between Shi'ite and Sunni communities in Azerbaijan were not unusual, as Persia and the Ottoman Empire competed for influence in the region (cf. Swietochowski 1994a). In the 19th century the Shi'ite population in 'Russian Azerbaijan' became predominant, as Sunni Muslims 'emigrated from Russian controlled Azerbaijan because of Russia's wars with their co-religionists in the Ottoman Empire'.[343] In the pre-Soviet period, there were some 2,000 active mosques in Azerbaijan,[344] and '786 Qoranic [sic] schools (*medresseh* and *mektep*)' (Lemercier-Quelquejay 1984: 39). Most of them were closed starting in the mid-1920s, and more vigorously pursued under Stalin in the 1930s.[345] During WWII, in an effort to mobilise popular support for the 'Great Patriotic War', the Soviet authorities stopped the anti-religious campaign, reopened some mosques and established the Muslim Spiritual Board of Transcaucasus in Baku, which still exists today, and is the governing body of Islam in Azerbaijan.[346] By the late Soviet period 'there were only two large and five smaller mosques in Baku and only eleven others operating in the rest of the country'.[347]

By and large Azerbaijani society was (and is) secular. 'We are the most secularised society of all the former Muslim people of the Soviet Union,' explained Saleh Aliyev in 1990, a specialist at the Soviet Academy of Oriental Studies. 'Every Azerbaijani knows that Islam is the religion of his forebears. But at the same time he has little idea of what that religion is'.[348] But, along with other freedoms and changes that came with independence, Islam too was

'rehabilitated' in Azerbaijan. In 2001, a decade after the break up of the Soviet Union, there were 1,500 functioning mosques (half of them unregistered) in Azerbaijan. The Quran was published in the Azeri language for the first time; religious literature was distributed en masse, religious schools were opened and new religious societies established.[349] The post-independence religious revival was largely funded and supported by countries such as Iran, Turkey, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia and others.[350] Even as Islam had regained public visibility and a place in society, for the majority of the population Islam was merely a part of their 'cultural identity'. Shaffer (2000) explains that 'Islam is predominantly a cultural force, and scarcely a political force, especially in Azerbaijan. Islam forms the framework for marking major rites of passage… but appears in few political contexts'. Nonetheless, for a segment of society, Islam is significant religiously, not only culturally. As one devout religious observer put it, 'I cannot imagine Azerbaijan without deep-rooted Islamic spiritual values'.[351] While, this is not a widely shared sentiment in Azerbaijan, Swietochowski (1994a: 288) explains, by way of background, that by the late Soviet-era, there was 'an age-old and never-overcome split [in Azerbaijan] between the intelligentsia, the urban population, and the better-educated on one side and the bulk of the tradition-bound, mainly rural or small-town population, often Shi'ite by background, on the other'. This cleavage was also reflected in the independence movement started in 1989, when the People's Popular Front of Azerbaijan, the umbrella political association in the country, 'in effect split into three wings, described as liberal, national-liberation, and Islamic-fundamentalist' (Swietochowski 1994a: 288).

> Some activists could not find a place for themselves in any of the wings and left the ranks of the PFA. The Islamic wing also drifted apart, and what remained of the Front was, in the words of a witness to the events, "a part of the liberal wing united with the national-liberation wing on the basis of the national-democratic platform" (Swietochowski 1994a: 288-289).

In the subsequent decade, the religiously oriented groups formed a number of political parties and movements, such as the Islamic Party of Azerbaijan, and the more fringe Jeyshullah, Tabuk Jamaat, and Wahhabi groups.[352] These were largely in reaction to domestic developments in

Azerbaijan, although receiving support from outside the country. By 2001, two local experts observed that 'elements of Azerbaijan's religious situation are similar to those in Iran in the early 1970s: corruption in the government and bureaucracy, a worsening economic situation, disappointment with the democratic changes and the police regime in [the] country. They pointed out that, even as 'less than 5 percent of Azerbaijan's population support an Islamic form of government', if repressive conditions do not improve, 'people could unite behind the Islamic forces', as they did in Iran (Valiyev and Valiyev 2002; cf. Peuch 2001). In especially peripheral regions of the country, Fuller (2002) adds that 'Islam is becoming a rallying point for the dispossessed, impoverished, and unemployed, and even simply for those Azerbaijanis who reject many aspects of western culture'. As elsewhere, for example in Central Asia, religious groups are likely to take advantage of such widespread dissatisfactions in society and 'tap into new pools of recruits' (Takeyh and Gvosdev 2002). Others, like Shaffer, who emphasise Baku's secularist policies, insist that 'the rhetoric of Islamic revival [in the Caspian region] is used by political forces, both governments and opposition movements, to stigmatise their enemies and bolster their cause' (Shaffer 2000). Yet, the issue is not as simple.

## Politicisation of religion

Since the beginning of the dispute in 1988, Islamic responses to the Karabakh conflict — a discourse embedded in religious language and beliefs — have crossed over local and regional lines in various intensities. Domestically, even as the growth of Islam has been closely watched and controlled by the secular state,[353] and Azerbaijan remains largely a secular state and society,[354] religion still interacts with other more prominent political and social factors — especially regarding Karabakh — both on the formal and informal levels.

Like the discourse of the Armenian Bishop of Karabakh, the Azerbaijani head of the Muslim Spiritual Board of Transcaucasus, Sheik-ul-Islam Allah-Shukur Pashazade, has called for 'mobilisation and vigilance of the faithful' regarding the conflict. While inviting Azerbaijan's Shi'a Muslims to observe Ashura, the day of mourning for the death of Imam Hussein, Pashazade exhorted:

> The struggle, which Imam Husayn was waging, was a great struggle to defend the truth, the words of the prophet, the land and the motherland. We remember and continue this because we have still not liberated our lands which are occupied by our neighbours, the Armenians, who committed aggression against us, and we have not fully restored the borders of our land. Yet we have made many sacrifices and shed much blood.[355]

In the early 1990s, clerics and religious groups *outside* Azerbaijan amplified the 'religious dimension' of the conflict and presented it as yet another 'conspiracy' against Islam. In a number of Muslim countries, certain government and religious officials and newspapers championed the Azerbaijani cause, both against the Armenians and the Soviet Union, whose troops were deployed in Baku in January 1990. This was also a reaction to the Russians' and generally Western world's biased attitude toward Azerbaijan and more favourable view of the Armenians. Iranian leaders accused Gorbachev of 'fighting Islam with a Marxist sword'.[356] Ayatollah Khomeini warned 'Soviet leaders to respect the 'Islamic sentiments of Soviet Azerbaijanis'. He said, 'In Soviet Azerbaijan our brethren show love toward Islam and this is not driven by nationalism, but by religious awareness'. A headline in *Al Siyasa* (18 January 1990) in Kuwait concurred: 'The Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict is not an anti-Russian Islamic movement'. Khomeini warned that 'Soviet leaders should know that Islam is an ongoing movement and not a silent [religion]'.[357] Newspapers throughout Iran echoed Ayatollah's statements. 'Moscow should be careful with its treatment of Muslims in the Soviet Union' headlined *Abrar* (18 January 1990). Iranian religious leaders 'warned that if the Soviet Union repressed the aspirations of Muslim Azerbaijanis, there would be "serious consequences"'.[358] However, by the late 1990s, Iranian-Azerbaijani relations were embroiled in political and diplomatic rows. Most disappointing for Baku is Tehran's close relations with Armenia. Shaffer articulates Baku's perceived disappointment:

> Despite [Iran's] rhetoric of neutrality in the Karabakh conflict, which is in and of itself inconsistent with the official ideology of a state that portrays itself as the protector and champion of the Shi'i in the world,

> throughout most of the post-independence period, Iran has cooperated with Armenia despite its struggle with Shi'i Azerbaijan for control of Karabakh (Shaffer 2000).

Indeed, Iran and Turkey were competing (and continue to compete) for influence in Azerbaijan, as Azerbaijanis share Shi'a Islam with Iran and Turkic ethnicity with Turks.[359] Since Azerbaijan's independence both rival countries had established religious schools, funded the building of mosques and provided humanitarian aid (cf. Vilayet and Vilayet 2002). The Turkish government has funded the construction of new mosques in Azerbaijan and the repairs of others (Fuller 2002).[360]

There was sharper Islamic response in the Middle East in the early stages of the Karabakh conflict — infused with anti-Zionist rhetoric, especially by militant groups, such as Hizballa (Party of God) and influential Islamic organisations in Lebanon. In *Al-Shi'raa* weekly (Beirut) Hassan Sabra wrote:

> When in 1988 Gorbachev visited the United States, a group of Armenians, together with immigrant Soviet Jews, organized a demonstration asking Gorbachev to take a concrete position towards the issue of Nagorno Karabagh, favourable to Armenians, against the Muslim Azerbaijanis.

Sabra continued his "analysis" by framing his discussion as an Armenian vs. Islam issue and blamed all Armenians for cooperating with the Zionists.[361] During the same period, *Al-Kifah al-Arabi* weekly reported: 'Reliable sources in East Beirut reveal that the "Lebanese Forces" [Christian Maronite militiamen] have moved their struggle to the Caucasus, this time not against federalism, but with separatist intentions'.[362] In January 1990, the Assembly of Islamic Religious Leaders issued a declaration stating:

> The issue of unifying Karabakh with Armenia is not realistic, it is unjust and not attainable, because the enclave is situated within the boarders of the Republic of Azerbaijan like an island…. Many Armenians, escaping their areas for numerous problems and complications, found hospitable refuge among Muslim Azerbaijanis [and they were welcomed], just as they were welcomed by the Lebanese, Syrians and others [in the past]… The demand of Azerbaijan concerning the enclave

> is legal and that legality is rooted in geographic and historical evidence…. the Tsarist armies conquered Armenia and separated it from Turkey and the Soviet armies conquered and separated Azerbaijan from Iran.

The Assembly found 'certain Armenians' guilty of provoking and instigating unjust demands for Karabakh and called upon all Armenians to stop their demand for unification of Karabakh with Armenia.[363]

Along the same lines, Fahmi Houyeidi of *Al Majalla*, the Saudi weekly published in London, wrote: 'The Soviets were pressuring the Muslims to the benefit of the Armenians' and that 'Muslims in Azerbaijan are being attacked by the [Soviet forces] with the backing of the West and the United States'.[364] Ahmed Muhammad Abdelqader gave a more elaborate explanation to this 'western-Zionist conspiracy' against Islam in *Al Ayam* newspaper published in Saudi Arabia.

> Russia created the Karabakh conflict in order to undermine the Islamic movement in the Soviet Union. The Armenian communists have relations with the West, which in all their capitals are planning to hit Islam, therefore, the Armenians are attempting, through political parties, to gain advantages [in their territorial claims]. The communists pushed the Armenians to agitate against the Azeris and demand the independence of Karabakh. This revolution started in Stepanakert, which is populated with Armenians. The Soviet Jews had a hidden role in starting this fire. And being ideologically and socially mixed with the Armenians, the Jews instilled fanaticism in the Armenians to rise against the Muslims of Azerbaijan.[365]

This perennial anti-Semitism in the Middle East had some influence on fringe religious groups in Azerbaijan. While Azerbaijan has a long history of tolerance and respect for its Jewish minority, in the early 1990s certain Islamic groups espoused such rhetoric, most notably the Azerbaijan Islamic Party, whose leader Haji al-Akram and his followers spoke of a 'world-wide anti-Islamic plot organised and supported by the world Zionism' (Malashenko 2000).

At home, the government of Azerbaijan has tried to 'downplay [the] religious dimension of the Republic's popular movement' (cf. Hunter 1993: 238-390). President Aliyev and politicians have merely paid the expected lip service to Islam as part of the *culture* and 'social values' of Azerbaijani society.[366] As opposed to the 'cultural Islam' of the majority of society, the possible growth of more 'fundamentalist' Islam[367] in post-Soviet Azerbaijan has been carefully monitored. It is this type or brand of Islam that Aliyev has cracked down on and has closely watched its spread in the country.[368] This is in line with his promotion of 'secular statehood' for Azerbaijan modelled on Turkey. While meeting the head of the Directorate for Religious Affairs of Turkey, Mehmet Nuri Yilmaz, in Baku, he explained that

> there are people in Azerbaijan who want to introduce fanaticism into religion. There are circles both inside and outside that want to use religion as a tool for terrorism. We must not let terrorism and fanaticism be injected into Islam.[369]

Yet, there was hardly any condemnation by Aliyev, the state, or religious leaders when, for example, Rovsan Badalov, the former commander of 'Mujahideen' fighters, called on his fellow Azerbaijanis to launch 'a holy war' (*jihad*) against the Karabakh Armenians, or when the Azerbaijan Karabakh Liberation Movement called for a *jihad* as 'the only way to fight against the Armenians'.[370] Other such examples suggest that religious militancy is tolerated as long as it is used as a social and political device for profiling the "other" and for mobilising support toward an "Azerbaijani solution" to the Karabakh conflict, but not when it is used for socio-political critique of Azerbaijan or the government.[371]

It is mainly religiously devout groups in the fringes of Azerbaijani society — such as the 'Tabuk Azerbaijani Jamaat' — that have subscribed to a more specific "jihadi discourse", which is infused with criticism of Azerbaijan's current political and military leadership. In addition to criticising the lack of 'human rights' in Azerbaijan, Jamaat's Badalov called upon his fellow citizens to declare a 'jihad' against the 'Armenian invaders' of Karabakh:

> We give a solemn undertaking that we are capable of standing

> up for the interests of Azerbaijan and our people and, with God's help, of clearing our homeland, our homes and lands of our enemies. Let our enemies know that we have embarked upon jihad in the name of God and our homeland. Our constitution is the Koran. Our justice is Shari'ah, our flag of battle is the way of martyrs who die following God's path. We call on everyone who is not indifferent to the fate of the Azerbaijani people to join us in our holy fight.[372]

Mahir Javadov, an advocate of establishing an Islamic state in Azerbaijan and suspected of plotting a coup against Aliyev in March 1995, threatened from his exile in Iran to lead a march on Karabakh to liberate it from the Armenians.[373]

In the immediate neighbourhood, the Chechens have been the most vocal of the jihadi discourse in the Caucasus, which targets not only their arch-enemy Russia, but also the regimes of 'Muslim states' in the region that are 'hostile to Islam'. Former Prime Minister of Chechnya, Movladi Udugov, explained the Karabakh conflict as a result of the 'Christian-heathen union' with Zionism and declared that 'Karabakh is not only Azerbaijani but also Muslim territory'.[374] Shamil Basayev, the commander of Chechen forces, has on a number of occasions affirmed the participation of Chechen fighters and mercenaries in the Karabakh war.[375] 'We came there [Shusha] not for trophies, but for jihad and to help for the sake of God', he said in a video clip shown on an Azerbaijani television broadcast nationally.[376] Noteworthy, after the broadcast of the Basayev interview, the head of the TV channel 'criticised the government's handling of the matter, saying it damaged Azerbaijan's international reputation'.[377] The concern was Baku's international image, especially in the Western world, and not necessarily the effects of such religious discourse on Azerbaijani society. In general, the development of the political dimension of Islam has been a double-edged sword for Azerbaijani officials. As explained by Zardush Alizade, co-chairman of the Social Democratic Party, 'the politicisation of Islam [in Azerbaijan] has helped drive the secular opposition into a corner. A holy place is never empty, and the population has reached out for the mosques'.[378] On the external front, it has enhanced the government's diplomatic efforts vis a vis Karabakh.

Both Azerbaijanis and Armenians have appealed to religious affinities in foreign affairs and diplomacy to support their positions. Traditionally,

Armenians have viewed "Christian Russia" or "Christian Europe" — and to a lesser extent in recent years to "Orthodox Greece" — as sympathetic to their national causes. Regarding the Karabakh conflict in particular, for instance, Baroness Caroline Cox of the British House of Lords, an avid advocate of Karabakh Armenians, has often lobbied in support of Karabakh as a "Christian nation" 'threatened by militant Islamists who have declared their intention to unite with Azerbaijan to conquer the whole of the Caucasus — and Karabakh is one of their first targets'.[379] This is alarmist and very far from reality, but, again, what is important for our discussion here is how religion interacts with other dimensions of this conflict. Another example, while not of any great significance, is Karabakh's observer status in the Inter-parliamentary Conference of European Orthodox States, a little known organisation made of 18 "Orthodox states". Karabakh, as an "Orthodox country" received the observer status in 1996. In turn, Azerbaijan has used its membership in multi-state organisations, such as the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), made up of 56 Muslim states, to garner support for Baku's position on Karabakh. Ever since Azerbaijan joined the OIC in 1992,statements in support of Azerbaijan have been issued at every OIC summit.[380] Sheikh-ul-Islam Allah-Shukur Pashazade, too, has regularly appealed to the Islamic world in support of Azerbaijan's position. In May 2001, he called on the 'world community to show solidarity with Azerbaijanis' in connection with the 'genocide day of Azerbaijanis'.[381] Religion has also played a role in Baku's bilateral relations with Muslim countries, such as Pakistan, Turkey, Kuwait, Iraq and others.[382]

Vafa Guluzade, the outspoken former senior presidential advisor and a well-known political commentator in Azerbaijan, best articulated Azerbaijan's use of the "religious factor" if and when needed, in foreign relations:

> Azerbaijan is a Muslim country and it is surrounded by Muslim countries. While Azerbaijan is a secular country, it offers its help to the USA and is in favour of establishing an alliance with the USA to meet its own state interests. But if our problems are not resolved and reach a deadlock — all Islamic organizations are represented in our country, Iran is active here, Saudi Arabia is active, Turkey's Muslim circles are

> also active, Azeris are also Muslims — Azeris can also join Islam, the Muslim world…. [In fact] the whole Muslim world and Turkey will be on our side.[383]

Indeed, religion is a factor, though not a central one, in this non-religious war. The danger is that its exploitation in domestic and foreign relations could further deepen the differences among the parties in the conflict — a process hardly conducive for conflict resolution and reconciliation.

## Conclusion

The complex personal and collective dimensions of religion and multi-layered interaction of religion with other social-political forces discussed in this chapter provide a wider analytical framework for understanding how a meaning system is externalised and maintained, and how it legitimises the post-Soviet 'new' social-political order. The "rehabilitation of religion" in the post-Soviet South Caucasus coincided with the processes of restructuring of inter-ethnic relations and radical changes (conflicts), where the Communist background of society and its effects on the reintroduction of religion is an important variable. The process of 'return to faith' has individual and collective dimensions, which overlaps, for example, with people's alienation from the previous ideology, the struggle for self-determination, war and its consequences. Religion is not an ad hoc gap-filler in the "ideological vacuum" of the post-Soviet era, but a "bridge" that restores a connection with past identity and culture, and in turn, establishes a basis for the reconstruction and maintenance of plausibility structures of current social reality. Religion, as a meaning system, is a fusion of beliefs, language, land and history, which serves as a unique point of reference for individual and collective identity.

Key social actors and internal/external conditions or factors mediate individual and collective religiosity. This complex and highly interactive process evolves around two main axes: on the horizontal level, the collective dimension provides an objective identity reference and a 'moral code' for social reality; on the personal dimension, it provides the basis of 'spirituality' and faith.

Vertically, on the one hand, religion or the meaning system provides a wider social framework to prevent or deal with anomy, on the other, it constitutes a source of perception and representation of the "other". The latter process ("othering") has been and continues to be a relatively significant factor in the inter-ethnic conflicts presented here. The evidence suggests that religion could be a potent mobilising factor in the still unresolved conflicts of Karabakh and Abkhazia.

CHAPTER 6

# The 'New Order' and the International Community
# Self-Determination vs Territorial Integrity

The previous chapters discussed why and how two of the autonomies in the former Soviet South Caucasus are struggling for independence and how they have mobilised their political, military, social and religious resources towards establishing a new political and social order in their societies. While, internally, the new created order is legitimised and maintained by various social-political processes discussed earlier, externally, one of the most contentious issues in the still unresolved conflicts between the former autonomies and their 'titular states' is the legality and international legitimacy of the "new order" — i.e., the *de jure* recognition of their independence. Since the end of the Soviet Union, the strategic aims of Tbilisi and Baku have been to resolve the Abkhazia and Karabakh conflicts through military force, rather than through political and legal means. Yet, at least since the ceasefire agreements in 1994, Abkhazia and Karabakh have been *de facto* independent polities, with the key attributes required for international recognition as States (cf. Chirikba 2000: 233; Barsegov 1996). The crux of the legal contention is the right of self-determination of the Abkhazians and Karabakh Armenians, on the one hand, and the territorial integrity of Georgia and Azerbaijan on the other.

*De facto* independence has been achieved and legitimised in Abkhazia and Karabakh on the bases of long-running and unresolved historical, political, economic, cultural, and religious differences in the minority-majority relations — and through military victories. More recently, the continued security threats and the likelihood of resumption of military clashes have further emboldened the Abkhazians and the Karabakh Armenians to preserve at least their internal independence. However, both Abkhazia and Karabakh realise that the long-

term viability, security, and socio-economic development of their 'states' depend on international recognition of their independence (or political status). Thus, international recognition is a critical challenge to the leaderships of Abkhazia and Karabakh, especially in view of the failure of their former autonomous status within the USSR discussed in Chapter 2 and 3. Towards this end, since the end of the Soviet Union, Abkhazia and Karabakh have mobilised large intellectual resources in presenting legal arguments and justification for their full independence based on international law and practice.

The articulation of legal arguments, especially through political and diplomatic channels, is another dimension of the process of restructuring and legitimation of the 'new order' in the minority-majority relations. There is already a considerable literature on the legal aspects of the conflicts in Abkhazia and Karabakh.[384] But, the aim of this chapter is a) to present the most contentious legal issues in the ongoing conflicts; b) to discuss the key legal positions presented by Abkhazia and Karabakh; and c) to show how these legal arguments are crucial to the ultimate resolution of the conflicts and the determination of the 'final status' of Abkhazia and Karabakh. First, a brief discussion of how the right of self-determination has been shaped since World War I will provide the larger historical and contemporary contexts of this chapter's discussion.

## Self-determination in international law

As declared by the United Nations General Assembly in 1970, the right of self-determination entails:

> The establishment of a sovereign and independent State, the free association or integration with an independent State or the emergence into any other political status freely determined by a people constitute modes of implementing the rights of self-determination by that people.[385]

Generally, the terms "autonomy" and "self-government" are used as

synonyms in international political and legal discourse and are considered a step down from self-determination.[386] Legal experts argue that 'autonomy in general terms is yet to be firmly anchored in international and regional human rights instruments' (Alfredsson 1998: 126). On the other hand, the right of self-determination is not limited to self-government, but entails the right of full independence. While the political discourse and legal practice of the right of self-determination were shaped mainly in the period of World War I, the United Nations, since World War II, has attached greater significance to self-determination than to autonomy, especially for colonial peoples (cf. Hannikainen 1998: 81). The United Nations Human Rights Covenant (1966) declared:

> 1. All people have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.
>
> 2. All peoples may, for their own ends, freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources without prejudice to any obligations arising out of international cooperation, based upon the principle of mutual benefit, and international law. In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence.

The terms 'nation' and 'people' are also used synonymously in the legal literature concerning self-determination. Some authors use the term 'nation' to refer to 'the population of a certain territorial unit' — what Radan refers to as the 'classical theory of self-determination'. Others use 'nation' (as applicable to Abkhazia and Karabakh) to refer to 'a cultural group based upon a common history and language', or the 'romantic theory of self-determination' (Radan 2002: 11; cf. Berman 1988).[387] Incidentally, Soviet authorities 'carved out political boundaries that roughly corresponded to linguistically distinct peoples' (cf. Horowitz 2001: 650; Coppieters 1999:16-17). Although the term 'people' is not defined in the UN declaration,[388] 'it is commonly accepted by States that peoples under colonial or other comparable alien domination have the right of external (full) self-determination' (Hannikainen 1998: 83). Yet,

there is a general consensus in the international community that, other than colonial peoples, the right of self-determination should not be extended to "secessionist" peoples who wish to exist apart from existing States, and whose governments are against such a "divorce".[389] In relevance to our case studies, Hannikainen (1998: 83-84) argues that

> an exception [to this] appears to be possible in the international community of States – not a rule or right but only a possibility. Namely, if the government resorts to mass extermination or other systemic violence against a part of its population and mercilessly suppresses its basic human rights, the UN may not deny secession.

The establishment of Bangladesh in East Pakistan in 1971 and the State of Israel in 1947 represent such significant cases of exception. The recognition of the right of self-determination of Bangladesh and the Jewish people by the international community 'proved that oppression and victimisation of a nation could lead to the establishment of a state based upon the romantic theory of self-determination' (Radan 2002: 11). The example of Bangladesh is also relevant to Abkhazia and Karabakh as it is a case of "decolonisation" within a decolonised state. Pakistan became an independent state as part of a process of decolonisation in the post-World War II period. But as the Urdu-speaking Muslims of West Pakistan continued to oppress, victimise and attempt to assimilate the Bengali Muslims in East Pakistan (who spoke a Sanskrit-based Bengali), the international community "sanctioned" the secession of the later and recognised Bangladesh as an independence state.[390]

Furthermore, the end of the Indian Empire (1877-1947) resulted in the proclamation of three independent states — Burma, India and Pakistan — out of 'a single administrative territorial unit'. Based on this precedent, Avtonomov (1999) argues that 'there are no grounds to suppose that international law guarantees the preservation of the unitary states that came into being out of the former Soviet republics when the Soviet Union collapsed regardless of the will of the peoples residing in these former Soviet republics'. A more recent case is the Dayton Accord (1995), whereby Bosnia-Herzegovina became a sovereign federal state made of a Muslim-Croat Federation and the Serb Republic.[391]

'The [Dayton] agreement thus preserved the *de jure* sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina, but effectively created two separate *de facto* entities' (Musgrave 1997: 116-121; cf. Chirikba 2000: 251; Grant 1999: 149ff). Based on the same legal reasoning applied to the South Caucasus, it is argued that while Georgia and Azerbaijan were "colonised" by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (in fact, this was the basis of their declaration of independence in 1991), Abkhazians and Karabakh Armenians were "colonised" by the Soviet Union and then by Georgia and Azerbaijan respectively (more on this later). Yet, when the international community recognised the "decolonisation" of former Soviet republics and their independence, it did not extend the same right to the decolonisation of the second tier "colonised peoples", i.e., autonomous republics and regions.[392] Also important to our case studies is the fact that the Abkhazians and Karabakh Armenians are not attempting to "create" a new national state, but to restore the "statehood" they had had historically (cf. Chirikba 2000: 237-38; Hewitt 1996: 280-81).[393]

Indeed, the international community has not been consistent in its approach and practice with respect to self-determination.[394] It has been reluctant to recognise the right of self-determination of 'suppressed peoples', upholding rather the 'territorial integrity' of existing States. 'When a state joins the United Nations, there is an implied acceptance by the entire membership of its territorial integrity and sovereignty' (Emerson 2000: 8).[395] In the post-World War II period, the majority of colonial peoples achieved independence, but in the post-Cold War era 'it has so far proved impossible to determine what category of peoples, if any, will next be designated as the ones entitled to call upon the right of self-determination' (Emerson 2000: 9). Nevertheless, a ruling of the International Court of Justice in 1995 reaffirmed that the right of self-determination of peoples is 'an essential principle of contemporary international law and an *erga omnes* obligation' [i.e., obligations of a State towards the international community as a whole]' (Radan 2002: 9). Likewise, the General Assembly of the United Nations, in its Declaration on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations, in October 1995, stated:

> [We] continue to reaffirm the right of self-determination of all peoples, taking into account the particular situation of peoples under colonial or other forms of alien

> domination or foreign occupation, and recognize the right to peoples to take legitimate action in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations to realize their inalienable right of self-determination.

However, once again, it underlined the self-interest of States by cautioning that

> This shall not be construed as authorization or encouraging any action that would dismember or impair, totally or in part, the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent States conducting themselves in compliance with the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples and thus possessed of a Government representing the whole people belonging to the territory without distinction of any kind.[396]

One argument advanced by UN representatives against peoples seeking full self-determination is that 'there would be no limit to fragmentation if every ethnic, religious or linguistic group claimed statehood, and that peace, security and economic well-being for all would become more difficult to achieve'.[397] In contrast, Alfredsson (1998: 132) argues that 'there are plenty of good legal arguments in favour of granting the right of external self-determination to indigenous peoples'. And he poses a number of unanswered questions:

> Why should these peoples be denied what others enjoy when we are talking about peoples or nations with their own identities, territories and historical institutions who used to exercise internal and external control until they were reduced to dependency? Why should they not be subject to decolonisation as well as overseas people and countries? (Alfredsson 1998: 133).

The definition of 'people' is another legally significant issue. In current international law, only 'peoples' are entitled to external or full self-determination, while 'minorities' are entitled to only autonomy. For example,

the international community recognises the Tibetans as a 'people' — with full rights of self-determination — but the Turkish Cypriots are considered a 'minority'. Duursma (1996: 41) explains that 'minorities do not have the right of self-determination, unless they are also peoples'. The Abkhazians and the Karabakh Armenians argue that they constitute a 'people' by all international legal standards,[398] most significant of which is their record of recognition as state units within multi-national legal and political frameworks. In this respect, Berman's analysis of various opinions on the issue is relevant:

> A "people" would have the right to self-determination if it is characterized by certain objective indicia and expresses its desire, by political or military means, to change its political status. This solution appeals to the desire for a moderate, non-partisan approach and appears to offer a reasonable way for limiting self-determination to a manageable group of cases (Berman 1988: 96).[399]

The historical development of the right of self-determination in international legal discourse has significant implications for Abkhazia and Karabakh and, ultimately, for the resolution of the conflicts. In the World War I period (the 'Wilsonian period') 'peoples' were made of 'ethnic communities, nations or nationalities primarily defined by language and culture' (e.g., the Kurds and the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire). In the post-World War II decolonisation period, 'ethnic identity is essentially irrelevant, the decisive, indeed, ordinarily the sole, consideration being the existence of a political entity in the guise of a colonial territory' (Emerson 2000: 7, cf. Grant 1999: 84ff). Therefore, the exercise of the right of self-determination in the aftermath of the two World Wars was different:

> In the first, politically shapeless ethnic communities were authorized to disrupt the existing states; in the second, the inhabitants, however haphazardly assembled by the colonial Power, take over pre-existing political units as independent states, but with the firm prescription reiterated in substance under various auspices (Emerson 2000: 7).

Emerson explains that while in the post World War I period the exercise of the right of self-determination 'involved secession' and that 'it is nonsense to concede the right to "all peoples" if secession is excluded, the 'verdict' of the international community 'has been that self-determination does not embrace secession, at least as any continuing right' (Emerson (2000: 8).[400] Despite this position, the existing legal "asymmetry" concerning the right of self-determination and territorial integrity in international law has other consequences:

> The present international legal situation encourages the use of force in order to make demands for secession successful…. If the State authorities are the first to use violence, breaching fundamental human rights or even the prohibition of genocide, then the secessionists may offer armed resistance. In the absence of international recognition of the seceding State, the civil war, once started, will continue until a de facto solution has been imposed by force. Either the metropolitan State has regained control over the seceding territory, or the secessionists have stabilized their authority and have managed to secure the exercise of all elements of statehood, that is, they have created an independent State.[401]

This legal assessment applies to the situation of Abkhazia and Karabakh. As with the case of Bangladesh — which achieved independence through the use of force and foreign military assistance — 'the oppression theory' in international law is invoked by Abkhazia and Karabakh as legal justification for secession, 'according to which the severity of a State's treatment of its minorities… may finally involve an international legitimation of a right to secessionist self-determination, as a self-help remedy by the aggrieved group' (Buchheit 1978: 222; Chirikba 2000: 241; cf. Crawford 1979: 99ff ).

In discussing the relevance of 'oppression by the majority' to the case of Abkhazia, Chirikba (2000: 241) adds two other issues — also applicable to Karabakh — that provide legal basis for secession in international law:

'illegitimate authority' and a people's right of self-determination: a) both Abkhazia and Karabakh were oppressed by the majority; b) both were attacked by the militarily forces of their metropolitan (titular) states by the order of political structures and leadership in Baku and Tbilisi respectively, who did not represent the people of Abkhazia and Karabakh — the Abkhazians and Karabakh Armenians did not participate in the election process of central authorities in Tbilisi and Baku, respectively, neither in the Constitutional referenda in Georgia and Azerbaijan.[402] Finally, in the case of Abkhazia, 'secession became rather the outcome of the war', unlike Karabakh, which had opted for union with Armenia. Until 1999, the Abkhazians had offered a federalist solution to the conflict, on a two equal states basis, but Tbilisi had refused. Chirikba (2000: 235) argues that Abkhazia's original aim was not separation from Georgia, 'but to repel the attacking [Georgian] army, which was threatening the very existence of the autonomous Abkhaz State'.

## Declaration of independence

Against this background, the legal bases of the declaration of independence of Azerbaijan and Georgia, on the one hand, and Karabakh and Abkhazia on the other are significant from the perspective of international law and in the ongoing negotiations for the resolution of the conflicts.

### a) Azerbaijan and Karabakh

On 30 August 1991, the Supreme Council of the Azerbaijan SSR declared independence by restoring the independent Republic of Azerbaijan that existed between 1918 and 1920 and declared the establishment of Soviet power in Baku as illegal.[403] Two articles formulated in the Constitutional Act were significant: Article 2 stated: 'The Azerbaijani Republic is the successor of the Azerbaijani Republic which existed from 28 May 1918 to 28 April 1920'; and Article 3 declared: 'The treaty on the establishment of the USSR on 20 December 1922 is considered not valid in the part related to Azerbaijan from the moment of

signing it'.[404] Furthermore, earlier, the law proclaimed the Azerbaijani *nation's* sovereignty over the republic. Azeri was confirmed as the state language, and the republic's land and natural resources were defined as 'national wealth' belonging to 'the Azerbaijani people'.[405]

By refusing to become the legal successor of Azerbaijan SSR, Baku freed itself from recognizing Nagorno Karabakh as an Autonomous Region, a semi-*state* within the legal framework of the Soviet Union. Back in 1923, the Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh were recognized as a legal entity within Azerbaijan SSR by becoming a *state unit* within a state, i.e., the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast. As such, legally speaking, in 1991 the 'Mountainous Karabakh Republic' was declared over territories that the Republic of Azerbaijan had no sovereignty over — in view of the fact that it had rejected the Soviet legal system, the very legal basis of its claim over Karabakh. The Armenians argue that Nagorno Karabakh was not part of the first republic of Azerbaijan between 1918 and 1920. Indeed, on 26 August 1919, the government of Azerbaijan and the Karabakh National Council had signed an interim agreement whereby the sides had agreed that the Paris Peace Conference would settle "the problem" of Karabakh. This implied Azerbaijan's recognition of Karabakh as a distinct 'legal entity'.[406]

Furthermore, from an international legal point of view, the League of Nations not only did not recognise the sovereignty of Azerbaijan over Karabakh in 1919-1920,[407] but also did not recognise Azerbaijan as a state — by rejecting its application (1 November 1920) for admission into the League — because its 'frontiers appeared to be ill-defined' and Azerbaijan 'did not appear to fulfil all the conditions laid down in the Covenant [of the League of Nations], in particular, those concerning stability and territorial sovereignty'.[408] In reviewing Azerbaijan's application, the Fifth Sub-Committee of the League recommended not to admit Azerbaijan:

> There are frontier disputes with Georgia and Armenia. Some agreements have been reached concerning the future settlements of the same, but they do not appear to be so far-reaching and definite as to justify the affirmation that the boundaries of the country have been definitely fixed.[409]

Sovietisation of the region had started just as the League was discussing the membership of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia. It is an historical irony — or further indication of the complexity of the conflicts — that over 80 years later the international boundaries of the three Republics in the South Caucasus are yet to be 'definitely fixed' through bilateral or multilateral agreements.

In the early Soviet period, as discussed in Chapter 2, the sovietised government of Azerbaijan had announced in an official declaration, in November 1920, that Karabakh (along with Nakhichevan and Zangezur) were to be part of the Soviet Republic of Armenia. This was reaffirmed on 4 July 1921 by the Caucasian Bureau (Kavbureau) of the Revolutionary Committee of the Party at its plenary session in Tbilisi, which decided that Karabakh should remain part of Armenia SSR. However, on 5 July, Stalin reversed the decision of the Bureau and dictated otherwise. From a legal standpoint, it is argued that Stalin's decision was illegal (at least on procedural grounds) as his decision was neither discussed nor voted on by the Bureau. Moreover, the legality of the decision of a "third party" — i.e., the Bolshevik Party, which had no jurisdiction to determine the status of a disputed territory at the time — remains questionable. Nevertheless, on 7 July 1923 Soviet Azerbaijan's Central Executive Revolutionary Committee decided to incorporate Karabakh into Azerbaijan. As such, the forced incorporation of Karabakh into Azerbaijan during the Soviet period remains a disputed legal issue in the current negotiations for a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

While Azerbaijan takes the incorporation of Karabakh for granted, the Armenians dispute Azerbaijan's legal claims vis a vis the political decision and its legal implications in the early Soviet era, and the legal procedures followed before the end of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and early 1990s. When still under Soviet rule, on 20 February 1988 the Assembly (parliament) of the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) had passed a resolution for the transfer of Karabakh from Soviet Azerbaijan to Soviet Armenia, and appealed to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, the highest legislative body in the "empire", for confirmation.[410] Armenians 'believed their demand to uphold the Karabakh Armenians' democratic choice and undo the territorial injustice inflicted by Stalin was in full harmony with the aims of glasnost and perestroika, and Gorbachev's rejection of the Stalinist heritage' (Herzig 1999: 11). Azerbaijan SSR rejected the resolution, arguing that the 'application jeopardises the mutual

benefits of the republic's Armenians and Azerbaijanis alike and contradicts the efforts made to enhance restructuring and strengthening friendship between nations'.[411] In order to prevent further escalation of hostilities between the Azerbaijanis and Karabakh Armenians, on 20 January 1989, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR established a special authority in Karabakh — headed by Arkady Volsky — under the direct supervision of the Soviet government in Moscow, in effect, removing Azerbaijan SSR's political control over Karabakh.[412] The special authority was abolished on 28 November by the USSR Supreme Soviet and replaced by the Baku-controlled 'Republic Organisational Committee' (Orgkom) on 15 January 1990. Subsequently, the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan, on 23 November 1991, passed a law abolishing the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast. This decision was deemed unconstitutional — along with Armenia SSR's decision (1 December 1989) for the reunification of Karabakh with Armenia — by the USSR Constitutional Oversight Committee on 28 November.[413]

The first attempt of Karabakh Armenians' for legal "divorce" from Azerbaijan SSR and "re-union" with Armenia SSR had failed. A second attempt for legal remedy, this time for independence, was based on an all-Union law passed in 1990, which granted rights to autonomous entities and national settlements to independently decide their legal and administrative status in case the host (titular) republic exits the USSR.[414] Thus, Karabakh declared independence from Azerbaijan on 2 September 1991 based on the same operative laws of the Soviet Union upon which Azerbaijan declared its own independence from the USSR. Significantly, the USSR Constitutional Oversight Committee did not annul or revoke NKAO's declaration establishing the 'Nagorno Karabakh Republic', as the decision was in compliance with USSR's law (passed on 3 April 1990) on procedures of secession. Based on this law, Karabakh organised a referendum on 10 December 1991, in the presence of international observers, by which the people of Karabakh expressed their will for independence. This provided legitimacy to Karabakh's independence in the legal context of the USSR, which was still in existence and internationally recognized. Mollazade (1998: 22-23), in presenting the legal position of Azerbaijan, does not mention or discuss the 1990 law or the legal arrangements made in the early Soviet period. His argumentation is based on Article 78 of the 1977 USSR Constitution, which stipulates that 'the territory of Union

Republics may be altered by mutual agreement of the Republics concerned' [i.e., Azerbaijan SSR and Armenia SSR]. He states that 'the Autonomous Region of Nagorno-Karabakh did not have the right of secession on the basis of the Constitution of the former USSR and Azerbaijan'. Mollazade does not note that this was legally the case *only* until 1990 — i. e., before the passing of the all-Union law on self-determination — and as long as a Union Republic remained within the USSR.

**a) Georgia and Abkhazia**

Like Azerbaijan, the Supreme Soviet of Georgia SSR, in a 20 June 1990 resolution, declared all Soviet era laws in Georgia null and void. Earlier, on 9 March 1990, it had noted that 'the authority established in Georgia as a result of intervention and occupation [i.e., Bolsheviks and Soviets]… did not express the genuine, free will of the Georgian people' and declared 'illegal and void all acts that abolished the political and other institutions of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, substituting for them political and juridical institutions that relied on a foreign power' (Avtonomov 1999). Thus, as in the case of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Georgia saw itself as the 'legitimate' successor of the Georgian republic in 1918-1921 and not of Soviet Georgia.[415]

After the ouster of President Gamsakhurdia, the Georgian Military Council annulled Georgia's Soviet Constitution and restored, provisionally, the 1921 Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. The reinstatement of the pre-Soviet Constitutions was 'without changing existing borders of territorial/administrative arrangements', i.e., the autonomous republics of Abkhazia and Adjaria.[416] Therefore, seemingly, Abkhazia's legal status as an autonomous state remained intact. In the 1995 Constitution — where 'Georgia is an independent, unitary and indivisible state, which is confirmed by the referendum held on 31 March 1991' — Abkhazia is a territorial unit of Georgia with unspecified status to be defined after 'the full restoration of the jurisdiction of Georgia over the whole territory of the country'.[417] (Seven years after the ratification of the Constitution, in October 2002 the Parliament of Georgia voted 'to amend the constitution to designate Abkhazia an autonomous republic within Georgia'.)[418] As in the case of Karabakh and

Azerbaijan, Georgia's 1995 Constitution was ratified without the participation of the population in Abkhazia, which by then was *de facto* independent.[419]

The Abkhazians argue that Abkhazia was not *legally* part of the Democratic Republic of Georgia in May 1918.[420] In fact, similar to the Azerbaijan-Karabakh Armenians' agreement in August 1919, Georgian and Abkhazian representatives had signed an agreement, in February 1918, recognising Abkhazia's frontiers from the River Ingur to the River Mzymta. But within months of the agreement, Abkhazia was 'occupied by Georgia's armed forces' in June 1918 — 'on the pretence of fighting the Bolsheviks' — after Tbilisi had declared independence (cf. Avtonomov 1999). Georgian forces remained there until February 1921. With the end of the Georgian Democratic Republic, Abkhazia proclaimed the Soviet Social Republic of Abkhazia on 16 December 1921. At the time, the 1921 Constitution of Georgia 'did not stipulate the existence of Abkhazia as qua subject within the makeup of Georgia' (cf. Avtonomov 1999).[421] As with Karabakh, it was only upon Stalin's dictates that Abkhazia entered into a federative relation with Georgia upon signing a Union Treaty, which was reflected in Abkhazia's 1925 Constitution and Georgia's 1927 Constitution. The constitutions confirmed both Abkhazia's sovereignty and its unification with Georgia. But in 1931, again by fiat, Stalin (together with Beria) demoted Abkhazia into an autonomous republic within Georgia. The legality of the decision for demotion remains questionable. It is also significant that the 'three autonomous territorial units [Abkhazia, Adjaria, South Ossetia] were established in Georgia after the Soviet system was instituted in the country' (Losaberidze 1998: 10). In sum, as Gordadzé (1999: 12n) writes, 'entre 1921 et 1931, le statut de l'Abkhazie reste flou'.

In the late Soviet period, as Abkhazian-Georgian political and inter-communal relations deteriorated (see Chapter 4), on 25 August 1990, the Abkhazian Supreme Council (parliament) — boycotted by the Georgian deputies — declared Abkhazia's sovereignty, and in July 1992 restored the 1925 Constitution of Abkhazia. At this stage, unlike Karabakh, Abkhazia had not proclaimed full independence from Georgia, but Abkhazian sovereignty. Sukhum advocated for a confederal framework 'as the only acceptable option' to resolve the conflict. 'This mean[t] that both [Georgia and Abkhazia] would remain fully sovereign (and recognised as such by the international community)

and retain their present state structures' (Coppieters 2000: 37). Meanwhile, on 26 November 1994, Abkhazia adopted a new Constitution, whereby Abkhazia was declared a sovereign democratic state without reference to secession from Georgia, and 'consolidating the post-war realities of the republic's state-building' (Anchabadze 1999: 146).[422] A major shift of the Abkhazian position — exacerbated by continuing Georgian military threats and failure of ongoing negotiations — in both political and legal terms, was the declaration of full independence of Abkhazia on 12 October 1999, supported by a popular referendum on 3 October. The 'Act on State Independence of the Republic of Abkhazia' stated: 'the disruption of state and legal relations between Abkhazia and Georgia initiated by the Georgian authorities and the subsequent Abkhazo-Georgian war of 1992-1993 resulted in the independence of Abkhazia both *de jure* and *de facto'*. The declaration appealed 'to the UN, OSCE, to all States of the world to recognise the independent State created by the people of Abkhazia on the basis of the right of nations to free self-determination'.[423] As with Karabakh, no state has recognised Abkhazia's independence.

**Autonomy vs 'Common state'**

Both Georgia and Azerbaijan have so far been willing to grant only 'the highest level of autonomy' (still undefined) to Abkhazia and Karabakh. In 1992 President Shevardnadze 'rejected the idea of establishing federal relations between Georgia and Abkhazia and emphasised that the Georgian leadership was "prepared to consider only defining the legal status of the Abkhaz autonomous region" within Georgia' (Chirikba 2000: 235; cf. UNPO 1992: 18). Although since then he has spoken about 'transforming Georgia into 'a unified federation',[424] in 2001 he reiterated Georgia's basic position on Abkhazia: 'Georgia will never reconcile itself to the loss of Abkhazia, but will use force to bring the breakaway republic back under its control only as a last resort, when all other peaceful means of resolving the conflict have been exhausted'.[425] Abkhazia's President, Vladislav Ardzinba, was as determined as Shevardnadze when he said: '[the Abkhazian] people would never give in to international pressure to become part of Georgia again' (Henze 1998: 99, cf.

UNPO 1992: 18-19). In his turn Azerbaijan's President Aliyev has expressed readiness to grant Karabakh 'the highest status of autonomy' to Karabakh, with the 'wider concept of self government', which 'is a great freedom, a status bordering independence'.[426]

Meanwhile, Abkhazia and Karabakh have rejected any form of 'hierarchical' or 'vertical' relation with Tbilisi or Baku. 'From the Abkhaz point of view 'autonomy' is opposed to 'sovereign statehood' — a point of view which is shared by most former autonomous units in the post-Soviet space' (Coppieters 2000: 39), including Karabakh — and is considered as subordination to the central government in Tbilisi and Baku. Furthermore, based on their negative experience of autonomy within Soviet Georgia and Azerbaijan — which constitutes a significant part of their contemporary movement — the Abkhazians and the Armenians do not believe that autonomy within the newly-independent Republics would be any different. As stated by the foreign minister of Karabakh, Naira Melkoumian, 'Autonomy is unacceptable today, especially with the attitude Azerbaijan is displaying by issuing threats' against the Karabakh Armenians.[427] Since declaring full independence in 1999, the Abkhazians have rejected the Georgian offer of federation (upgraded from the earlier offer of autonomy) arguing that until August 1992 the Abkhaz leadership itself was 'offering Georgia federalisation of mutual relations'. However, especially after the 1992-93 war, the Abkhazians have given more weight to security arrangements and guarantees than to 'the concrete Georgian proposals for the demarcation of powers between the federal centre and the autonomous periphery', which 'remind one rather of the classical pattern for the way administration was constructed during the period of Soviet totalitarianism than of any compromise programme for the democratisation of Georgia's internal structure' (Anchabadze 1999: 144; cf. Chirikba 2000: 233-34).

In an effort to find a compromise between the two fundamental and diametrically opposed positions, the international community has proposed various versions of a 'common state' solution, and have put pressure on the sides — but more on the Abkhazians (by Russia) and the Armenians (by Western governments) — to accept the principle tenets of a 'common state' or modified versions of it, whereby the former autonomies would be

*de facto* independent, but *de jure* part of their former titular States. However, given the internal state structural, political and socio-economic weakness of both Georgia and Azerbaijan, the prospects for a federalist solution to the conflicts remain doubtful (more on this in Chapter 7). 'Georgia is not ready to take the risk of political instability by building federal state structures in which sovereignty would be fragmented among various units (South Ossetia, Adjaria, various Georgian regions)' (Coppieters 2000: 39). As for Azerbaijan and Karabakh, to a large extent, their fundamental positions have not changed since the start of the conflict over a decade ago, but they have "played along" with the negotiation processes sponsored by the international community. More than 14 years after the beginning of the conflict, the statements of the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia are telling. President Aliyev made it very clear: 'we will never give up our lands…. Armenia is putting forward its own conditions, which we cannot accept… [If peace talks fail] we have to fight to liberate our lands, and fighting means dying'.[428] His Armenian counterpart, Robert Kocharian, a native and former president of Karabakh, was more blunt: 'Nagorno-Karabakh has never been part of Azerbaijan and never will be… This is the bottom line. Beyond [that] one can think of some solutions and invent new statuses'.[429] Basically, the exercise of the right of self-determination for Karabakh Armenians has meant two things: either union with Armenia or full independence.[430] As efforts for union with Armenia had failed in the wake of the legal vacuum of the collapsing Soviet Union, as far as they were concerned, declaration of independent statehood was the only other choice.

## Qualifications for Statehood

While, generally, the international community continues to favour the preservation of the territorial integrity of the countries of the former Soviet Union — and despite the fundamental differences between the parties in the conflicts — Abkhazia and Karabakh have acquired the basic attributes of statehood.

The Montevideo Convention (1933), the basic standard employed by the international community 'to assess whether a community is a state' and

qualifies for recognition (cf. Grant 1999: 5-6),[431] has four main requirements: a) a permanent population; b) a defined territory; c) a government, and d) capacity to enter into relations with other states. Abkhazia and Karabakh fulfil the first three requirements, and, at least in principle, meet the fourth requirement.

> *A permanent population*: Currently Abkhazia has a population of 180,000-200,000 and Karabakh 120-150,000. Despite their seemingly small numbers, the populations of Abkhazia and Karabakh are still greater than some of the smaller states which have been admitted into the United Nations.[432]
>
> *A defined territory*: Both Abkhazia and Karabakh have control over defined territories, at least within the boundaries designated in the Soviet period.
>
> *An elected government*: Both Abkhazia and Karabakh have legitimate governments, democratically elected presidents, parliaments and local officials, state institutions, and an army under the command of civilian authorities.
>
> *Capacity to enter into relations with other States*: Both Abkhazia and Karabakh are engaged in 'foreign relations' vis a vis the peace negotiations and are recognized as at least 'entities' in various international documents — such as ceasefire agreements — and are in a position to conduct international relations. In addition, they have unofficial 'representative offices' (quasi embassies): Karabakh in Armenia, Australia, France, Lebanon, Russia and the US, and Abkhazia in Russia, the US and the Netherlands.

Some scholars and legal experts argue that 'the empirical qualifications' of a *de facto* state, such as Abkhazia and Karabakh, 'cannot make it legal or legitimate in international society' (Lynch 2001: 4; cf. Pegg 1998). This is a valid point, however, what cannot be discounted is the fact that state qualifications have been gradually strengthened over the last 14 years. Indeed, with each passing year, the growing facts on the ground in Abkhazia and Karabakh make a return to their status within former titular states more difficult, as discussed

in the next chapter. It is a fact that an entire generation has been born in the 'independence' period, and their parents hardly remember life under Georgian or Azerbaijani rule.

## Conclusion

Legal and arbitrary political decisions made in the Stalin era — maintained throughout the Soviet period — constitute the essential *legal* bases of Georgian and Azerbaijani claims over Abkhazia and Karabakh respectively. The logical questions that have not yet been answered by Tbilisi and Baku — and for that matter the international community — are the following: Why have Georgia and Azerbaijan, which have respectively denounced their Soviet era constitutions and laws as 'illegal and void', not applied the same legal logic to the administrative arrangements made for Abkhazia and Karabakh under Soviet rule?[433] Why is it that Soviet laws related only to Abkhazia and Karabakh are accepted as still legally in force and legitimate, while all other laws are considered expired and void? Most significant, while virtually all of Stalin's illegal and brutal acts have been condemned — by the Soviets, the Russians, the Georgians and all others who have been affected by them[434] — why is the fact that Karabakh and Abkhazia were made part of two republics arbitrarily and against the wishes of their native populations still considered *legally binding* by Tbilisi and Baku in particular, and the international community in general?[435] (For instance, the Council of Europe has demanded the return to Georgia of the Meskhetian Turks, who were exiled en masse by Stalin.) Why didn't the international community — which had never accepted Stalin's illegal annexation of the Baltic states and had stood up for their liberation — when in 1992 it recognized the post-Soviet states, including the Republics of Georgia and Azerbaijan, not recognise that Abkhazia and Karabakh had not been part of Georgia and Azerbaijan, legally, at least starting from 1991?[436] As Nadein-Rayevsky wondered: 'why was it possible for the West to recognise the right of self-determination of the Bosnians, making up 25 percent of the territory's population, or to approve the creation of a 'Macedonia' and not to recognize the national rights of the Ossetians or the Abkhazians in Georgia [or Karabakh in Azerbaijan]?'[437]

As reflected in the history of the region, political and geostrategic considerations and interests of the international community in general, and the regional powers and state actors in particular, are considered far more important than the legal pedigrees of disputes. Yet the legal dimension of minority-majority disputes cannot be overlooked in the process of the search for a lasting solution to the conflicts. Our case studies also suggest that the 'one size fits all' approach of the international community to resolving inter-ethnic conflicts is a failed approach — at best, it could only be an imposed solution. The legal arguments presented by Abkhazia and Karabakh in defence of their right of self-determination have a much deeper historical basis than the rights of territorial integrity of Georgia and Azerbaijan, which are primarily based on their political positions in 1992 (i.e., UN recognition). Significantly, the conflicts had started and independence declared *before* Georgia and Azerbaijan acquired seats at the UN (cf. Nodia 1997-98: 6). As Asenbauer (1996: 146) observes, 'the entire Transcaucasian region has been waiting since the First World War for a peaceful and just settlement of the territorial questions'. As our case studies suggest, it remains doubtful whether taking the end of the Soviet Union (1991) as the legal and political starting point for the resolution of these conflicts would in fact bring lasting peace to this region.

While international recognition remains a central objective for Abkhazia and Karabakh, the lack of it has not affected their state-building efforts as the final stage of social, political and territorial restructuring and as the *magnum opus* of the 'new order' they have established in their respective states.

# CHAPTER 7

## Contested independence and State-Building

So far this thesis has argued that a multi-perspective study of the conflicts in the South Caucasus suggests that the characterisation of the conflicts merely as nationalistic movements falls short of accounting for other significant processes. The discussions in previous chapters have attempted to show that the conflicts are part of the larger processes of restructuring of minority-majority relations, consolidation of power, methodologies of crisis management, and legitimation of a 'new order'. This final chapter will focus on the major transformations in power relations and their effects on the process of state building. The second part deals with the problem of 'othering', how it impacts on the restructuring of minority-majority relations and, ultimately, the resolution of the conflicts.

In the last fourteen years, the conflicts in and over Abkhazia and Karabakh have gone through major transformations — one significant qualitative change is the transformation of what were internal problems in the USSR into international matters of concern and engagement. In this process — driven by the elite in Abkhazia and Karabakh — the early years of political activism have turned into international diplomacy, and 'freedom fighting' into combat ready, disciplined armies. Despite the absence of international recognition of their 'statehood', which remains problematic and distant, since 1991 the Abkhazians and the Karabakh Armenians have acquired basic state attributes and they function (in relative terms) as independent states.

Nevertheless, the non-recognition of the declared new 'states' in the South Caucasus is an important variable in the scrutiny and analysis of, at least, most Western observers. Indeed, more than any other, this key variable is considered a determinant factor in assessing the viability of the unrecognised states and their future prospects.[438] However, what many Western observers

overlook or do not take into account in their analysis is how the unrecognised states structurally are mirror reflections, on a smaller scale, of their former metropolitan states. Neither the metropolitan states (i.e., Georgia, Azerbaijan and for that matter Armenia) nor the unrecognised states (Abkhazia and Karabakh) are fully functioning states; that is, they are not 'bureaucratic' in the Weberian sense, as discussed below.[439] They are based on 'charismatic authority' and still in the process of transition and "re-invention" of government.

In the context of this chapter, while Weber's (1947: 324ff) 'ideal types' of authority provide a useful framework, we shall define 'charismatic authority' as individual (or group of) leaders who introduce a radical break from the former system or authority and assume leadership position by popular acclaim. At moments of 'national crisis', they are distinguished from other activists or advocates of the collective interests by their personal 'charisma'. Even after assuming a position of authority, the legitimacy of such charismatic leaders remains dependent on *popularity* rather than 'rational rules'. There is, however, a temporary and unstable dimension to charismatic leadership: leaders may change their position or thinking, there could be an 'irrational' element in their behaviour, and, in the long run, they are mortal beings bound to physical expiration. These varialbles and eventualities lead to 'routinisation' of authority often during the lifetime of the leader; or transform charismatic authority into bureaucratic, rational legal authority; or, possibly, go back to an institutionalised *traditional* structure (cf. Weber 1947: 363-373).

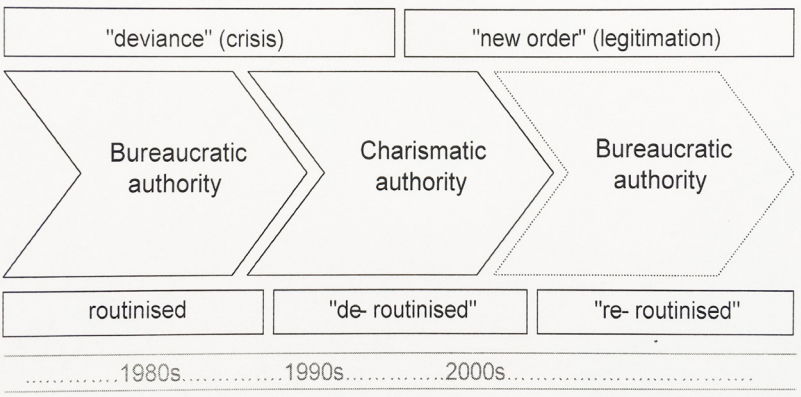
An examination of 'types' of authority in the South Caucasus provides a wider understanding of critical deficiencies, which have an impact on the resolution (or, rather, non-resolution) of the conflicts. True, procedural democracy, especially in dealings with the international community, is observable in the newly independent republics, but there is no substantive democracy.[440] In short, generally, studies of the South Caucasus do not scrutinise the *deviance* of the declared but unrecognised states in the framework of the *delinquencies* of the recognised metropolitan states. These variables are significant, at least methodologically. Autocratic or clan-based rule, nepotism, corruption, selective enforcement of the rule of law, lack of full human rights, etc. are, on the one hand, the result of the systemic disruption caused by the collapse of the USSR and, on the other, a political "culture" formed under decades of Communist rule.

## Transformation of authority

A closer look at the transformation of the 'types' of authority — or what Weber (1947: 330) calls the 'administrative organ', a unit exercising authority — offers insights into power relations. Chapter 4 discussed the transformation of authority in the context of a collapsing system — how authority is appropriated from the central government by regional, local and dissident elites and legitimised through various instruments. But, as our case studies suggest, once authority is redistributed and consolidated, in the *medium term* 'bureaucratic authority' (legal-rational) could be replaced by 'charismatic authority', and could be "re-bureaucraticised" in the *longer term* — i.e., when charismatic leadership is routinised (cf. Weber 328ff).[441] This appears to be particularly characteristic of state-building processes in the South Caucasus.

As presented in Figure 1, the transition from bureaucratic to charismatic authority is characterised by two key factors: 1) system-wide deviance from the established bureaucratic authority is caused by the weakening and eventual collapse of the entire order (i.e., USSR), and 2) in the subsequent authority "vacuum", charismatic leaders emerge (a) to appropriate authority from the previous system, (b) to manage crises — especially among the constituent elements of the previous system — and (c) to restructure former orders

**Figure 1. Authority 'type' change**



into "new orders". This shift to charismatic authority is triggered by major systemic crises and/or when accepted socio-political 'norms' of interaction are disrupted. In this transitional model, the previous bureaucratic authority goes through a process of "de-routinisation" — i.e., business is no longer as usual, and no longer played by previous ules.

The late 1980s and early 1990s developments in the South Caucasus are cases in point. All the movements for secession from the USSR (Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia) and from titular republics (Abkhazian and Karabakh) were led by charismatic leaders,[442] who subsequently led their countries into independence. The transformational objectives of these charismatic actors are also consistent with Weber's (1947: 361) assertion that 'charismatic authority repudiates the past and is in this sense a specifically revolutionary force'. However, Weber (1947: 364) explains that 'in its pure form charismatic authority may be said to exist only in the process of originating. It cannot remain stable, but becomes either tranditionalised[443] or rationalised, or a combination of both'.

The conflicts in the South Caucasus show that the charismatisation of bureaucratic authority is a functional outcome of the Transition and restructuring in the medium term. In the long term, however, it is bound to be bureaucratised (routinised) again, as suggested by Weber, primarily due to the eventual succession of (non-charismatic) leaders and the necessity of 'routine structures' for permanent relationships and stability.

Although charismatic authority still generally runs Georgia and Azerbaijan, both have faced serious challenges, especially from the mid-1990s. On the one hand, the increasing popular demand for socio-economic and political stability and growing disillusionment with 'charismatic' leaders and, on the other, external pressures for more accountability, rule of law and sustainability, is likely to lead to a process of re-routinisation of authority and a gradual shift back to bureaucratic authority.[444] One important indication of the beginning of the 'routinisation of charismatic authority' — or the re-bureaucratisation process — is the transfer of authority to the "next generation" of leadership. Arguably, the beginning of this process could already be seen in Abkhazia and Karabakh vis a vis the changes of leaderships (succession). In Abkhazia, the Prime Minister or the Vice President has

become the virtual head of state due to the grave illness of the President. In Karabakh, charismatic authority has been changing since 1996 when its former leader moved to Armenia to become prime minister and later president and, more recently, when the charismatic former defence minister, an influential figure, was jailed.[445] In Georgia and especially Azerbaijan 're-routinisation' has been much slower owing to the "charismatic" authority of their septuagenarian leaders (cf. Chapter 4).[446]

## Transformation of the elite

The changes in the make up of the elite in Abkhazia and Karabakh are also part of this transition process. Currently, there are two 'ideal type' groups of political and cultural elite in Abkhazia and Karabakh[447] (an economic elite has not yet emerged as a significant force due to the economic implications of the existing conflict):

a) Intellectuals, artists, and writers who were activists in the Soviet era in pursuit of the 'national causes' of their peoples. These were the initiators of the popular movements in the late 1980s. This group has nurtured a new cadre of intellectuals through various public, cultural and educational institutions.

b) A 'new' military and political elite that emerged after declarations of independence, mostly comprised of individuals who were involved in the armed struggle with Georgia and Azerbaijan in the early 1990s and currently hold important government positions.

While the first group is comprised of older, more ideological and history-conscious individuals, the new elite is mostly younger and more experienced in international affairs. It should be noted, however, that the 'new' elite, in Abkhazia especially, includes an influential group of actors with roots in Soviet political culture (cf. Henze 1998: 105ff; Coppieters 2002). In recent years, the influence of the Karabakh elite has extended beyond Karabakh:

in the Republic of Armenia, the President and the Defence Minister are Karabakhis, and other Karabakh natives hold high government positions; and in the Armenian diaspora, the Karabakh leadership enjoys full political and economic support.[448]

Despite differences of opinion on various aspects of authority, for the Abkhazian and Karabakh societies the most significant achievements of the ruling political and military elite has been the establishment of *de facto* independence since 1991 — reinforced by military "victories" and subsequent maintenance of well-disciplined armed forces — and the building up of constituent elements of statehood. These achievements have also accorded legitimacy to the leadership. Indeed, given the centrality of the conflict in the everyday life of the Abkhazians and the Karabakhis, the ongoing military tension, and the perceived eventuality of resumption of armed conflict, there is ideological uniformity in the *fundamental* issues facing Abkhazia and Karabakh — this does not discount the disagreements over methodologies and expediency. For example, political disagreements over the issue of status are virtually non-existent, especially in foreign policy, among the elite and the various political parties and civic organisations. The essential elements of this ideological and practical "doctrine" are: a) the inviolability of the right to self-determination; b) the unacceptability of a vertical relationship with their former titular states; c) physical security of their population; d) security guarantees by the international community — additionally for Karabakh, permanent territorial and political links with the Republic of Armenia (cf. Kvarchelia 1999; Tchilingirian 1999).

**Transformation of the conflicts**

Finally, the transformation, consolidation and legitimation of power in Abkhazia and Karabakh have taken place in three defining stages of transformation of the conflicts themselves. As presented in Figure 2, over time, the scope and results of each stage have introduced formidable facts on the ground, further solidifying the positions of the declared states.

What is significant here is how in a relatively short period of time the leaderships of the unrecognised states have managed major crises in minority-majority relations vis a vis their metropolitan states and turned them into

political assets. Furthermore, despite disadvantages and comparatively limited resources, they have been relatively successful in securing a position in the still evolving geo-strategic architecture of the South Caucasus. This has meant manoeuvring through and finding a balance between their political interests and the strategic interests of regional powers, especially Russia.

The conceptual analysis of transformations of authority types, the elite and the conflicts underline several issues that are critical to the understanding of the state-building processes in Abkhazia and Karabakh in particular, and their former titular states in general. We could assert that:

a) deviance from the established authority 'type' (as in the USSR) is common to both the minority (former autonomies) and the majority (titular states) — structurally they mirror each other;

b) in the medium term, the shift to charismatic authority is part of the transition into a 'new order' and radical restructuring of minority-majorityrelations;

c) in the long term, charismatic authority is not sustainable, and will gradually be re-bureaucratised. Lasting solutions to the conflicts are more likely to be found in such an eventual phase.

Both the recognised and unrecognised states in the South Caucasus are still in the *medium period*. This implies, perhaps the obvious: that these states have still a long way to go to become fully functioning states — i.e., Weberian bureaucracy — resembling most Western states. For instance, charismatic authority — with 'a character specifically foreign to everyday routine structures' and 'based on the validity and practice of personal qualities' (Weber 1947: 363) — has also put the independence of the various branches of government into question — neither the legislative nor the judiciary branches are independent from the influences of the executive.

The question remains whether a charismatically led metropolitan state, with critical structural weaknesses — such as Georgia or Azerbaijan — is in a position to resolve conflicts within its borders and offer the necessary guarantees of rights to its former autonomies. Moreover, other than the attempt to restore

**Figure 2. Stages of transformation of the conflict**

| STAGES | Political (mobilisation) 1988-1991 | Military 1991-1994 | 'State Building' 1994-2002 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Scope of conflict** | local/ internal | inter-state | international |
| **Actors** | Soviet-era elite | activists & 'new' elite | political, military, & civic elite |
| **Defining 'motive'** | discrimination by majority group | military attack by majority group | international legal rights (self-determination) |
| **Effects on Society** | politicisation of society | militarisation of society | international isolation |
| **Mediators** | central government (USSR) | strong regional power (Russia) | international & regional powers |
| **Results** | consolidation of power & resources | control of territory | *de facto* independence |

their territorial integrity and a *promise* to grant 'high autonomy' to Abkhazia and Karabakh respectively, the metropolitan states have not elaborated on the specifics of what they are willing to offer to their former autonomies. There is no public discussion of what autonomy would mean for the granting state and how would it benefit the receiving society. This lack of public discourse on autonomy and its "benefits" — coupled with continued bellicose statements by senior government officials in Baku and Tbilisi — gives further reason for the minorities to mistrust the "good intentions" of the majority.[449]

In discussing whether the Karabakh war was inevitable, Melander (2001: 74) points out, among other factors, that had Baku provided 'credible guarantees that Azerbaijan would become a tolerant democracy in which the Armenian minority could prosper', the results might have been different. Horowitz (2001: 645) makes a similar point about Abkhazia: 'conciliatory Georgian offers of strong regional political and cultural autonomy might

have satisfied the Abkhaz and South Ossetian populations and elites'. Since at least the ceasefire agreements, neither Tbilisi nor Baku has provided *credible guarantees* or *tolerant democracies*. As one British study put it: 'there is still a large gap between statements of good intentions and the actual practice' (Vaux & Goodhand 2002: 7). Our case studies suggest that a state with bureaucratic (legal-rational) authority and substantive democracy (see Chapter 2)[450] is more likely than a 'charismatic authority' to provide longer-term solutions to such conflicts. These issues must also be taken into consideration when studying or suggesting solutions to the conflicts.

## 'Statehood' in progress

The lack of both structural capacity and convincing plans in Georgia and Azerbaijan for the reintegration of their former autonomies has led Abkhazia and Karabakh to move further away from such "reunion".[451] At least in political, economic and military terms, Abkhazia has become deeply dependent on Russia,[452] and Karabakh on Armenia. In fact, in recent years there is growing integration of Abkhazia into Russia's "orbit" and Karabakh into Armenia. This move towards the "opposite direction" is also due to the existing intransigence of the parties in the conflict on the one hand, and the perceived bias of the international community in favour of the metropolitan states on the other.

There is another important factor in the state restructuring process: the "reinvention" or modernisation of state and government from the remnants of the former system is still in progress. One generalisation that could be made is that statehood — or the determination of type of statehood — is still evolving. More than a decade after independence, the question whether to have a presidential or parliamentary form of state is still debated in Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. The Constitutions of the three republics are still being amended and reshaped. The make up, sphere of competencies and "ethics" of the civil service is still under discussion. A host of other issues related to statehood continue to be debated. These questions are also prevalent in Abkhazia and Karabakh, but most important of all — due to international non-recognition and a dire need for essential resources — the question in Sukhum and Stepanakert is over the level and intensity of integration with

Russia and Armenia respectively. (At one time, the idea of becoming a federal unit of Russia was also entertained in Karabakh). These options are still possibilities as an alternative way of exercising the right of self-determination. In the absence of any real progress in the negotiations and uncertainties about how regional power relations will develop, Russian-Abkhazian relations are determined by Moscow's relations with Tbilisi in particular and its geostrategic interest in the region in general.[453] Armenia-Karabakh relations saw dramatic changes when Karabakh's leader became the president of Armenia. This was no less than a convergence of policies, interests and expectations — despite misgivings of opposition circles in Armenia over its implications.[454] It remains to be seen what will become of this relationship when the tenure of the Karabakh-born president of Armenia ends. In sum, such conditions in local and regional developments have added to the complexity of finding a solution to the conflicts in Abkhazia and Karabakh. Compromises and accommodations agreed upon by the parties require basic structural capacities that a granting and receiving entity must have. The question is whether a still evolving state possesses such stable structures.

It is against the background of such "work in progress", rather than a "recipe book" approach that the state qualifications of Abkhazia and Karabakh must be scrutinized.[455] True, compared with other developed countries or states, they may look "provincial", but in many fundamental aspects, this is also largely true for the three republics of the South Caucasus. It is important to distinguish the internal and external bases of structural weaknesses. The starting point of state re-building for both the recognised and unrecognised states is the dilapidated infrastructure that existed during Soviet times — they are engaged in a process of building a *new* structure on *old* foundations. The structural weaknesses of the unrecognised states are largely due to external factors, most critical of which are the lack of formal international support; foreign investments; aid for rebuilding infrastructure; communications with the rest of the world (especially in information and technology); resources and substantial assistance for development of civil society; and so on. The denial of such international assistance and engagement, notwithstanding the work of NGOs, is meant to punish the 'secessionists' and somehow force them to negotiate an end to the conflict. But this has had other consequences:

further isolation of the society and a re-enforcement of the suspicion that the international community is not impartial in the resolution of the conflicts, but favours the position of the metropolitan states.

State building is still progressing in the south Caucasus, particularly in Abkhazia and Karabakh. The first phase of the transition is the radical restructuring of former power relations and the *de facto* 'new order' that exists in Abkhazia and Karabakh — achieved at very high costs of socio-economic difficulties and international isolation. However, while externally the new order has not been internationally legitimated, the most essential feature of the independence of the former Soviet autonomies is the comprehensive redrawing of political, social, economic and national boundaries. For the elite and the societies of Abkhazia and Karabakh, this is the most significant achievement of independence. The Abkhazians and the Karabakh Armenians are no longer a minority in a titular state, but the majority in a restructured 'state'. They are no longer dependent on decisions made in far away centres of power, but decide upon their own course of action. The revealing answer of one Karabakh intellectual provides further insight to this fundamental change. When I asked him what was the most important aspect of independence, he explained:

> The most important thing for me today, even if I go hungry, is the fact that today I do not feel Armenian, I feel human. The Azerbaijanis used to constantly remind us that we are Armenian…. "You are Armenian, Armenian, Armenian…." and used to see us as second-class citizens. I am free of this heavy burden. I am a human being. I am an Armenian human being who is concerned about daily bread, about government, about borders, and how I could help the situation. We have reached this point, which is more important than having an extra pair of shoes. We grew up with bare feet [laughs]… and it is fine if we live with worn out shoes today….[456]

The minorities were not regarded as primarily citizens of the majority's state, but defined by the majority as the 'other' — the Armenians

were 'non-Azeris', the Abkhazians were 'non-Georgians', they were 'settlers' or 'latecomers' in the majority's state (cf. Nodia 1997-1998: 26; Lakoba 1995).[457] With independence, the minorities had eliminated the 'social control' of the majority, the 'heavy burden' of being the 'other'.

## The costs of independence

Virtually all former Soviet republics continue to face the effects of the collapse of the former system of government, disruption of the economy and socio-political transitions. But, in addition to these challenges, the unrecognised states, unlike the metropolitan states, were (and still are) faced with the challenges of providing physical security, protection of territory, rebuilding the enormous destruction caused by the war, the loss in the war of a significant part of the labour force, the massive task of creating a functioning government, becoming self-sufficient under blockades and embargoes, and conducting foreign affairs. These "special" conditions have great bearing on the long term development of Abkhazia and Karabakh, whether they are reintegrated into their metropolitan states or become *de jure* independent.

It is important to note, however, that the pace and extent of development in Abkhazia and Karabakh are quite different from each other — as Dov Lynch (2001: 6) puts it, 'Karabakh is [a] much stronger state'. While Abkhazia has been blockaded and heavily dependent on the "good will" of Russia and the assistance provided by international NGOs, the state resources of the Republic of Armenia, as well as the financial and political resources of the large Armenian diaspora have generously helped Karabakh. The financial and political assistance Abkhazia receives from its diaspora, especially in Turkey, has not been substantial, and nothing nearing what Karabakh receives from the Armenian diaspora.[458] But, rather than focusing on the particularities and divergences of the resources of Abkhazia and Karabakh, which are covered elsewhere,[459] for the purposes of our discussion, we shall present the main issues that are generalisable — issues that continue to pose formidable challenges to the 'statehood' of Abkhazia and Karabakh.

- **Recognition**

While *de facto* independent, the non-recognition of independence or some sort of political status by other states remains a major foreign affairs challenge for the leadership and society in Abkhazia and Karabakh. In general, neither the international community nor regional states have shown any willingness to grant recognition of full independence. Mobilisation of resources towards recognition continues, and, despite the obvious implications of non-recognition, Abkhazia and Karabakh have progressively enjoyed unofficial and semi-official recognition, especially since the 1994 ceasefires.[460] On the other hand, the Abkhazians and the Karabakh Armenians argue that their independence from former titular states is not determined by international recognition, but by the very exercise of their right to self-determination — i.e., the formal declaration of independence, supported by a popular referendum.[461]

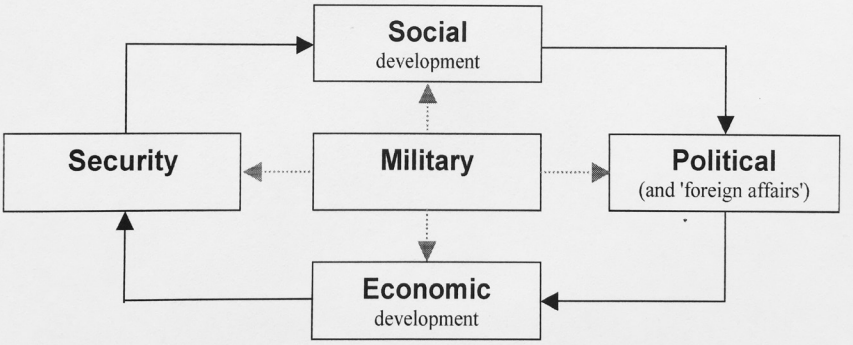
- **Security and economy**

Security issues and military preparedness predominate in the internal and external affairs of Abkhazia and Karabakh. More than eight years after the ceasefires peace has not been established — the relationship between the former autonomies and their titular states is characterised as 'col war'.[462] The balance of military power has been a significant factor in the maintenance of the fragile cease-fires since 1994. However, while the cease-fire regime has provided a respite to the warring sides, it has also been a period of rearming and extensive military training on all sides.[463]

The Abkhaz and Karabakh leaderships believe that Georgia and Azerbaijan respectively will eventually resolve the conflict militarily. Persistent statements by Georgian and Azerbaijani government officials and opposition parties for a 'military solution' make the threat real.[464] This 'threat', whether imaginary or real, has made military strength and combat readiness top priorities in the unrecognised states.[465]

Indeed, as shown in Figure 3, in the 'medium term' of transition, the military factor has had a major (negative) impact on all levels of development.

**Figure 3. Militarisation of society and state development process**




On the one hand, the likelihood of the resumption of military hostilities, on the other, the lack of any real progress in the resolution of the conflicts, have made the military factor a dominant aspect of everyday life, with serious consequences. For example, economically, the maintenance of a large armed force drains large resources from a state with limited economic resources. In terms of the labour force, male citizens between the ages of 17 and 45 are either drafted into the army or are on constant alert for mobilisation. This, combined with large unemployment, has resulted in the "feminisation" of the labour force, i.e., women have become the primary breadwinners, with all its social consequences. Moreover, the military establishment, due to its importance, has held significant economic levers, which has led to corruption and an unequal distribution of wealth.[466] Politically, the military situation has hindered the development of effective opposition political parties. 'The military continue to be an important influence on political process' (Vaux and Goodhand 2002: 13).

In addition to the loss of thousands of lives, the war in Abkhazia has caused damage to the tune of billions of dollars with enormous 'destruction of private houses, public buildings, cultural and economic institutions' (UNPO 1994: 11-12; UNPO 1992: 14-17). In Karabakh, the government estimated that the war has caused some $2.5 billion damage to its economy and infrastructure.[467] In general, the economies of the unrecognised states

remain meagre, and subsistence is heavily dependent on the agricultural sector. Other sectors remain either under-utilised or underdeveloped. Comparatively, however, Karabakh's situation is much better than that of Abkhazia, due to the substantial assistance received from Armenia and the investments made by the diaspora.[468]

The price of independence has been very expensive to both societies. In addition to security and the economy, a number of social problems — for example, the plight of orphans, widows and the elderly — require both short and long term solutions. While the governments have instituted various social welfare programmes, the establishment of adequate socio-economic infrastructure will depend on the final resolution of the conflicts. Yet, for the foreseeable future, a resolution is nowhere near.

## Demonisation of the 'other'

One of the overlooked aspects of these two conflicts is the discourse and impact of 'othering' in minority-majority relationships. Beyond the structural weaknesses of the metropolitan states and the lack of convincing offers for 'reintegration' of the former autonomies, the ideological and social discourse of 'othering' among the conflicting parties present the most formidable problems to the resolution of the conflicts. If a lasting peace is ultimately a process of reconciliation between societies, the persistent demonisation of the 'other' prevalent in the South Caucasus puts the whole prospect into question. As Suny (1997) argues, 'nationalist violence or inter-ethnic cooperation and tolerance depend on what narrative, what tales of injustice, oppression, or betrayal are told. Tellers of tales have enormous (though far from absolute) power to reshape, edit, shape their stories, and therefore to promote a future of either violence or cooperation'. Government officials, intellectuals, and the media are the main exponents of such 'tales' in our case studies.

For the Azerbaijanis and the Georgians, besides history, the 'othering' discourse is rooted in the sense of military defeat, loss of territory, socio-economic conditions, and most important, the plight of the refugees and IDPs — some 250,000 in Georgia and nearly 800,000 in Azerbaijan. The frustration

and the enormous problems the refugees and IDPs face in their daily lives present powerful emotional and political bases of 'othering'.[469] For the Abkhazians, it is the fear of 'georgianisation'; for Karabakh Armenians, it is the memory and fear of 'genocide', both in history and modern times — especially as they equate the Azerbaijanis with the Turks, thus the historical animosity of Armenians towards the Turks in Turkey is automatically transferred to the Azerbaijanis.

The point of the discussion here is not whether the 'othering' discourse is justified or not, or whether there are legitimate reasons for such discourse, but rather its sociological implication. More importantly, the strict "us-them" divide, as well as the process of projection of individual acts or particular events on entire populations, make the peaceful resolution of the conflicts less and less likely. On the contrary, the extreme 'othering' discourse has led to more militancy in society.[470] It is highly unlikely that conflicting societies would engage in a process of reconciliation under such circumstances. As Laitin and Suny (1999) observe: 'Nourished by resentments and material deprivation, the seeds of large-scale war that could easily last for generations and draw in powerful states like Iran, Turkey and Russia continue to be planted, almost hourly, in the South Caucasus'.

In Georgia, it is militant groups who dominate the 'othering' discourse to mobilise support — especially among internally displaced people (IDPs) — for the restoration of Georgian rule over Abkhazia. The most vocal among them is the "White Legion" (Tetri Legioni), composed of Georgian former members of the Abkhaz Interior Ministry — which for years operated in the security zone along the Abkhazia-Georgia border, conducting a series of armed attacks on the Abkhazian police force and civilians. The other main group is made up of informal paramilitaries subordinate to the Abkhaz Parliament in Exile, the Tbilisi-supported entity comprised of 28 Georgian former deputies elected to the Abkhaz parliament in 1991. 'Both advocate a new Georgian offensive to restore Tbilisi's hegemony over Abkhazia by force' (Fuller 1997).[471] For instance, in May 2002, Temur Shashiashvili, governor of the western Georgian province of Imereti, 'warned that the world will be faced with "another Afghanistan" unless Russia coerces Abkhazia to agree to a settlement — implying that the Abkhazians are like the Taliban. He 'issued an ultimatum to the Georgian

leadership to persuade the international community to pressure the Abkhaz to accept a peace settlement within six months'. Otherwise he would 'personally lead a guerrilla campaign against Abkhazia'. He set a two weeks deadline for Tbilisi to comply.[472] Such militant groups have received support from state officials, including President Shevardnadze who was in favour of 'a "strong and united" guerrilla movement composed of Georgian former residents of Abkhazia'.[473]

The Georgian media, too, has had its share in the 'othering' process. Especially since independence, 'one can find countless quotations to support the allegation that minorities had good reason to expect illiberal treatment in an independent Georgia' (Nodia 1997-98: 14). One of the main stereotypes in the Georgian media is the portrayal of Abkhazians as puppets of Russia — a community manipulated by Moscow against Georgian interests. Indeed, Georgians often accuse Russia of 'deliberate policy of subversion and oppression'.[474] While Russia is not blameless, the constant shift of responsibility on Moscow or outside players has hampered serious discussion within Georgian society on national political issues, especially regarding minorities.

In Abkhaz, the main theme in the 'othering' discourse is 'Georgian imperialism', and the perceived threat of 'georgianisation' — the loss of culture, language and identity (cf. Nodia 1997-98: 28-29). 'We're tired of being "ruled" by Georgia," an Abkhazian man said at the start of the armed conflict. 'They shout, "Abkhazia is ours", and treat us like property' (Nasmyth 1992: 200). In the words of President Ardzinba, Georgia 'is a neighbour state trying to capture territory that does not belong to them' (Steavenson 2002: 254). Georgians are often demonised as 'aggressors', 'chauvinists' or 'destroyers of Abkhaz culture'. Moreover, past Abkhaz suffering in the hands of especially two Georgians, Joseph Stalin and Lavrenty Beria, are neither forgotten nor forgiven. Brutal acts committed by these men in the name of Communism are projected as "traits" peculiar to the Georgian nation (cf. Baudelaire & Lynch 2000; Kvarchelia 1999: 32-33; Hewitt 1999).

In Azerbaijan, the discourse of 'othering' of Karabakh Armenians in particular and the Armenians in general primarily portrays them as 'aggressors' and 'terrorists'. For instance, Novruz Mammadov, head of the foreign relations department of the Azerbaijani presidential administration, explained that

'the proof of this is the history of the Armenians over the last 150 years. This entire period consists of aggressive separatism and terrorism by the Armenians'. Therefore, 'Armenian terrorism has special merits in developing terrorism in general and in forming international terrorism in particular'.[475] *Alternativ*, a Baku newspaper, further explained that 'Armenian terrorism is moral, cultural, political, economic and all-human terror'.[476] Another example is the declaration of the Human Rights Institute of the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan that 'Armenian terror organisations are dangerous for peace and stability in our planet'.[477]

Since September 11, 2001 the terrorist profiling has found more currency in Azerbaijan.[478] Not only Armenians have established 'divisions' among militant Islamic cells in Central Asia, but also 'scientific research' by the National Academy of Sciences has shown that terrorist acts by ethnic Armenians in Arab countries are aimed at dealing a blow to the Islamic world and laying the groundwork for a Christian-Muslim conflict'.[479] Armenians commit other types of terrorism as well, such as 'virtual terror', that is, 'Armenia's Internet war against Azerbaijan… bankrolled by Osama bin Laden', as reported by *Zerkalo* newspaper (1 December 2001).[480] In foreign affairs, government and parliamentary representatives have used opportunities in bilateral relations and multinational organisations (UN, OSCE, Council of Europe, etc) to present the Armenians of Karabakh as 'terrorists', 'illegal bandits', 'drug traffickers',[481] 'environmental polluters', and to prepare the legal basis for the 'fight against terrorist' in Karabakh.[482]

In the 'othering' discourse of the Karabakh Armenians, the Azerbaijanis are equated with the Turks and the history of 'genocide'. A telling example is a statement made by Karabakh president, Arkady Ghoukassian, who saw the Karabakh conflict as part of the historical conflict between the Armenians and Turks in the Ottoman Empire and now in the Turkish Republic. For Ghoukassian, and Armenian nationalist political parties, such as the ARF, 'the issue of Karabakh is part of *Hay Tad*' —"the Armenian Cause", the historical conflict between Armenians and Turks that goes back to 19th century Ottoman period, in which Armenian nationalist demands for return of 'historical Armenian territories' in Turkey are prominent. As such, according to Ghoukassian, 'the issues of the Genocide [of Armenians] and Karabakh are

really the same, with the only difference that Armenians still live in Karabakh today, whereas they are no longer present in Turkey'.[483] (It should be noted that, although there are virtually no Armenians living in Anatolia, some 80,000 Armenians still live in Turkey, largely in Istanbul). This line of political 'othering' is extended to other events in the history of Karabakh as well. For example, in 2000, the '80th Anniversary of the Armenian pogroms in Shushi' was officially commemorated in Karabakh by a government decree. This was the anniversary of events of June 1919 when, according to a Karabakh government official publication, 'the Azerbaijani irregular bands aided by Turkish expeditionary forces remaining in Transcaucasus, in an attempt to subdue Armenians in Karabakh, attacked, massacred, and torched the Armenian section of [the city of] Shushi'.[484] The anniversaries of more recent events are commemorated regularly in Karabakh and Armenia.[485] What is conveniently overlooked in the commemoration of such tragic events is the cleansing of Azerbaijanis from Karabakh and adjacent occupied territories by Armenian militias in the early 1990s. On the other hand, President Kocharian of Armenia, himself a Karabakh Armenian, cited 'ethnic incompatibility' — a rather undiplomatic term used during a speech at a diplomatic academy in Moscow — to describes the existing *otherness* in Armenian-Azerbaijani relations:

> The Armenian pogroms in Sumgait and Baku, and the attempts at mass military deportation of Armenians from Karabakh in 1991-92 indicate the impossibility for Armenians to live in Azerbaijan in general. We are talking about some sort of ethnic incompatibility…. It is not pleasant to talk about this, but it's a fact. Something like that has already been seen in the Balkans. This motivated out statement [sic] that Armenia is responsible for the security of the people of Nagorno Karabakh. A nation that has survived genocide cannot allow it to repeat.[486]

His Azerbaijani counterpart, Aliyev, was as undiplomatic when on another occasion he said, 'The Armenian aggressors do not differ in any way from Hitler's armies, from German fascism'.[487]

The Armenian discourse of 'othering' is primarily rooted in the sense of national victimhood and irredentism. More radical 'othering' or demonisation of the Azerbaijanis and the Turks is found in the discourse of fringe groups in Armenia — for example, the 'Defence of the Liberated Territories', a group made up of Karabakh war veterans or the organisation of Nakhichevan Armenians, a group made of former natives of Azerbaijan's exclave demanding its transfer to Armenian control — and occasionally in mainstream groups, such as the ARF (Dashnaks), a nationalist party opposed to any territorial concession to Azerbaijan.[488]

These sweeping generalisations by the parties in the conflicts overshadow centuries-old neighbourly relations and friendly relations among ethnically diverse peoples in this region. Indeed, especially in recent years, the positive aspects of inter-ethnic relations are rarely discussed in societies of the South Caucasus. It is only when outsiders or journalists ask that individuals recount examples or experiences of good relationships with the 'others'.

One radical outcome of the 'othering' discourse is 'ethnic cleansing' — i.e., the complete elimination or physical distancing of the 'other' — whether through lethal means (mass killing) or forced transfers of population.[489] Once the relationship is radicalised and former social and political boundaries altered, the 'other' is 'demonised': this serves the purpose of one group to preserve its 'gains' in the restructuring of relations, and for the other group to retake what it has lost. For our case studies, the roles might yet be reversed. The adverse effects of this potentially recurring cycle could be broken or escalation of tensions defused by mediators — especially outside actors. But, ultimately, the very (hostile) groups in the conflict must agree on the terms of restructuring of relationships.

## Like roots of a tree

For over a decade, but especially since 1994, the international community has attempted to mediate solutions. A number of comprehensive proposals and many other suggestions of methodologies and structures have been presented, such as the 'common state' model, 'asymmetric federalism' and others.[490] In virtually all these proposals, the troubled history of this region and its "lessons"

are considered unimportant. As Lynch (2001: v) puts it, 'what matters most is 2002, less 1992'. Yet history is instructive not only to understand this region, but most crucially to discern possible solutions to these conflicts.

As this thesis has argued, the conflicts in the South Caucasus are not the result of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Postponed solutions to fundamental problems — objective and subjective — had accumulated over at least the last two centuries. Sociologically, the subjectively 'constructed history' in group identification and collective consciousness *is* 'real' history — i.e., it is defined as real and objective for the group. Thus, history, in both essentialist and constructivist sense, matters. The analysis of the history of Abkhazia and Karabakh in the last two centuries presented below is revealing.

Over a period of 189 years (1803-1992), there has been a major conflict every 4.3 years in Abkhazia; and every 4 years in Karabakh (in a 179-year period). In the 20th century alone, the average is staggering 2.9 years in Abkhazia and 1.9 years in Karabakh. The conflicts are divided into three categories: major military conflicts, political conflicts or protests, and popular protests or petitions. As indicated in the table below (and in more detail in Appendix), political conflicts have been the most frequent: on average every 10.5 years in Abkhazia and 7.7 years in Karabakh. In the 20th century, the averages are 5.8 and 3.7 respectively.

These figures support the arguments presented in this thesis that the issue of political restructuring and modernisation is fundamental to the current conflicts and their resolution. However, if peace is to be lasting, the analysis and understanding of the patterns that emerge in the history of this region are indispensable. There are instances where examining the roots of a tree provide better treatment to the part above the earth. Perhaps, the South Caucasus is such a tree?

## Conclusion

The unrecognised and recognised states in our case studies are still progressing, marked by significant transformations of authority, the elite, and the conflicts. These changes occur on two levels: a) transformation from a former central system into a new one and b) radical restructuring of relations among

component elements of the old order. As the minority, through available resources, redraws the political and socio-economic boundaries, the high price paid by the majority for the forced rearrangement radicalises the relationship. In this outcome, both groups engage in a discourse of extreme 'othering' to legitimise their claim and mobilise support toward eventual confrontation, which both groups believe is inevitable. In the interim, mediators could either delay the confrontation or defuse it into a mutually accepted re-arrangement of relations. But, ultimately, it is only the groups themselves who can resolve their conflicts. This requires structural capacity, stable 'bureaucratic' (democratic) authority and socio-political will. Finally, a more comprehensive study of the patterns in the history of the region provides a useful framework for the understanding of the conflicts and their resolution.

# Conclusion

As argued throughout this thesis, the conflicts in the South Caucasus are largely the product of the lack of multi-level restructuring of minority-majority relations. Sociologically, the inter-ethnic disputes reflect the attempt by disadvantaged groups to overcome system-imposed barriers to the preservation of 'other' identity. This 'other' identity has both objective and subjective dimensions. As the dominant group consistently defines the minority group as 'other' — as 'them' — the characterisation further alienates the minority and is integrated into the subjective self-perception of the group. This motivates the minority group to mobilise efforts to struggle against the homogenising policies of the more powerful group. Thus, the continued mutual 'othering' becomes a defining negative process in the perpetuation of conflict. While nationalism is a mobilising ideology toward change for a perceived "better" collective future, it is not the sole determining factor. The negative experience of autonomy in the Soviet period — as well as the political, military, and socio-economic variables in the history of the South Caucasus — cannot be discounted when analysing the conflicts and suggesting models for resolution.

Even as history remains a contested and politicised subject in the minority-majority relations, there is at least one important "lesson" in the history of the South Caucasus. Unresolved political and territorial conflicts could resurface — with various levels of intensity — depending on the political and geostrategic developments over a long period of time, and the 'historic' opportunities they accord to different groups engaged in conflicts. The establishment of Soviet power in the Caucasus was both a blessing and a 'curse'. While it resolved some existing territorial and inter-ethnic disputes, it failed to secure basic collective rights and the preservation of 'national peculiarities' of autonomous minority enclaves situated within a larger titular state. On the contrary, the political and legal arrangements made in the Soviet period, which

gave controlling power to titular authorities, gradually undermined the viability of the 'autonomy' granted to minorities. The failures of the autonomies were marked by political, economic, cultural and educational discriminations and homogenising policies of the titular authorities. The alarm over 'depopulation' and 'cultural extinction' was perceived as real by the minorities. Indeed, as the components that defined the minority group were threatened by the policies of the majority — who were to police and guard 'constitutional rights' but instead weakened those structures — the national elites of the minority groups mobilised a movement toward protecting those cultural, social and political structures that provide points of reference to their collective existence. Attempts are made to resolve such disputes in minority-majority relations through legal, political and administrative measures. However, once the central government collapses, the crises turn into large-scale inter-ethnic conflicts, with military consequences. The radicalisation of the political-territorial problem also causes a breakdown of macro- and micro-social relations among the ethnic groups who had lived together for a long time.

The collapse of the Soviet Union provided 'historic' opportunities to the minorities to force restructuring of power relations between the ruler and the ruled. Nonetheless, the process has been radical, violent and contested — at a very high cost of human suffering on all sides in the conflicts. As reflected in conflicts elsewhere in the world (for instance, the former Yugoslavia), the persistent resistance of the dominant group to systemic reforms and restructuring of socio-political relations gradually reduced the "tolerance" level of the disadvantaged groups. Other case studies (cf. Gurr 1993) of similar situations suggest that the accumulated pressure in minority-majority relations can burst into violence, especially when the dominant group or state is faced with major systemic and/or political changes of its own — for example, the disintegration of the Communist empire as a whole.

By the time the Soviet empire collapsed, the minorities were in a position, politically and militarily, to forcefully change the boundaries that were once a permanent feature of being a minority. They 'restructured' their status from being a minority within the titular state into being a majority within their claimed territorial boundaries. This restructuring process is achieved through transformation, redistribution and legitimation of power and authority.

**Frequency of Conflicts in Abkhazia and Karabakh 1803-1992**
(see Appendix for details)

| | **Abkhazia** | | | | **Karabakh** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **1803-1992** | Military conflict | Political conflict/ protest | Popular protest/ petition | **1813-1992** | Military conflict | Political conflict/ protest | Popular protest/ petition |
| Total number of conflicts | 44 | 11 | 18 | 15 | 44 | 8 | 23 | 13 |
| **Average years** | **4.3** | 17.2 | 10.5 | 12.6 | **4** | 22.3 | 7.7 | 13.7 |
| **20TH CENTURY ALONE** | | | | | | | | |
| Total number of conflicts | 30 | | | | 39 | | | |
| **Average years** | **2.9** | 17.4 | 5.8 | 8.7 | **1.9** | 12.3 | 3.7 | 5.7 |

Ultimately, such restructuring aims to remove the perceived or real 'threats' to the collective existence of the minority group and the establishment of a 'new order' — self-determination.

The established 'new order' is legitimised and maintained by the 'rehabilitation' of social institutions — for example religion, which restores a connection with past identity and culture — and the articulation of legal and political arguments. While this provides the basis for the reconstruction of plausibility structures of current social reality, it has a negative dimension: the "othering" of the titular majority — in turn the majority's 'othering' of the minority — and a relatively significant factor in the resolution of the inter-ethnic conflicts.

The 'new order' created and maintained in the last 14 years by the former Soviet autonomies in the South Caucasus remains contested, but with each passing year its reversal becomes more difficult. The international community has not recognised the legitimacy of the declared independence of the former autonomies. On the one hand, the lack of recognition has not affected their state-building efforts as the final stage of social, political and territorial restructuring of their relations with the majority. On the other hand, the resolve of their former titular states to reverse the course of developments raises the stakes for a forceful (military) return to the former status quo.[491] Since at least the 1994 ceasefire agreements in Karabakh and Abkhazia, as

Jonathan Cohen of Conciliation Resources put it, 'the psychological heritage of separation that is accumulating and the lack of sufficiently strong peace constituencies make it difficult to turn war fatigue into peace hunger'.[492] Indeed, the ceasefires have lasted so far not necessarily because of the peaceful intentions of the parties, but because of the balance of military power and political assets of the parties in the conflicts. Even as the original causes of the conflicts have been virtually "forgotten" in the current political discourse of the metropolitan states, two colliding principles have become the determining factors of the conflicts and their resolution: on the one hand, the territorial integrity of Georgia and Azerbaijan; and the right of self-determination of the Abkhazians and Karabakh Armenians, on the other. The virtual reduction of these conflicts into a contention of these two colliding principles has created a stalemate in the negotiations process, especially as it ignores fundamental issues in minority-majority relations and the management of centre-periphery relations.[493]

## Prospects for conflict resolution

Given the long-history, causes and consequences of the conflicts in Karabakh and Abkhazia and their multi-dimensional complexities discussed in this thesis, the prospects for speedy resolution to the conflicts are bleak. More than eight years of negotiations, under the auspices of the international community, have not resulted in any meaningful progress. Arguably, it could be said that the positions of the parties to the conflict since the start of the negotiations process in 1994 (and even before) have not changed significantly. On the contrary, instead of a genuine search for understanding the position of the other and for direct talks with their 'subjects', the sides have largely blamed and relied on outsiders. Georgia and Azerbaijan continue to accuse "outsiders" (mainly Russia) of causing the conflicts and of benefiting from the maintenance of the status quo — i.e., no war, no peace — while Abkhazia and Karabakh have used the "patronage" of Russia and Armenia respectively to maintain their *de facto* independence.

True, the involvement of third parties has prevented the resumption of hostilities, but the internationally sponsored talks have not moved forward

towards a phase more conducive for peace. This is not because of lack of efforts on the part of the international community, but because the parties in the conflict are not ready to compromise — despite their stated intentions to do so. The parties to the conflict hope that by relegating "responsibility" for resolution to the international community, it will impose a settlement on the 'other'.[494]

The engagement in the peace process of the international community — with its own sets of expectations and geo-strategic interests — has not been free of complications either.[495] The self-interests of the third party states — whether individual or collective — have too often collided with the interests of the parties in the conflicts, just as, for example, in the former Yugoslavia, Cyprus or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. When assessing the role of the international community, Michael Ignatieff makes a poignant observation about Bosnia, which is pertinent to the South Caucasus:

> The promised reconciliation hasn't actually occurred…. When traumatized people fail to play out our script of reconciliation, we tend to blame them rather than our own wishful thinking. Bosnians of all ethnic groups would be shallow creatures indeed if they did not hold onto memory and pain. Yet we are impatient with their memory, impatient with their reluctance to be reconciled. We are in a hurry. We are leaving, in part, because they have failed to provide us with the requisite happy ending.[496]

On the other hand, the intransigence of the parties to the conflict in the South Caucasus has made the task and role of the international community even more difficult. There is an element of "intervention fatigue" and frustration in the international community. While the sides in the conflict expect outsiders to resolve their problems, the international community has made it clear that the ultimate "burden" of peace and reconciliation must be borne by the parties themselves. Whether the parties are willing and ready is another question.

Against the background of the issues and discussions presented in this thesis, we can ascertain that the "peace process" in the South Caucasus will be a very long process extending over decades, not years. The international community and third-party mediators will have to adopt a long-term approach for at least the next 10 to 15 years. Rather than just focusing on "conflict resolution" and "confidence building measures", which are important, the long-term prospects for the settlement of the conflicts require a *crisis management* mechanism. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict — and the Cyprus problem — is instructive: the task of establishing a framework for peace talks itself — let alone a final peace — could take decades. Even after the signing of the Oslo Peace Accord in 1993 between Israel and the Palestinians and after the 'historic' handshake of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat on the White House lawn, violent confrontations have continued. Indeed, the political developments and violence since Oslo have virtually terminated the terms of the agreement. In Cyprus, it has taken more than a quarter of a century to draw up a draft agreement as the basis for talks. The conflicts in Karabakh and Abkhazia share many similarities with these conflicts, most importantly, the issue of the return of occupied territories (by Armenians to Azerbaijan) and the return of hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people (IDPs). The Armenians, like the Israelis, have insisted on maintaining control over certain areas of Azerbaijani territory, such as the Lachin corridor, the land strip connecting Karabakh with Armenia, for 'security' reasons. Azerbaijanis are opposed to such territorial concessions. The resolve of one Azerbaijani IDP expresses the general mood in Azerbaijan: 'Not a single inch of our land will remain under enemy occupation'.[497] The Abkhazians have allowed the return of only a small portion of Georgian IDPs and insist on limiting the number of returnees in a final agreement. Like Israel's concern over the issue of the return of Palestinian refugees, the Abkhazians fear that the return of over 200,000 IDPs would eventually alter the demography of Abkhazia to Georgian advantage. This is one of the most contentious issues in the Abkhazian-Georgian conflict. The fact that the Abkhazians are a minority in Abkhazia remains problematic. Yet, this is not unique to Abkhazia. When Kazakhstan declared independence, the Kazakhs were a minority — 40 percent of the population. Only after 1999 did they become a majority with 53.4 percent due to emigration of Russians and state programmes encouraging an increase of Kazakh births (Olcott 2002: 51ff).

The resolution of such contentious issues presents formidable challenges to the 'peace process'. It is likely that the formulation of agreements acceptable to all parties will take years.

In recent years a number of frameworks and more comprehensive models for the resolution of the Karabakh and Abkhazia conflicts have already been proposed, discussed and continue to be considered.[498] The intention of this thesis has been the understanding of the situation rather than the discussion of yet other models of "conflict resolution". However, the thesis suggests that there is greater need for more focus on *a long-term conflict and crisis management* for the South Caucasus. This entails, in addition to efforts toward continued negotiations, the design and implementation of a mechanism that would deal with recurrent and predictable crises in the complex relationships of the parties to the conflicts over a *long period of time*. In view of the experience of other examples of conflicts around the world, combined with the fact that for the last two centuries conflicts in Abkhazia and Karabakh have emerged on average every 4.3 and 4 years respectively (see Chapter 7), there are no credible reasons to believe that the signing of a peace agreement by leaders today would indeed bring lasting peace to the conflicts in the South Caucasus. Neither the politicians nor the populations seem ready to resolve their seemingly intractable differences. As in the Israeli-Palestinian case, even after the signing of an agreement, crises are bound to recur. From the issue of the return of the refugees, to the demarcation of territorial boundaries, to determination of political status, to the problem of international guarantees, these are potentially explosive issues and sources of major crises. Thus, the simultaneous development of a *crisis management* component to the "peace process" is crucial to the viability of any agreement. The history, the modern experience, and the internal and external developments in the South Caucasus over the last 14 years provide a useful background to anticipate and diagnose the kinds of crises that would need to be managed and diffused — recurrent and contentious disputes could become obstacles to the peace process and long-term stability of the region. The multifaceted problems in the conflicts will not be resolved by the signing of a peace agreement alone, but a lasting resolution would require constant vigilance and commitment to detect potential crises and manage them before they turn into yet another vicious cycle of disputes and violence.

## APPENDIX

### Frequency of major military and political conflicts and popular protests in Abkhazia and Karabakh from 1803-1992

(Compiled based on sources mentioned in the bibliography)

| Abkhazia | | | | | Karabakh | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Military conflict (local/region) | Political protest/ conflict | Popular protest/ petitions | | Military conflict (local/region) | Political protest/ conflict | Popular protest/ petitions |
| 1803 | • | | | 1813 | • | • | |
| 1806 | • | | | 1828 | | • | |
| 1810 | • | | • | 1880 | • | • | |
| 1812 | | • | | 1918 | • | • | • |
| 1821 | • | | • | 1919 | | • | |
| 1861 | | • | | 1920 | • | • | |
| 1864 | | • | • | 1921 | • | • | |
| 1866 | • | | • | 1922 | • | | |
| 1877 | • | | | 1923 | | • | |
| 1890 | | | • | 1929 | | • | • |
| 1905 | | | • | 1936 | | • | |
| 1907 | | • | | 1937 | | • | |
| 1917 | | • | | 1945 | | • | |
| 1918 | • | • | | 1949 | | • | |
| 1920 | • | • | | 1956 | | • | |
| 1921 | • | • | | 1958 | | | • |
| 1922 | | • | | 1959 | | • | |
| 1925 | | • | | 1962 | | | • |
| 1931 | | • | | 1963 | | | • |
| 1937 | | • | | 1964 | | | • |
| 1953 | | • | • | 1965 | | • | |
| 1957 | | | • | 1966 | | | • |
| 1964 | | | • | 1967 | | | • |
| 1967 | | | • | 1972 | | | • |
| 1977 | | • | | 1973 | | • | |
| 1978 | | | • | 1977 | | • | |
| 1988 | | • | | 1987 | | • | |
| 1989 | | | • | 1988 | | • | • |
| 1990 | | • | • | 1989 | | • | • |
| 1991 | • | • | • | 1991 | • | • | • |
| 1992 | • | • | • | 1992 | • | • | • |
| Total Years | 189 | | | | 179 | | | |
| Total Number of conflicts | 44 | 11 | 18 | 15 | 44 | 8 | 23 | 13 |
| **Average years** | **4.3** | **17.2** | **10.5** | **12.6** | **4** | **22.3** | **7.7** | **13.7** |
| Total number of conflicts in 20th c. alone | 30 | | | | 39 | | | |
| **20th c. Average years** | **2.9** | **17.4** | **5.8** | **8.7** | **1.9** | **12.3** | **3.7** | **5.7** |

# Chronology of Conflicts in Abkhazia and Karabakh

## Abkhazia

| | |
|---|---|
| 1803-05 | Conflicts between Keleshbey and Tsarist Russia (Military) |
| 1806-12 | Russo-Turkish War affects Abkhazia (Military) |
| 1810 | Expulsion/resettlement of Abkhaz population (in Turkey) (Military/popular) |
| 1812 | Establishment of total Russian rule in Abkhazia (Political) |
| 1821 | Aslanbey against Russia (Military & Popular protest) |
| 1861 | Assembly of Mountain Peoples (Political) |
| 1864 | Abolition of Abkhazian princedom (Political & Popular protest) |
| 1866 | Popular uprising in the village of Lykhny Expulsion of 20,000 Abkhazians to Turkey (Military & popular) |
| 1877-78 | Russo-Turkish War, recapture of Sukhum (Military conflict) |
| 1890s | Large numbers of non-Abkhazians encouraged to settle in Abkhazia, resented by the Abkhazians (Popular protest) |
| 1905 | Inter-communal tensions on the eve of the Russian Revolution (Popular protest) |
| 1907 | Tsar Nicholas 'rehabilitates' the Abkhazians by an edict proclaiming they were no longer 'guilty' against the empire. (Political) |
| 1917 | Abkhazian National Council calls for self-determination for Abkhazia; the Republic of North Caucasus. (Political) |
| 1918 | Georgia and Abkhazia sign agreement on mutual recognition, Abkhazia joins the North Caucasus Republic, Georgia invades Abkhazia, establishment of the Transcaucasus Federation. (Political/Military) |
| 1920 | Establishment of Transcaucasus republics (Military/political) |
| 1921 | Bolshevik takeover of the Transcaucasus; Abkhazia declares independence. (Military/political) |
| 1922 | Abkhazia signatory to the formation of the USSR (Political) |
| 1925 | Adoption of first Constitution of Abkhazia (Political) |
| 1931 | Abkhazia becomes part of Georgia (Political) |
| 1937-1953 | Tens of thousands of Kartvelians transplanted from Georgian regions to Abkhazia (Political) |

| | |
|---|---|
| 1957 | Demands for Abkhazia's independence<br>(Popular protest) |
| 1964 | Demands for Abkhazia's independence<br>(Popular protest) |
| 1967 | Demands for Abkhazia's independence<br>(Popular protest) |
| 1977 | Letter signed by 130 Abkhaz intellectuals enumerating dissatisfactions with Georgia<br>(Political Protest) |
| 1978 | Popular demands for Abkhazia's independence; intellectuals send petition to Soviet leadership<br>(Political/Popular) |
| 1988 | Letter signed by 60 Abkhaz intellectuals calling for return to Abkhazia's status before 1920s.<br>(Political protest) |
| 1989 | Demands for Abkhazia's independence<br>(Popular protest) |
| 1990 | Abkhazia declares sovereignty<br>(Political/popular) |
| 1991 | End of Soviet Union<br>(Military/political/popular) |
| 1992 | Full scale war<br>(Military/political/popular) |

**Karabakh**

| | |
|---|---|
| 1813 | Russian annexation of Karabakh<br>(Military/political) |
| 1828 | Treaty of Turkmenchay<br>(Political) |
| 1880 | Territorial changes in Transcaucasus by Russia<br>(Political) |
| 1918 | First Assembly of Karabakh, election of People's government<br>(Political) |
| 1918 | Massacre of Armenians in Shushi by Turkish troops, British occupation of the region.<br>(Military) |
| 1919 | Armenians rely on Britain and West for end to dispute<br>(Political) |
| 1920 | Establishment of Transcaucasus republics, full scale war between Azerbaijanis and Armenians<br>(Military/political) |
| 1921 | Complete takeover of the Transcaucasus by Bolsheviks; Karabakh made part of Armenia at first, then changed by Stalin and made part of Azerbaijan.<br>(Military/political) |
| 1922 | Sporadic arms clashes in mountains of Karabakh<br>(Military) |
| 1923 | Karabakh made formally part of Azerbaijan<br>(Political) |
| 1929 | Protests for unification with Armenia<br>(Popular) |
| 1936 | First Secretary of Armenian CP attempts to renegotiate Karabakh's return to Armenia, He is killed in Tbilisi in Beria's office<br>(Political) |

| | |
|---|---|
| 1937 | Karabakh enters Azerbaijan's Constitution<br>(Political) |
| 1945 | First Secretary of Armenian CP, Harutiunian, appeals to Moscow to reunited Karabakh with Armenia<br>(Political) |
| 1949 | First Secretary of ArmCP, Harutiunian makes second attempt<br>(Political) |
| 1956 | Catholicos Vazken I appeal to USSR PM Bulganin concerning 'internal land' issues<br>(Political) |
| 1958 | Petition signed by 2,500 to Khrushchev demanding Karabakh reunion with Armenia<br>(Popular) |
| 1959 | Poet Silva Kaputikian writes to President of Azerbaijan's Academy of Science about poor conditions in Karabakh<br>(Political) |
| 1962 | Workers of 'Avtobaza' petition to CC of CP to annex Karabakh to the Russian Federation<br>(Popular) |
| 1963 | 2,500 Karabakh Armenians petition Khrushchev to reunify Karabakh with Armenia<br>(Popular) |
| 1964 | Demands for Karabakh's reunion with Armenia<br>(Popular) |
| 1965 | 13 intellectuals appeal to CC of CP for reunification; popular protest in Yerevan demanding Karabakh's reunion with Armenia<br>(Political) |
| 1966 | 50,000 signatures demanding Karabakh's reunion with Armenia<br>(Popular) |
| 1967 | Karabakh Armenians appeal to Armenia SSR and CPSU for unification<br>(Political) |
| 1972 | Karabakh Armenians send appeal to Moscow<br>(Political) |
| 1973 | 58 prominent Armenian intellectuals send a petition to Moscow complaining about Boris Kevorkov's appointment as Party First Secretary in Karabakh<br>(Political) |
| 1977 | Writer Sero Khanzadian writes to Brezhnev arguing for Karabakh's reunion with Armenia<br>(Political) |
| 1987 | 11 intellectuals present their case to CC of CP in Moscow<br>(Political) |
| 1988 | Demands for Karabakh's reunion with Armenia<br>(Popular) |
| 1989 | Demands for Karabakh's reunion with Armenia<br>(Popular) |
| 1991 | End of Soviet Union; declaration of independence<br>(Popular/Military) |
| 1992 | Full scale war<br>(Military) |

# NOTES

1. Documentaire: 'Abkhazia Journal' at http://www.documentaire.com/caucasus/Abkhazia.html (Baudelaire & Lynch 2000).

2. Especially international NGOs working in this region, whose ultimate effectiveness is still determined by inter- and intra- state relations and, at times, by politicised funding. For example, Rupert Neudeck, founder of the German-based Cap Anamur, observes: 'There is a major crisis in the humanitarian community because the boundary between government and non-governmental agencies is becoming blurred. In Germany, for instance, the Foreign Ministry has a department for the "co-ordination of non-governmental agencies"; the policy makers are also giving more and more money to NGOs…. At the moment there is a gap between NGOs that work in the field and the agencies that co-ordinate operations from the capitals of developing countries' ('An Interview with Rupert Neudeck', *Humanitarian Affairs Review*, Spring 2000: 9).

3. For example, see Edward Walker (1998) 'No Peace, No War in the Caucasus: Secessionist Conflicts in Chechnya, Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh' Cambridge, MA: Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, SDI; Centre for European Policy Studies, *Stability Pact for the Caucasus. A Consultative Document of the CEPS Task Force on the Caucasus* (Brussels, 2000); and Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue's 'South Caucasus: Regional and International Conflict Resolution' (Geneva, June 2001).

4. For instance, Hutchinson (1994: 3ff) 'primordialists, modernists, ethnicists; Goodman (1996: 11) 'ethno-national, modernisation, state-centred, class-centred, and "uneven development" theories'.

5. Gellner (1983: 2-3) further explains that 'the nationalist principle, as defined, is not violated by the presence of small numbers of resident foreigners, or even by the presence of the occasional foreigner in, say, a national ruling family. Just how many resident foreigners or foreign members of the ruling class there must be before the principle is effectively violated cannot be stated with precision…. the impossibility of providing a generally applicable and precise figure, however, does not undermine the usefulness of the definition'.

6. The views of Catalan scholars Salvador Cardus and Joan Estruch quoted in Tishkov 1997: 228-29.

7. However, each interview cited in this thesis is referenced: the location and date of the interview, followed by the reference number of the tape recording of the interview. The numbers after the colon refer to the lines in the transcript of the interview (e.g., K12: 150-190).

8. For forced population moves and expulsions in the North Caucasus, see Nekrich 1978 and Karcha 1958: 47; for deportations of Kurds from the South Caucasus, see Müller 2000: 59ff.

9. For an elaborate discussion of this problem see Saroyan 1997.

10. This does not include the Shahumian region in the north, which was not part of the Nagrono Karabakh Autonomous Oblast, but was claimed as part of the territory of the Mountainous Karabakh Republic in 1991.

11. 'Nationality Composition by Union Republics,' *Soviet Union: Political Affairs* (Joint Publication Research Service) JPRS-UPA-90-066 (December 4, 1990). For a detailed demographic analysis of the population of Karabakh between 1913 and 1979, see Luchterhandt 1993: 31: 75-78.

12. Cf. 'Bloodshed in the Caucasus: Indiscriminate Bombing and Shelling by Azerbaijani Forces in Nagorno Karabakh', Helsinki Watch, Vol. 5, Issue 10, July 1993. 'Throughout the armed conflict, both sides -- the Popular Liberation of Artsakh and the National Army of Azerbaijan — have treated civilians with appalling cruelty. Whichever side held the strategic advantage in Nagorno Karabakh at any given moment was the one that most egregiously violated the Geneva Conventions' rules that protect civilian life.' (*ibid*, 11).

13. Hewitt observers that what the Georgians call 'Georgians' in Abkhazia 'almost without exception… are Mingrelians, and the Mingrelians' mother tongue (not mother-*dialect*) is Mingrelian — it is true, the majority also know Georgian, but this is their 2nd language (Russian being their 3rd)'. *Literaturuli Sakartvelo* (*Literary Georgia,* Tbilisi) 21 July 1989.

14. Based on the 1897 Russian (Tsarist) census, cf. Coppieters 2000: 23.

15. Strabo (first century BC), *Geography*, compiled and translated by F. Lasserre (Paris, 1960), book XI, chapter 14: 4; an early 7th century Armenian world atlas published in French by A. Soukry *Géographie de Moïse de Corène* (Venice, 1881), cited in Donabedian 1994: 87n.

16. According to 10th-11th century historian of Albania: 'Urnayr, King of Albania… was reborn through St. Gregory the Illuminator [the patron saint of the Armenians]…. he converted the Albanians…. After his [Gregory's] death the Albanians asked for the young Grigoris [his grandson] to be their catholicos, for our king Urnayr had asked St. Gregory to consecrate him bishop of his country — not by necessity or because the Armenians are senior to the Albanians; they decided to submit voluntarily, summoned the worthy heir of St. Gregory, and were well pleased' (Dasxuranci 1961: 7-8).

17. See E. Hasan-Dchalaliants *Histoire de l'Aghovanie* in M. F. Brosset *Collections d'Historiens Arméniens*, Vol II (St. Petersburg, 1874-76). Bjørn A. Wegge, a Norwegian missionary, in a 1996 guidebook about Christians in Azerbaijan, claims without providing references, that the Albanians converted to Christianity through the 'Assyrian Church' and that the 'Assyrian Church is obviously Azerbaijan's mother church' (Wegge 1996: 60). Wegge provides no references or documentation for his claims. The 'study' is replete with statements such as 'many different sources state' (p. 61), 'the church archives give a precise listing' (p. 62), 'sources are scarce and fragmented' (p. 64) but there is no mention of what or where these 'sources' are. His sole reliance on Azerbaijani scholars (e.g., historian F. Mamedova and archaeologist Nasib Myxtarov) is exemplified in statements such as: '[the Udi] claim to be Christians, belonging partly to the Russian and partly to the Armenian church, but should rather be considered Mohammedans' (p. 78), contradicting his statement a few pages earlier when he writes, 'the Udi people — never converted to Islam and never allowed themselves to be absorbed by the Armenian church' (p. 74). Studies by western scholars of architectural, archaeological, literary and epigraphic remains in Karabakh refute these claims and show a clear connection between Armenian and Albanian Christianity. For example, art historian J. M. Thierry writes:

> La plupart des spécialistes azerbaeidjanais d'histoire de l'art estiment que les monuments chrétiens du Karabagh se rattachent à la culture albanienne en se fondant sur les données historiques de l'Antiquité, sur la matérialité d'un alphabet albanien, sur l'existence au haut moyen-âge d'un royaume d'Albanie, jusqu'aux temps modernes, d'une église albanienne autocéphale. Tout cela est vrai 'du jure' en quelque sorte, mais de fait il en est autrement car l'Albanie sans langue commune a été, comme nous l'avons dit, submergée par la culture arménienne qui lui a donné sa langue religieuse, la seule véhiculaire à l'époque, et cela dès la fin du VIe s. Les dynasties locales qui, peut-êtres albaniennes à l'origine, étaient devenues culturellement arméniennes, exactement comme les princes bagratides du Tayk deviendront culturellement géorgiens au IXe s. (Thierry 1991: 222).

See also P. Cuneo *Architettura Armena* (Rome 1988); M. Hasratian *Gandzassar,* Documenti di Architettura Armena, no. 17 (Milan 1987); M. Thierry and P. Donabedian *Les arts arméniens* (Paris 1987).

18. Toumanoff (1963: 58-9) writes: '[the Albanians were] Armenianized, and in part Georgianized, in the early Middle Ages, they lost their identity through submersion by Islam'. For a lengthy discussion on the subject, see Donabedian 1994: 56-64.

19. For a discussion of the Georgian and Abkhazian historians' view of the 'Abkhazian Kingdom', see Smith et al 1998: 56-58.

20. Quoted in Mumin Shakirov, 'Karabakh: The agony of a stagnant peace', *The Moscow Times*, 5 February 2000: 12.

21. Zeynaloglu 1997; I. Aliev, *Mountainous Karabagh: History, Facts, and Events* (Baku 1989)(in Russian); F. Mamedova, *Political History and Historical Geography of Caucasian Albania* (Baku 1986); Z. Buniyatov, *Azerbaijan from the Seventh to the Ninth Centuries* (Baku 1974); K. Aliev, *Caucasian Albania from the First Century BC to the First Century AD* (Baku 1974); see also Mansurov 1991. In recent years, references to Armenians in primary historical sources in the new editions of early chronicles on Karabakh have been deleted or altered, for example 18th century Mirza Jamal Javanshir's *Tarikh-e Qarabagh*; see *Garabaghnamälär* (Baku, 1989), 108, 111, 112, and others, cited in Bournoutian 1994: 37n.

22. The 'nativization' policy was intended to promote national cultures, increase the number of natives in the republican party structures, higher education, etc. See Goldenberg 1994: 41-43; Saroyan 1997: 141-143.

23. For example, Baku's Armenian architects are "assimilated" into the broader Russian and European architectural categories and Armenian architectural monuments in Baku are not discussed at all nor the Armenians' key business and industrial positions in Baku at the turn of the 20th century. See Sh. S. Fatullaev, *Gradostroitel'stvo i arkhitektura Azerbaidzhana XIX — nachala XX veka* (Leningrad: Stroiizdat, 1986) cited in Saroyan 1997: 162n. In a more recent presentation of cultural life in Shusha (Shushi) there is no mention of Armenian cultural institutions, *Azerbaijan International* 6, 2 (Summer 1998): 52-54.

24. Cf. Swietochowski 1990: 45; Atabaki 1993: 25; Hunter 1993: 230; Gachechiladze 1996; Kazemzadeh 1951; Smith et al 1998: 50ff. The debate as to how to name the Azerbaijanis goes back to the late 19th century; the population of Azerbaijan, formerly known as 'Türk' or 'Transcaucasian Tatar' was formally re-identified as 'Azerbaijani' in 1937. Cf. Azerbaijani historian Suleiman Aliiarov 'Bizim sorghu' in *Azarbaijan* 7 (1988): 176, cited in Saroyan 1997: 161n. The founder of the first Republic of Azerbaijan, Mohammad Amin Rasulzadeh, 'admitted that naming the new republic *Azerbaijan* 'had been a mistake' (Atabaki 1993: 25). In June 2000, *Nezavisimaya gazeta* quoted Vafa Guluzade, former advisor to the President of Azerbaijan, affirming that 'the very concept "Azerbaijani" is an anachronism from the Soviet period. Our language is Turkish, and by nationality we are Turks,' *RFE/RL Caucasus Report*, Vol. 3, No. 25, 23 June 2000. For a discussion of Azerbaijani ethnogenesis and formation of the Azerbaijani nation, see Altstadt 1992. Altstadt provides an exhaustive history of Azerbaijan up to the present time, based, as the book indicates, 'almost exclusively [on] Russian sources'. In the Middle Ages, the territory of what is Azerbaijan today was inhabited by indigenous Caucasian peoples, which included the Caucasian Albanian Christian kingdom. The territory of *Azerbaijan* came under numerous imperial jurisdictions, 'among them "Turkic", sometimes Persian (with whom present-day Azerbaijanis share Shia Islam and not Sunni Islam which is that of the Turks)' Dragadze 1989: 68.

25. Cf. Smith et al 1998: 50-53, Dudwick 1990, Nadein-Raevski 1992: 115, Saroyan 1997: 125ff. Modern Azerbaijani authors omit references to Armenians who inhabited Karabakh before the Turkic invasions of the region. For example, the new Azeri edition of the 19th century chronicler Mirza Jamal Javanshir's *Tarikh-e Qarabagh* has deleted the statements that 'in ancient times [Karabakh] was populated by Armenians and other non-Muslims', and most other references to the Armenian presence in Karabakh, see *Garabaghnamälär* (Baku, 1989), 108, 111, 112, and others, cited in Bournoutian 1994: 37n.

26. *Zerkalo* (Baku) 5 May 2001. Hunter (1993: 237) writes: 'Today Azerbaijan is bedevilled by [the Soviet] legacy [of reinterpretation of the region's history and culture]. Indeed, many of the same methods of historical revisionism are used by the current leadership and nationalist leaders'. Cf. Smith et al 1998: 50ff.

27. Islam is another issue. For example, Hadjy-zadeh (1999: 43) adds: 'le nationalisme turc, qui est entré en conflit avec l'islam, a contribué substantiellement à modifier l'identité azérie'. See also anthropologist Fereydoun Safizadeh's presentation of post-Soviet Azerbaijanis' 'dilemmas of identity' (Safizadeh 1998).

28. Interview in Vank (Martakert region in Karabakh), 28 August 1995.

29. Kapuscinski, 1994: 43. For *khachkars* as 'political symbol' see Michael Kimmelman 'When Art Becomes a Metaphor for Identity', *New York Times* 9 September 1998. Also, *khachkar* sculptor Gaspar Gharibian states: 'In the past they have been used to mark the borders between neighboring villages', *Armenian International Magazine*, January-February 2002: 63.

30. For a discussion of Armenian and Azerbaijani nationalist historiography on ethnogensis, see Astourian 1994.

31. In the 1989 Soviet census Abkhazians numbered 102,938 in all of the Soviet Union, 93.3 per cent of whom considered Abkhaz their first language. The vast majority (95,853) of the Abkhazians lived in Georgia — 93,267 in Abkhazia itself — but constituted only 1.8 per cent of Georgia's entire population (cf. Hewitt 1999: 17).

32. Indeed, in the early 1990s, all non-Georgian ethnic gourps in Georiga, one-third of the population of the coutnry, as Suny (1992:22) writes, were "depicted by hospitable nationalists as invited guests and by the most intolerant as recent interlopers."

33. Among such Georgian historians are Pavle Ingoroqva*, Giorgi Merchule* (1954), Rostom Chkheidze, Aleksandre Oniani and ultra-nationalist Zviad Gamsakhurdia (1989-1990), Tamaz Nadareishvili (1996), (cf. Hewitt 1999: 18-19; and Hewitt 1996); and Marika Lordkipanidze (see Smith et al 1998: 55).

34. Nadir Shah had waged wars in 1730-1736 and 1743-1746.

35. A 19th century chronicler, Mirza Yusuf Nersesov, provides a detailed history of this period. See Nersesov 2000, especially Chapter 8 (pp. 206ff) on 'The Events in Armenian Kingdom and *Mahals* of Khamsa and Zangezur, the Origins and the Descent of their Meliks and Khans'.

36. In the early 20th century, prominent descendants of Karabakh Meliks included Gerasim Melik-Shahnazarian, Mayor of Shushi in 1918, who was regarded as the spokesman of the commercial classes of that city. Aslan Melik-Sahnazarean was chairman of the Karabakh Council, the organisation representing the Karabakh Armenians in their struggle for union with the First Armenian Republic. George Melik-Karageozian, a member of the Armenian Populist Party, was Assistant Foreign Minister of the Armenian Republic in 1918 and Minster of Enlightenment (education) the following year.

37. Indeed, generally, the geography of the Caucasus had served as a barrier to linguistic and cultural homogenisation and full domination. 'The same mountains that had always separated tribe from tribe, such harsh terrain that entire language groups could coexist within a few miles of one another'. The *Adat* in the Caucasus — the 'evolving form of ancestral custom that doubled as law, centred on the abilities of clans and families to deal with their own' — provided another barrier (Griffin 2001: 22, 165).

38. Shervashidze in Georgian.

39. Keleshbey's father, Mancha Chachba, a former ruler of Abkhazia, was banished to Turkey by the Sultan as punishment for the family's fight against the Turks in 1757. In 1771, his uncle Zurab and former ruler of Abkhazia had staged a successful popular uprising against the Turks, which led to the expulsion of the Ottoman army from Sukhum. However, soon the Turks recaptured the port city and eliminated Zurab and installed Keleshbey in his place (Lakoba 1999: 68ff).

40. Reportedly, Keleshbey corresponded with Napoleon's foreign minister Talleyrand to develop relations with France, but not much came of it (Lakoba 1999: 68).

41. Perhaps one 'positive' aspect of Russian control of the region was the end of the traditional economy of the Charatala with the Ottoman Empire, which was primarily the trade of Armenian and Georgian slaves who had been captured during raids, cf. Gammer 1994: 40. Interestingly, the Imam Shamil's second wife, Shuanette, was an Armenian (by the name Anna) captured in a raid in the village of Mozdock (Nicholas Griffin, *Caucasus*. London: Review, 2001: 28).

42. Armenians complained in 1849 about their harsh conditions and treatment, and as a result, the Erevan Province was created. Other changes were made in 1862, 1867, 1868 and 1875. An interesting editorial written in 1889 by Avedis Araskhanyants, entitled 'Territorial Issues in Transcaucasia' [*Hoghayin Khndirner Andrgovgasum*] gives details about the specific problems resulting in these changes and their impact on the lives of ordinary people, see *Murç* 1/9 (1889): 1289-1295.

43. The assembly was initiated by the Ubykhs and included the Circassian Shapsughs, Abadzekhs/Abzakhs, and the Abkhazian tribes of Ahchypsy, Ajbga and the coastal Sadzians.

44. Lakoba 1999: 79-80. In 1862 Polish Colonel Teofil Lapinski (1827-86) led an Abkhaz-Adyghean delegation to London and met British Prime Minister Lord Palmerston. But, 'the deputation set sail from the shores of England with nothing' (cf. Lakoba 1999: 80-81).

45. In 1883 it became the Sukhum District.

46. For deportations of Kurds in 1944 from Soviet Georgia to Central Asia and 'Azerbaijanization' of Kurds, starting in the middle of 19th century and through the Soviet period, see Müller 2000: 59-63.

47. Cited in Lakoba 1999: 86.

48. For example, Israel Ori, a native of Karabakh and one of the noted diplomats of the era, struggled for Armenian liberation through diplomacy. But his efforts were fruitless. Others who tried 'diplomatic solutions' were Catholicos Essayi Hassan-Jalalian and Bishop Minas of Karabakh. See Walker 1991: 79; Nalbandian 1963: 21-22.

49. See, for example, Bloed 1997; Croissant 1998; Celac et al 2000; Coppieters 1996, 2000, 2001.

50. On the emergence and demise of the Transcaucasian Federation, see Swietochowski 1985: 73-75.

51. Pipes (1972: 506) provides an insightful observation on the short-lived, pre-Soviet independence: 'The local governments which came into being in the years 1918-1920 may have been as ephemeral as the money or postage stamps they issued, but the independence which they proclaimed and in some way embodied struck root in popular consciousness'. Indeed, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia and Azerbaijan declared independence by restoring their republics that existed in 1918-1920 and not as successors of the Soviet republics that they were.

52. In addition to Bolshevik Russian, German and British interests in the energy resources and transport routes, Ottoman Turkish interests focused on 'ambitions of incorporating the Turkic-speaking Transcaspians into the Ottoman empire'. Thus, in the spring of 1918, a German-Turkish forces advanced towards the Transcaucasus and the Caspian basin. In response, in January, Britain advanced its own troops to the Caspian and Baku. 'It was followed in June by a force of Indian troops commanded by General Malleson, which crossed the North-West Frontier to establish a base in the Persian city of Meshed, south of the Caspian, with the object of preventing German or Turkish penetration of Russian Central Asia' (cf. Keegan 1998: 413ff).

53. [British General] 'Dunsterville was driven from Baku in September [1918] by a Turkish advance, which resulted in a massacre of Baku's Armenians by their Azeri enemies' (Keegan 1998: 414). Earlier, in March 1918, according to Pipes (1997: 200) the Dashnaks, in alliance with the Bolsheviks, had massacred 'some three thousand persons, mostly Moslems' in Baku. Subsequently, 'the Moslems took revenge' massacred an estimated 4,000 Armenians in Baku, 'in

pogroms which lasted for several days (Pipes 1997: 205; Lanne 1977: 189ff). Azerbaijanis claim that '10,000 Azeris were massacred' in Baku in 1918 by, as a Baku news service put it in 2002, 'Communist Gang leader Stepan Shaumiyan [and] his armed gang groups, cooperating with Armenian Dashnak groups, which came to Baku from Russia, [and] organized a massive attack on peaceful Azeri population in Baku'. This event was recognized as 'genocide' by a decree of the President of Azerbaijan on 26 March 1998 (*Azerbaijan News Service* 28 May 2002).

Winston Churchill in a 1922 memo writes, 'The details of atrocities committed by the Turks in the Caucasus during the winter of 1920 when the fifty thousand Armenians had perished and the appalling deportations of Greeks from Trebizoned [sic] and Samsun districts which had occurred in the autumn of 1921, were now for the first time reaching Europe' (Churchill 1929: 416-417).

Baku had been the scene of Muslim-Armenian violence in 1905. An eyewitness writes: 'When the Turks and Azerbaijan Tatars were in control of Baku, more than 20,000 Armenians were done to death in the space of a mere three days. I was too young to receive a permanent picture. I remember only the countless bundles, as they appeared to me at the time, that littered the street in front of our window' (Tutaeff, 1942: 61). As a result of the Muslim-Armenian violence, 'an estimated 128 Armenian and 158 'Tatar' villages were pillaged or destroyed. The estimates of lives lost vary widely, ranging from 3,100 to 10,000' (Swietochowski 1985: 39-41). See also Nikita Dastakian, *Il venait de la Ville Noire. Souvenirs d'un Arménien du Caucase.* Paris: L'Inventiare/CRES, 1998; and Murad Mathossentz, *The Black Raven.* London: Policy Research Publications, 1988.

54, Indeed, the capital of Armenia, Erevan, was 'a minor provincial center with none of the resources or administrative machinery to govern an independent state' (Herzig 1996: 250).

55. Abkhazia was ruled by administrators sent from Tbilisi: 'Special Commissar' V. Chkhikvishvili and 'Political Representative' Isidore Ramishvili. Cf. Lakoba 1999a: 90.

56. This was following the armistice of Mudro on 30 October 1918, between the Allies and the Ottoman Empire; the Turks evacuated their occupied areas in the Transcaucasus; Batum and Baku came under Allied control.

57. For British interests in the Caspian region, see Keegan 1998: 412ff.

58. In February 1919 the Karabakh Armenians sent a delegation, headed by Bishop Vahan of Shushi, to Tifilis to present their case 'directly to the representative of Great Britain, General Thomson and to express the wish of the Armenians to be part of the Republic of Armenia and not Azerbaijan' (Hovannisian 1971: 21, 33-35). The British Parliament was aware of the 'uncertainty of the boundaries of Armenian and Azerbaidjan [a]s the cause of repeated conflicts for which each side is blamed in turn'. But it was 'believed', as Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs Cecil B. Harmsworth put it, that the League of Nations would resolve the territorial dispute. See *The Parliamentary Debates. Official Report. Fifth Series, Volume 128. House of Commons. Fourth Volume of Session 1920.* London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1920: 846. For a discussion of the indifference of the Allies at the Paris Peace Conference toward Armenians and the inability of the League of Nations to do anything, see Churchill 1929: 406-408, where he wrote, 'history will search in vain for the word "Armenia"'.

59. Audrey Altstadt (1992: 103), a widely quoted scholar of Azerbaijan's history, surmises: 'Perhaps Karabagh was 'awarded' to Azerbaijan [by Britain] as a way of bolstering it against the new Russian, now Bolshevik, threat'.

On 22 August 1919, Karabakh Armenians, soon after some 600 Armenians were massacred by Azerbaijani forces in a village near Shushi, had no choice but to sign an agreement that put Karabakh 'under the jurisdiction of Azerbaijan provisionally until the Paris Peace Conference and its outcome' (Hovannisian 1971: 29). For the text of the agreement, see Hovannisian 1971: 35-37; cf. Arslanian, A (1994). 'Britain and the Armeno-Azerbaijani Struggle for Mountainous Karabagh'. *Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 1, 92-104.

60. Quoted in Lakoba 1999a: 91. Furthermore, the British General Briggs noted in Tbilisi, in May 1919: 'As for the Sukhum District, I have heard from other sources that a wish to unite with Georgia does not reflect the will of the population'.

61. The declaration, signed by Nariman Narimanov, President of the Revolutionary Committee

of Azerbaijan, was published in *Pravda*, Stalin himself called it 'a historic act of world significance', (*Komunist,* 2 December 1920, No. 2; also published in *Komunist* (Yerevan) 7 December 1920). Earlier, on 11 January 1918, a 'Decree of the Soviet Council of People's Commissars on Self-Determination and Independence for "Turkish Armenia"' was signed by Lenin, Stalin and Bonch-Bruevich, see text in Basil Dmytryshyn and Frederick Cox (1987) *The Soviet Union and the Middle East. A Documentary Record of Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey 1917-1985,* Princeton, NJ: 463-464.

62. Already in early 1920 Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk) was negotiating with the Bolsheviks for military and financial assistance to Turkey. 'In Mustafa Kemal's eyes, the Bolsheviks were, diplomatically, a useful counterweight to Britain, France and their protégé Greece. Militarily they were even more necessary, as the only major outside source of money and supplies' (Mango 2000: 286; cf. Swietochowski 1994a: 281ff). President Mammad Amin Rasulzada of Azerbaijan expected 'Turkey, "the saviour of Azerbaijan"' to help Baku fight against the invading Red Army, but Turkey was preoccupied with preserving its own Ottoman territories. 'The hope of regaining lost Ottoman territory, which lay within the 1918 armistice lines, had to be balanced against the need to secure Soviet Russian aid' (Mango 2000: 288-289). For a discussion of Ottoman Turkish-Azerbaijani relations, see Pipes 1997: 204-8; . Swietochowski 1994a.

63. 'Obrazovanie avtonomnoi oblasti Nagornogo Karabakha', *Sobranie uzakonenii i rasporiazheni i Raboche-krest'ianskogo pravitel'stva ASSR,* (7 July 1923), No. 298: 384-385. The designation of 'Red Kurdistan', an autonomous region within Azerbaijan from 1923 to 1929, is also mentioned in the same document. For a discussion of the short lived autonomous region of 'Red Kurdistan' see Müller 2000 and Krikorian 1992-1993.

64. The 1921 census put the total population of Karabakh's five administrative units at 129,243 people, of which 122,426 were Armenians (94.73%), 6,560 Azerbaijani Turks (5.07%), 267 Greeks, Russians and Kurds (0.20%). The census was ordered by Nariman Narimanov, chairman of the Council of the People's Commissars of Azerbaijan, the results of which were published by the Central Statistical Administration of Azerbaijan in 1922. See Karapetian 1991:74.

65. For instance, when on 12 December 1920 an Armenian delegation met Lenin in Moscow to ask for assistance against Turkish hostilities, Lenin reportedly declared to his Armenian comrades: 'We will fight with no one for Armenia and Kars, and least of all with [Mustafa] Kemal… [It is necessary] to establish contact with the Turks immediately and through them with the Islamic world' (Afanasyan 1981: 159).

66. Other studies show that, before WWII, Jews, Armenians and Georgians 'ideologically committed to Marxism-Leninism' were 'prime beneficiaries of the increased social mobility fostered by the revolution' (see Barghoorn 1972: 80).

67. Some scholars, for example Coppieters, argue that the 'legal validity' of this Constitution is 'quite dubious' on the basis that, while it was adopted by the Third Council of Soviets of Abkhazia, it was 'rejected by the Transcaucasian Regional Bolshevik Party Committee (*Zakkraikom*)' (cf. Coppieters 2001: 21n).

68, Constitution (Fundamental Law) of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, adopted at the Seventh (Special) Session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR Ninth Convocation, on October 7, 1977. See http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/ russian/const/77cons06.html.

69. Stalin rejected the idea of 'personal autonomy' as a 'subtle form of nationalism'. In his view, the 'distinction between cultural-national autonomy and the economic interests of a national group' was an illusion and 'class struggle and national conflict [were] practically identical' (Eide 1998: 270, cf Kann 1950: 171-172. As for Lenin, he rejected 'any middle way, such as federalism or cultural autonomy, because he felt they institutionalized and therefore perpetuated national distinctions' (Pipes 1972: 505).

**70.** As the new constitution of the USSR was being drafted in 1922, Stalin had advocated that the national republics should be incorporated into the Russian Soviet Republics. It was Lenin who insisted that the Soviet state should be dissociated from the name 'Russian' as this would permit the absorption of future communised countries (cf Pipes 1972: 507).

71. In all USSR's administrative arrangements, the First Secretary of the Communist Party in each division and sub-division was the leader, 'referred to as the secretary of the obkom, kraikom, raikom, and gorkom'. However, 'the backbone of the Party were the obkom and kraikom first secretaries, most of whom were elected by the Central Committee. Every Party leader after 1953 had occupied one of these posts (McCauley 1996: xv).

72. USSR Constitution, Section III, Chapter 9: The Union Soviet Socialist Republic

*Article 76.* A Union Republic is a sovereign Soviet socialist state that has united with other Soviet Republics in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Outside the spheres listed in Article 73 of the Constitution of the USSR, a Union Republic exercises independent authority on its territory.

A Union Republic shall have its own Constitution conforming to the Constitution of the USSR with the specific features of the Republic being taken into account.

*Article 77.* Union Republics take part in decision-making in the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, the Government of the USSR, and other bodies of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

A Union Republic shall ensure comprehensive economic and social development on its territory, facilitate exercise of the powers of the USSR on its territory, and implement the decisions of the highest bodies of state authority and administration of the USSR.

In matters that come within its jurisdiction, a Union Republic shall co-ordinate and control the activity of enterprises, institutions, and organisations subordinate to the Union.

*Article 78.* The territory of a Union Republic may not be altered without its consent. The boundaries between Union Republics may be altered by mutual agreement of the Republics concerned, subject to ratification by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

*Article 79.* A Union Republic shall determine its division into territories, regions, areas, and districts, and decide other matters relating to its administrative and territorial structure.

*Article 80.* A Union Republic has the right to enter into relations with other states, conclude treaties with them, exchange diplomatic and consular representatives, and take part in the work of international organisations.

*Article 81.* The sovereign rights of Union Republics shall be safeguarded by the USSR.

73, A national group granted with the right to constitute a state unit within the USSR.

74. USSR Constitution, Section III, Chapter 10: The Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic

*Article 82.* An Autonomous Republic is a constituent part of a Union Republic.

In spheres not within the jurisdiction of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the Union Republic, an Autonomous Republic shall deal independently with matters within its jurisdiction.

An autonomous Republic shall have its own Constitution conforming to the Constitutions of the USSR and the Union Republic with the specific features of the Autonomous Republic being taken into account.

*Article 83.* An Autonomous Republic takes part in decision-making through the highest bodies of state authority and administration of the USSR and of the Union Republic respectively, in matters that come within the jurisdiction of the USSR and the Union Republic.

An Autonomous Republic shall ensure comprehensive economic and social development on its territory, facilitate exercise of the powers of the USSR and the Union Republic on its territory, and implement decisions of the highest bodies of state authority and administration of the USSR and the Union Republic.

In matters within its jurisdiction, an Autonomous Republic shall co-ordinate and control the activity of enterprises, institutions, and organisations subordinate to the Union or the Union Republic.

*Article 84.* The territory of an Autonomous Republic may not be altered without its consent.

*Article 85.* The Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic includes the Bashkir, Buryat, Daghestan, Kabardin-Balkar, Kalmyk, Karelian, Komi, Mari, Mordovian, North Ossetian, Tatar, Tuva, Udmurt, Chechen-Ingush, Chuvash, and Yakut Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics.

The Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic includes the Kara-Kalpak Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.

The Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic includes the Abkhasian and Adzhar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics.

The Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic includes the Nakhichevan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.

75. USSR Constitution, Section III, Chapter 11: THE AUTONOMOUS REGION & AUTONOMOUS AREA

*Article 86*. An Autonomous Region is a constituent part of a Union Republic or Territory. The Law on an Autonomous Region, upon submission by the Soviet of People's Deputies of the Autonomous Region concerned, shall be adopted by the Supreme Soviet of the Union Republic.

*Article 87*. The Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic includes the Adygei, Gorno-Altai, Jewish, Karachai-Circassian, and Khakass Autonomous Regions.

The Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic includes the South Ossetian Autonomous Region.

The Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic include the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region.

The Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic includes the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region.

*Article 88*. An autonomous Area is a constituent part of a Territory or Region. The Law on an Autonomous Area shall be adopted by the Supreme Soviet of the Union Republic concerned.

76. For example, throughout Soviet history, 'borders among the union and autonomous republics were changed more than 200 times, sometimes in minor ways and sometimes in radical ones. And the status of many peoples… was upgraded, downgraded, or even suppressed by Moscow in pursuit of its domestic and foreign policy aims' (Goble 2001).

77. Indeed, 'the autonomy of the autonomous republics and regions was as much a fiction as the sovereignty of the Union Republics' (Herzig 1999: 62).

78. This, of course, is not unique to the USSR. In Africa, for instance, 'most borders were drawn up by white empire-builders, who casually split some ethnic groups between different states, and lumped others together with neighbours they disliked' (*The Economist*, 1 March 2003: 14).

79. Between 1924-1925, the Republic of Abkhazia had adopted its own emblem and flag, 'acts of a constitutional character were ratified and the codices of the Abkhazian SSR (related to crime, citizenship, criminal court-proceedings, land and forestry) were put into action' (Lakoba 1999a: 94).

80. According to Lakoba (1999a: 94): 'Stalin, despite friendly relations with [Nestor] Lakoba, [the leader of Abkhazia from 1922-1936], demanded of him in 1930-31 the introduction of collectivisation regardless of the "particularity of the Abkhazian tenor of life." Being responsible for the destiny of the people and statehood of Abkhazia, Nest'or could not fail to appreciate to what collectivisation would lead. Stalin for his part having become the sole master of the Kremlin, let it be known that he would hold back from its introduction in Abkhazia on one condition, namely the entry of the 'treaty-republic' of Abkhazia into the constituency of Georgia as an autonomous part thereof.… [Nestor] Lakoba was forced to agree to entry into Georgia, seeing in this move the lesser of two evils'.

81. *The Constitution of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan (Basic Law),* 'as approved by the decision of the 9th Conference of pan-Azerbaijan Soviets' was published in 1937. Interestingly, 'Azbartneshr', Azerbaijan's state publishing house, printed 25,200 copies of the constitution in the Armenian language. A second printing of the same, in Armenian, was published in 1938, this time 20,200 copies.

For an analysis of Stalin's 1936 Soviet Constitution, see Schlesinger 1945: 219-232.

82. The particular mention of language and 'national peculiarities' of the population is in line with policies advanced by Stalin. He emphasized the use of native languages in the process of 'bring[ing] the apparatus of the [Communist] party, and especially of the soviets, close to the people'. In June 1923, in his report to the Fourth Conference of the Central Committee of the Communist Party with Nationalities Officials, which he headed, Stalin explained: 'These apparatuses must function in languages understood by the broad masses of the population, or else there can be no closeness between them. If it is the task of our party to convince the masses that the soviet system is their own system, then this can only be done when that system is understood by them'. He further admonished that 'the people directing state institutions, and the institutions themselves, must conduct their work in a language intelligible to the population… Local people who are familiar with the language and customs of the population must be appointed to the management of state institutions in the Republics'. Indeed, this was part of the gradual 'nationalisation of the governmental institutions' in the republics and provinces of the

USSR. (The translated text of the report is found in Schlesinger 1956: 61-77; the above quotes are at 65). In addition to language, 'the habit of mind of the natives', as explained by A. Linevski in a 1929 article, was important, too, for 'Soviet construction'. See Linevski's 'The Role of the Ethnographer in Soviet Construction in the North' in Schlesinger 1956: 109-122.

83. *Constitution of the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of Nakhichevan*. Publication of Central Committee of Communist Party of Nakhichevan, ASSR, 1937: 31-32.

84. *Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic Constitution (Basic Law), 'a*pproved by the extraordinary conference of the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan SSR, on 21 April 1978. (Baku: Azerbaijan State Publication, 1984); also published in Armenian, in Baku.

85. *Bakinskiy Rabochiy* 4 May 1999. Usubov's figures for 1970 and 1979 correspond to the numbers (rounded) of the Soviet census. However, the 1989 Soviet census for Karabakh is problematic as there are variations in the percentages reported by different sources; the number for Azerbaijanis in Karabakh ranges from about 22 to 30 percent. The 30 percent presented by Usubov is closer to reality, as there was rise rather than decline of Azerbaijanis living in Karabakh. In 1979 it was already 22.9 percent. Cf. 'Nationality Composition by Union Republics', Soviet Union: Political Affairs, JPRS-UPA-90—066 (4 December 1990).

86. RFE/RL Azerbaijan Report - 06/15/2001 Press Review.

87. For further discussion of 'interim' autonomy, see B. Broms (1992) "Autonomous Territories" in R. Bernhardt (ed), *Encyclopaedia of Public International Law* Vol. 1, 1992: 311ff.

88. United Nations Conference on International Organisation in San Francisco, 1945, states "the principle conformed to the purposes of the [UN] Charter only insofar as it implied the right of self-government of peoples and not the right of secession' (*Documents of the United Nations Conference on International Organization,* Vol. 6. New York/London: UN Information Organization 1945: 296).

89. Hentze's other two are 'personal' and 'functional' autonomies (Heintze 1998: 22-24) and Nordquist's other two, based on cases studies between 1920 and 1995, are 'expedient autonomies' — due to geographical distance of the autonomy and the granting state, such as the Falkland Islands, a British dependent territory — and 'organic autonomies', which are a result of 'a long-term [development] process within a modern constitutional framework of the central state' and the particular identity of the group, such as Greenland within Denmark (Nordquist 1998).

90. As pointed out by Eide (1998: 252n): Latvia, "Law on Cultural Autonomy for National Minorities" (26 October 1993) and "Law on the Free Development of National and Ethnic Groups of Latvia and Their Rights to Cultural Autonomy", 19 March 1991; Slovenia, "Law on Self-Managing Ethnic Communities", 5 October 1994); Hungary, "Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities" (7 July 1993) and Russian Federation, "Law on National-Cultural Autonomy" (25 June 1996).

91. Nordquist (1998: 61) lists 16 territorial conflicts in 1995. (EUROPE: Bosnia and Herzegovina vs. Serbian Republic; Croatia vs. Serbian Republic of Krajina; Russia vs. Republic of Chechnya; MIDDLE EAST: Iran vs. Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran; Iraq vs. Patriotic Union of Kurdistan; Israel vs. PLO groups/non-PLO groups; Turkey vs. Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan (PKK); ASIA: Bangladesh vs. JSS/Shanti Bahini; India vs Kashmir insurgents; India vs. Sikh insurgents; India va. Bodo Security Forces and United Liberation Front of Assam; Indonesia vs Fretilin; Myanmar vs Karen National Union; Mynamar vs. Mong Tai Army; Sri Lanka vs. Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam; AFRICA: Sudan vs. Sudanese People's Liberation Movement.

92. For further discussion of these cases see Gayim 1993: 469ff [Ethiopia]; Bagwell 1991: 489-523 [Kosovo].

93. Since 1945, millions of people have been murdered by state authorities when confronted with autonomy or separatist movements — for example, in East Bengal by the Pakistani army, East Timor by the Indonesian army, and southern Sudanese by the Sudanese regime. See Gurr 1993: 92ff.

94. For a list of countries and territories with special legal arrangements, see Blaustein 1994.

95. For a discussion of territorial divisions and problems from the 18th century to Soviet times in the context of Soviet international ideology, see Vladimir A. Kolossov, Olga Glezer, Nikolai Petrov, *Ethno-Territorial Conflicts and Boundaries in the Former Soviet Union* (Durham, UK, 1992); also a *Pravda* editorial on the All-Union Conference on Ideological Workers in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 24/29 (16 August 1972).

96. Interview K17: 247-254. Another informant, who had been an activist in Karabakh starting in the 1960s, when asked whether the Armenians were committed to Communist ideology, explained:

> To believe in Communism had nothing to do with nationalism [national ideology]. At the time, they were trying to prove that Communism was the truth, the truth of the future, and were telling people to believe in it. Poets were writing poems about this. For example, one of our most famous poets, Gegham Saryan, has written a wonderful poem. [It] used to be one of my favourites poems. But because Communist ideology led us to destruction, I am hesitant to be as fond of it now as I used to. Let me recite you a little piece of it:
>
> *Communism shall come to the hearts / Through hearts it shall come.*
> *It comes through the sparkling waters of my country / Through the call of the sparkling waters it shall come. [...]*
> *The ranks of the centuries shall shout / It shall march over the centuries […]*
> *Be assured that my heart / My heart shall awake by the shouts of the fox.*
> *But my friends innumerable / Remember that there was a poet*
> *Whose eyes on your path / Has breathed with every rock of yours.*
>
> …We believed in this kind of Communism. But how were we to know that this Communism and its deception were leading us to destruction. They were taking away our faith, our history; they were taking away our land — by shouting Communism. I used to recite this poem during gatherings. People used to get excited and clap madly. But in the same hall, others were planning how to increase the number of Turks [Azeris] in this city [Stepanakert]. They were thinking that tomorrow we shall increase the number of Turks by five and decrease the number of Armenians by five hundred. (Interview in Stepanakert, 2 September 1995; ref. K14 A&B).

It should be noted, however, that the bureaucratisation of Soviet life and society also brought substantial benefits to virtually all the 169 nationalities living in the Soviet Union. This included development of education and high level literacy; the training of local administrators, the emergence of national/local intelligentsia; industrialization and economic development, construction of railroads and inter-state transport routes, etc. Nevertheless, 'many intellectuals in the borderlands passionately believe[d] that they [were] being exploited by Russia, and this belief [was] politically significant' (Pipes 1972: 509).

97. For instance, for an extensive discussion of political socialization in the USSR, see Barghoorn 1972: 82ff.

98. The 'mini empire' was characterised by human rights activist Andrei Sakharov and is often quoted by Abkhaz and Russian accounts of the conflict (cf. Hewitt 1999a; Nodia 1997-98: 20). In the 1920s, Azeri lawyer and activist, Ahmad Agaoglu (Agayev) (1869-1939), was one of the key exponents of Pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism in Azerbaijan, another was Ālibäy Hüseynzadä (1864-1940), editor of *Fiyuẓat* newspaper and 'founder of theoretical pan-Turkism', who spoke about 'Türkläşmäk, Islamlaşmak, Müasirläşmäk' (cf. Djavadi 1990: 98). Pan-Turkism, as an ideology and political movement, espouses the notion of the unity of the Turkic peoples and the oneness of their historical destiny. Its objective is cultural and/or physical union among all the peoples of proven or alleged Turkic origins. Pan-Turkists believe that their movement is rooted in the empire of the Huns of 210 BC, which they consider to be the first Turkic state. They

argue that Turkey is the Huns' 16th state and as such brings together all Turkic people, currently totalling some 170 million from China to Mongolia and from Azerbaijan to Bulgaria. cf. *Russia and Successor States Briefing Service* 1/6 (December 1993), 18-19.

99. Abkhazia and Karabakh were not alone in their protests. Other nationalities in various parts of the USSR had similar struggles. For example, in the 1930s a National Independence (*Milli Istiklal*) movement and a National Unification (*Milli Ittikhad*) organization existed in Uzbekistan; similarly, the *Diidigyan* (Great She-Bear) organization in the Tatar republic. For a discussion of these movements from the Soviet government perspective, see Rysakov 1956: 176-78.

100. Every five years, the Soviet State Planning Committee of the USSR Council of Ministers (Gosplan) prepared a 'Five Year Plan' for the Union, the republics and administrative sub-divisions. The Plan had the force of law and non-fulfilment of it was, therefore, a criminal offence.

101. Three of the 1965 movement leaders were also involved in the 1988 movement: Bagrat Ulubabian (1925-2002), Martin Hovanissian (b. 1939) and Gurgen Gabrielian (see footnote 9).

102. Interview in Stepanakert, 6 September 1995 (ref. K17).

103. The 13 were: Bagrat Ulubabian, Secretary of the Oblast Division of the Writers' Union of Azerbaijan SSR; Sergei Shakarian, President of Works Committee of Stepanakert City Soviet; Lazar Gasparian, editor of *Soviet Karabakh* oblast newspaper; Grigor Stepanian, senior editor at oblast radio; Aram Babayan, director of no. 2 Sovkhoz of Stepanakert; Arsen Mukanian, president of 'Sosi Shahumian' kolkhoz and deputy of Azerbaijan SSR Supreme Soviet; Gurgen Gabrielian, chief of oblast Culture Committee; Bostan Chanian, poet; Mikael Gorkanian, republican popular actor; Arkady Manucharian, chief of Stepanakert's no. 59 Construction Committee; Albert Seyranian, director of Stepanakert electric-technical factory; Maxim Hovanessian [Avanesian], senior editor at oblast radio; Sergei Grigorian, chief engineer of no. 59 construction committee.

104. A year earlier, a petition signed by 2,500 Karabakh Armenians was sent to Khrushchev on 19 May 1964. The petition, which was never answered, stated, among other things, that 'the Armenian population of Azerbaijan SSR has been subject to a chauvinist policy which has created extremely unfavourable living conditions'. The English text of the petition is published in G. J. Libaridian (ed.), *The Karabagh File* (Cambridge, MA & Toronto: The Zoryan Institute, 1988): 42ff.

105. The text of the letter is in Ulubabian 1994: 207-215. In hindsight, Ulubabian comments about the 'unfortunate' coincidence of the 'number 13': the letter happened to be 13 pages long, it was signed by 13 individuals, it reached Moscow on June 13, and the courier stayed in room 13 at the hotel in Moscow.

106. In 1965, Gurgen Allakhverdovich Melkumyan was the First Secretary of the Nagorno Karabakh Oblast Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan SSR, effectively the "leader" of Karabakh (starting in 1962). According to one of the signatories, Melkumyan eventually became aware of the letter campaign, after it was sent, as did other officials, such as the Party Secretary for Agricultural Affairs of the Autonomous Oblast, 'a wonderful individual', as described by my informant. 'The word quickly spread and everybody knew about it. This created a new wave [of enthusiasm] in Karabakh' (Interview in Stepanakert, 6 September 1995).

Gurgen A. Milkumyan was a member of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan SSR. In 1961-62 he was the Second Secretary of Nagorno Karabakh Oblast Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan SSR, and prior to that, the First Secretary of Martuni Rayon Committee (1959-60). He was a Deputy in the 1959 and 1963 convocations of the Azerbaijan Supreme Soviet, and a member of the Commission for Public Health and Social Security of the 1963 conclave. (Cf. Andrew I. Lebed, et al., *Who's Who in the USSR 1965/1966*. New York & London: Scarecrow, 1966).

107. For demographic changes in the Armenian population of Nakhichevan, see Joffé 1996: 25. Newly revealed information in Soviet archives, according to Ronald Suny, indicates that in the late 1940s Stalin 'was moving Azerbaijanis out of the city of Yerevan into Nakhichevan. And

he was moving Armenians from Nakhichevan into Armenia'. See 'Negotiations on Nagorno-Karabakh: Where Do We Go From Here? Summary and Transcript from a Panel Discussion held on April 23, 2001', (Cambridge, MA: Caspian Studies Program, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 2001): 26.

108. See Chapter 1 for a discussion of the Meliks of Karabakh.

109. Interview in Stepanakert, 6 September 1995 (ref. K17).

110. One of the authors explained:

> For us that wasn't the most important thing at the time. Because it was a problem in the entire [Soviet] Union, Karabakh couldn't have been an exception under Azerbaijani conditions. The same situation existed in Azerbaijan, in Russia, etc. We couldn't blame Azerbaijan for this problem. This was a general approach of Bolshevism, it was Communism's approach to religion, since Marxism considered religion the opium of the people. As such we couldn't raise the issue of religion or churches. (Interview in Stepanakert, 6 September 1995, ref. K17: 185-191).

By 1936, all churches in Karabakh were closed and the clergy banished. However, an Armenian diocese and churches functioned in Baku during the Soviet period.

111. Karabakh is rich with forests, arable soil, mineral deposits, and alpine pastures. It is famous for its silk, honey and leather products. Most of its industry revolved around agricultural production.

112. Other sources indicate that between 1913 and 1973 industrial production grew 113-fold in the USSR, about 221-fold in Armenia, about 40-fold in Azerbaijan, but in Nagorno Karabakh only 14.8-fold. For detailed discussion and analysis of economic factors in the Karabakh conflict see Luchterhandt, 1993; for a general discussion of economic infrastructure in Karabakh see T. Amirchanian and V. Arzoumanian (1994) *Geography of Mountainous Karabakh* (in Armenian) Stepanakert.

113. Indeed, economic discrimination continued well into the 1980s. While the Oblast turned over 91 million rubles annually to Baku, it operated on a budget of 42 million rubles. FBIS-SOV (*Pravda*), 20 July 1988: 54.

114. Another interesting case, not included in the letter, but provided by one of the signatories, was the arrangement for bus drivers.

> There were buses, every half hour, from Stepanakert to Aghdam, a very busy route, the Armenian bus driver going from Stepanakert had to pay 58 rubles for each trip to Aghdam; but the Azerbaijani driver coming from Aghdam had to pay only 28 rubles for each trip to Stepanakert. The Armenian driver had to pay twice more to the government than his Azeri counterpart. This is a documented proof (Interview in Stepanakert, 6 September 1995, ref. K17: 24-29).

Generally, means of transportation in the regions of Nagorno Karabakh were poorly developed, making communication between its citizens very difficult. The lack of roads and functional inter-regional communications greatly hampered economic development, especially in the small towns and villages of the region. For example, while Karabakh has a favourable geographic position with regards to neighbouring Armenia and Georgia, the exchange of goods and trade with them accounted for only 2% of its total 'foreign trade'.

115. Yamskov (1998: 168-197) provides another perspective on this issue: 'The poor economy of the region contributed to clumsy demographic [changes] in Karabakh'. He points out that the 'Azerbaijanisation' of Karabakh was due mainly to the migration of Azerbaijani farmers and shepherds into agriculturally rich villages of the region, the 'naturally high birth rate of Azerbaijanis', and the gradual 'migration of Armenians to the urban centres of the Soviet Union'. For the political dimension of the migration process, see Dudwick 1996: 436ff.

116. Post-Soviet Azerbaijan's Interior Minister Ramil Usubov affirmed: 'All these measures…

[were] undertaken thanks to the wisdom of the First Secretary of the Azerbaijani Communist Party Heydar Aliyev…[which] helped in strengthening [the] inflow of Azerbaijanis' [in Karabakh]. *Bakinskiy Rabochiy* 14 May 1999.

117. While capital investment was lacking in the period discussed in the letter, one of the signatories explained to me the intricacies of capital investments:

> Azerbaijan had a very cunning policy. Conditionally, they were financing us for X quantity of material for X amount of rubles for capital construction. But they allocated a lot less building material than originally planned. For example, they would allocate us 100 million rubles for construction, but they would give us only 50 million rubles worth of building material. They were deceiving us. On paper they would say they are giving us 100 million, but in actuality we could only built for 50 million, that's all they would gives us. But then they would turn and blame us for not being able to accomplish our plans or complete our projects. This was the case with all other areas of life (Interview in Stepanakert, 6 September 1995, ref. K17: 40-48).

Housing and construction were minimal in Karabakh compared to the national average in Azerbaijan SSR. In the capital, Stepanakert, and in some other towns of Karabakh the waiting lists for housing were up to 20 years.

118. Article 11 of the 1936 Constitution of Azerbaijan SSR stipulates the use of Armenian for official business in NKAO, however this provision had been completely removed from the 1978 'amended' Constitution of Azerbaijan SSR (see Chapter 2).

119. In 1979, Azerbaijani authorities changed the name and official seal of the theatre in Stepanakert from *Mountainous Karabakh Autonomous Region's Stepanakert's Maxim Gorky Armenian State Dramatic Theatre* (which was written in three languages — Armenian, Russian, and Azeri) — to *Stepanakert State Theatre*, written only in Russian and Azeri. The words 'Armenian' and 'Dramatic' were removed.

120. Interview in Stepanakert, 2 September 1995 (ref. K14A& B). In the same Aliyev period (1970s), for example, a factory was being set up in Stepanakert to produce 8 million pairs of shoes a year. The engineers of this new factory received their education in Kirovabad and were all ethnic Azeris. A Karabakh native explains: 'Two hundred and forty families were to be suddenly relocated to Stepanakert for which they were constructing buildings. And we all know how Azeris, like other Muslims, have many children. Thus, they were choosing those families that had at least eight to ten children. If there were eight or ten children per family, then immediately there would be an influx of at least 2000 people in Stepanakert where the population is forty or fifty thousand' ('An Interview with Vaché Sarukhanian', *Armenian News Network/Groong*, May 14, 2001, www.groong.com).

121. Education on the elementary school level, especially in the rural areas, remained divided between Armenian and Azerbaijani languages, more or less reflecting the unofficial division of 'Armenian villages' and 'Azerbaijani villages' in the enclave. Indeed, despite these educational policies, the use of the Armenian language did not decline in Karabakh. The policies seem to have created an opposite effect of 'resistance'. In 1979, 96.3 percent of the Armenians in NKAO spoke Armenian (Karabakh dialect) as their native language; their knowledge of the Azeri language was extremely low. In 1970 only 3.44 percent of the Armenians of Karabakh could speak Azeri, which remained relatively constant by 1979, standing at 3.76 percent. On the other hand, after the heavy 'russification' of the educational curriculum in the 1970s, the number of Karabakh Armenians who could speak Armenian and Russian rose sharply. In the decade between 1970 and 1980, it increased from 17.2 percent to 31.4 percent. (cf. Luchterhandt 1993: 62-63).

122. *Azerbaidzhan v tsifrakh: Kratkii statisticheskii shornik,* Baku: Tsentr. stat. upravl. pri Sov. min. Azerbaidzhanskoi SSR, 1964: 192-93. For an extensive analysis of education policies, see Bilinsky 1972.

123. Javad Derahti, 'Our Diaspora: Yesterday and Today' at http://www.azerigenocide.org/

view/dak0.htm (12 February 2002).

124. This problems was not new. Stalin complained about it in June 1923, in his report on the 'Resolution of the National Question' at the Fourth Conference of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. He said:

> I know that many People's Commissars in the Republics… have no desire to visit the localities, to attend peasants' gatherings, to speak at meetings, to acquaint the broad masses with the work of the party and the Soviet Government in matters which are of particular importance to the peasants. This state of affairs must be ended. It is absolutely necessary to hold non-party conferences of workers and peasants to acquaint them with what the Soviet Government is doing. Without this, the contact between the state apparatus and the people is unthinkable (Schlesinger 1956: 66).

125. Dan Fisher, 'Azerbaijan a Land of Skulls, Plots, Rumors', *Los Angeles Times*, February 13, 1990: 1.

126. Fatma Abdullazadeh, *Karabakh.* Baku: "XXI" YNE, 1999: 5.

127. Nazim Ibrahimov (compiler) *Armenian Nazism. Two Interpretations.* (Translated into English by Ghilinjkhan Bariramov) Baku: Azerbaijan Publishers, 1994: 12-13; 19, 20; See also Mansurov (1991).

128. Arkady Volsky, member of the Communist Party Central Committee and head of Karabakh under the direct rule of Moscow from January to November 1989, during a mission to Karabakh on behalf of the Party, observed: 'In my trips around the country [USSR], I have never encountered the kind of neglect and disregard for people's future I saw in Nagorno Karabakh. There is no excuse for the individuals who brought this mountainous area, where good, hard-working people live, to such a state' (*The Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 18 June 1989: 16).

129. Eventually, only two of the signatories remained in Karabakh. One of them explained: 'When the other members of the group left, it was a very bad sign. If it was possible to expel these prominent intellectuals, then it would be very easy to deal with junior intellectuals. If these people left, than there was no hope in Karabakh. But because [two of us] stayed, we gathered the remaining intellectuals around us… Of course, we lived through a decline, but we kept our intellectuals on our land for future activities (Interview in Stepanakert, 2 September 1995, ref. K14 A&B).

130. Interestingly, one of the 1965 signatories reported that the Turkish government had also lobbied against changes to Karabakh's status in 1966. I could not confirm this information, but reportedly:

> 'According to information we [the signatories] obtained from Moscow, Ankara sent a telegram to Brezhnev, through the Turkish Ambassador in Czechoslovakia at the time, asking him not to change the status of Karabakh. They argued that if you cut Karabakh from Azerbaijan and give it to Armenia, it would mean the destruction of the USSR, as thousands of nationalities issues [in the Soviet Union] would come to the surface. This was related to Turkey's interests as well, because it would also mean that Azerbaijan has the right to leave the USSR and join Turkey. Eventually Brezhnev rescinded his decision and sent a delegation to Karabakh, which came through Baku' (Interview in Stepanakert, 2 September 1995, ref. K14 A& B).

While this could not be confirmed, there are other instances when Ankara through its ambassador in Moscow intervened in the early stages of the conflict. For example, Zaur Gadimbeyov writes that in 1991 'Turkey's ambassador to the USSR Volkan Bural spread a note of protest through the diplomatic canals [sic] and mass media' (Ibrahimov 1994: 21).

131. Interview in Stepanakert, 6 September 1995 (ref. K17).

132. Nevertheless, Darrell Slider, a US sovietologist, observes in a 1985 article that: 'The Abkhaz, on the whole, appear to have benefited less from the development of Abkhazia than have other ethnic groups… The state budget for Abkhazia, an important source of centralized investment, has been about 40 percent lower than that of the Georgian republic when measured on a per

capita basis' (Slider 1985: 57-58).

133. *Georgian Radio* (Tbilisi), 14 August 2000, posted on *Groong* electronic news mailing list, (www. groong.com).

134. This policy of drawing borders based on linguistic areas 'did not [always] correspond to the reality on the ground', such as with the borders between Turkish Uzbekistan and Persian Tajikistan (cf. Horowitz 2001: 650).

135. In 1861, Russian linguist (and general) Pyotr Uslar devised an Abkhazian alphabet, along with the languages of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus. This was part of the Russian Empire's 'politics of colonisation' of the region (Avidzba 1999: 177).

136. Hewitt affirms that 'linguistically it cannot be denied that Georgian is the best already established writing system to serve as base for the representation of any Caucasian language, but this shift was primarily motivated not by linguistic considerations but in order to underscore Abkhazia's new subservience to Tbilisi' (Hewitt 1999: 171).

137. Here, the symbolic role of language is more significant than its use. As Romanucci-Ross & De Vos (1995: 23) argue: 'Ethnicity is frequently related more to the symbolism of a separate language than to its actual use by all members of a group'.

138. *Ek'onomist* (Tbilisi) 3, 1981: 74, quoted in Hewitt 1999: 173.

139. As a linguist, Hewitt laments the uncertain future of the Abkhaz language. He writes: 'The long-term viability of Abkhaz will be precarious, given both the low number of speakers and the unfavourable linguistic environment, whatever the outcome of current political problems. Despite the larger numbers in Turkey, the long-term survival of Abkhaz (and indeed the other North Caucasian languages spoken there) must be regarded as being in similar jeopardy' (Hewitt 1999: 175).

140. Sh. Inal-Ipa writing in 1978, quoted in Hewitt 1999: 283n. Nevertheless, Avidzba points out that 'despite the excessive and pointless' orthographic changes and 'in spite of a panoply of obstacles', a body of important Abkhaz literature was produced, especially starting in the mid-1950s. The focal themes of this "native" literature — in the post-Stalin period — were the history of the Abkhazian nation and 'an investigation and analysis of the internal world of man' (Avidzba 1999: 177, 195-185).

141. Other measures taken to address Abkhazian grievances included the establishment of a weekly two-hour (mainly news) broadcasts in Abkhazian on television, increase in publications and local enterprise development.

142. Slider (1985: 65), writing about the 1953-1979 period in Abkhazia, wrote: 'In essence, the Georgian leadership was forced to admit that many of the complaints made by Abkhaz nationalists were legitimate'.

143. For detailed demographic figures from 1864-1989 and analysis, see Müller 1999: 218-239. The 1959 census is found in *Itogi vsesoyuznoi perepisi naseleniya 1959 goda. SSSR. Svodnyi tom*, Moscow 1962, quoted in Müller 1999: 236.

144. Other archival material from this period is reproduced in Clogg 1995.

145. They were Gennadii Alamia, Rushbey Smyr, and Denis Chachkhalia. The English translation of the letter is found in Hewitt 1996: 283-93. The original text is reprinted in I. Marykhuba, ed., *Abkhaziya v sovetskuyu epokhu: Abkhazskie pis'ma (1947-1989). Sbornik dokumentov, tom 1* [Abkhazia in the Soviet epoch: Abkhazian letters (1947-89). Collection of Documents, vol. 1], Nalchik, 1994: 383-439.

146. Here 'dissident/popular authority' denotes informal authority held by the popularly acclaimed elite or communists-cum-'nationalists', such as intellectuals, artists, educators, or 'dissidents' who represent alternative visions for their societies.

147. See for example, Beissinger 2002; Suny 1998; Gorbachev 1996; d'Encausse 1993; Denber 1992. For an extensive discussion of *Perestroika*, see Merridale and Ward 1991, and Magstadt 1989.

148, Spoken at the Nineteenth Communist Party Conference in June 1988, quoted in Suny 1998: 461.

149. Interview in London, 11 May 2001 (ref. K0511: 313-326).

150. As Olcott puts it: once 'reformists and pro-market forces' in the centre 'joined together, there was nothing left to hold the old elite coalition of the centre together and their dissolution led to that of the USSR itself' (Olcott 2002: 35).

151. After Azerbaijan's independence, Aliyev admitted such lobbying efforts. '[The] question [of Karabakh] was repeatedly raised by Armenian nationalists and —let us be honest—at that time their attempts were prevented… In March of 1988 [the issue was discussed by the] Central Committee [of the Communist Party]. V. Polyanichko said that the question of Upper Karabakh was raised up in 1977 as well. Yes, it is so. But we stopped these attempts immediately'. See Heydar Aliev, *Steadfast Position* (Baku: Azerbaijan Publishing House, 1994): 17, 23. For a discussion of Shevardnadze and Georgia, see, for example, Hunter 1994: 114-135, and Herzig 1999: 19 & passim.

152. Interview in London, 11 May 2001 (ref. K0511: 49-55).

153. *Ibid* 91-100. The topic is also discussed with other activists in Karabakh (Interviews K17 and K14A&B).

154. For example, at the time Georgia SSR was preparing a draft law on 'State Programme for the Georgian Language' which required the teaching of Georgian in all schools of the republic and stipulated that the passing of a test in Georgian language was a necessary requirement for entry into a university (cf. Lakoba 1999a: 101).

155. The primary problem at the time was the question of whether the Abkhazian State University should be divided into two sections (Abkhazian and Georgian). The Commission ruled against partition on the basis of nationality.

156. A participant and political analyst commenting on the 'rhetorical evolution' of the Karabakh movement in Armenia' described one aspect of this legitimation process: 'the boldest, the most emotional speakers [at rallies and demonstration] became the recognised leaders. It was whoever made the strongest impression on the crowd' (quoted in Malkasian 1996: 38).

157. For a discussion of other lobbying activities of Armenian intellectuals in Moscow, see, for example, Rost 1990: 20-25; Malkasian 1996; Balayan 1995; Ulubabyan 1994.

158. Aliyev had ranked fourth in length of Politburo service after Gorbachev, Soviet President Andrei A. Gromyko and Ukrainian leader Vladimir V. Shcherbitsky. Aliyev was among the few non-Slav party officials who was brought to Moscow by Andropov and made First Deputy Chairman of the Politburo.

159. Karabakh-born Zareh Melik-Shakhnazarov and Georgy Ter-Agopov, who were Soviet decorated pensioners in their 70s at the time of the lawsuit. Ter-Agopov was a well-known medical doctor and pathologist in the Soviet Union. All three petitioners were living in Yerevan at the time.

160. My informant told me that he knows this for a fact 'because someone working in Gorbachev's office, Georgi Shakhnazarov, who was Gorbachev's advisor, confirmed the meeting' (Interview in London, 11 May 2001, ref. K0511: 639-641). Shakhnazarov (born in Baku, in 1924) was full time advisor to Gorbachev from 1988. He 'was an early advocate of reform and helped Gorbachev to shape his plans to open up the system to new ideas and freedoms, but like his boss he failed to articulate a clear vision of where he believed the country should go' (Felix Corley,

254

'Obituary: Georgy Shakhnazarov', *The Independent*, 19 May 2001).

161. At a press conference Aliyev was asked why he had mentioned Brezhnev's name 13 times in a 15-minute speech at the 27th Communist Party Conference in early 1986, 'Blushing, he laughed and replied: "There's nothing unusual in this — he was general secretary (of the party) and many comrades mentioned his name"' (*Los Angeles Times*, 22 October 1987). For Gorbachev's views on Aliyev, see Gorbachev 1996: 144-145.

162. For example, referring to his opponents, Gorbachev (1996: 336) wrote: 'The national feelings of people became the object of merciless conflicts. *In their hands Karabakh was a mine laid underneath perestroika'* [emphasis added].

163. *RFE/RL Azerbaijan Report*, 15 June 2001, Press Review. Interestingly, such population movements proved critical for Aliyev's reclaim of the leadership in Azerbaijan. For example, in his analysis of 'tribalism' in Azerbaijan, Safizadeh writes: 'It is often stated that it is through tribalism that Heidar Aliyev was able to mobilize people to stave off challenge to his power, that is through his Nakhichevan gang or tribe, or through the *Yeri-az*, transplants to Baku from the countryside in the past 30-40 years. These people dominated the Communist Party and the local administrative positions' (Safizadeh 1998).

164. Reported by the Azeri service of Radio Liberty in the background of Aliyev's 'victory during he Lisbon Summit', *Armenpress* 10 December 1996.

165. Gorbachev also reports that in 1988 there were problems with emergency assistance provided to Karabakh by Moscow. He wrote, 'We began to receive indications that the authorities in Azerbaijan were distributing the monies from the centre according to their own wishes, with only a small part reaching the intended recipients. We had to send commissions to verify these assertions. It appeared, however, that most of the needs of the local people had indeed been met' (1996: 335). It was never verified whether some 400 million rubles allocated for Karabakh were actually used for Karabakh or they simply 'appeared' to be properly used.

166. Ninety thousand of the 125,000 were collected in Karabakh and the rest were of Karabakhis living in Armenia (about 25,000-30,000) and Central Asian republics (5-6,000).

167. Interview in London, 11 May 2001; ref. K0511: 581-677. It is interesting to note that Karabakh activists also realised that the best chances for the resolution of the Karabakh conflict was *before* the collapse of the USSR. As one activist explained:

> [We] were trying to make everyone understand that the Soviet Union was falling apart and if Karabakh becomes part of a sovereign Azerbaijan when USSR dissolved, in that case it would no longer be possible to raise this issue between two sovereign nations. In such a case, our actions would be viewed as those against a sovereign country. It was this that gave us a great sense of urgency. We saw that the Soviet Union was falling apart with the coming of Gorbachev. I wanted to see Karabakh at least get independence from Azerbaijan, if not union with Armenia by the time the Soviet Union broke apart' ('An Interview with Vaché Sarukhanian', *Armenian News Network / Groong*, May 14, 2001; cf. Interview in London, 11 May 2001; ref. K0511).

168. In his memoirs Gorbachev (1996: 315) wrote: 'I was certain that elimination of the CPSU monopoly on power would be beneficial for the people and the Communist Party itself, at least the millions of rank-and-file Communists, I did not and do not believe that this had to be done all at once, that the CPSU had to renounce the throne only to allow it to be seized by those lads who even in 1988 would go to meetings with banners saying: "Party, give us the helm!"'.

169. True that a vertical hierarchy is formed within each of the "broken" parts of the old pyramid (Phase 1), however, what's relevant to our discussion here is the transformations that take place from Phase 1 to 4, i.e., the relations of our original C, R, L, & D.

170. See Chapter 1, under 'Re-writing Histories'

171. See, for example, Afanasyan 1988; Barseghov 1990; Mirzoyan 1990. Another interesting

example of literary 'thematisation' in Karabakh in a poem dedicated to the Monastery of Gandzasar in Karabakh, written in the mid-1980s by poet Armen Hovhannesian. In 1987 the poem was turned into a song by poet/singer Gourgen Gabrielian. This song, called "Gandzasar", became the unofficial theme song for the Karabakh Movement. Gabrielian explained:

> [During Soviet times] we couldn't write confrontational (*jakatayin*) pieces, only symbolic ones. There is this line in "Gandzasar":
>
> *Expel the deception around me / Or the fog from the canyon of Tartar [river] / Take away my suffering / Or the spike in my altar / The destructive spike has been pushed in your side / It was ruining you...*
>
> At the time, my friend [Armen Hovhannesian] would use symbols to make the points. For instance, for the necessity to drive the Turks [Azeris] away from the canyon of Tartar, he wrote "Expel the fog from the canyon of Tartar", the "fog" is the Turk; or "the spike in my altar", the "spike" is also the Turk.
>
> I added to this, *"Let me cover your cracking wound with life";* this was already at the beginning of the struggle. I wrote it in 1987 at the start of the Movement. *"I shall sacrifice my life for you / Let me pluck out the spike-root in your garden",* read to chase out the Turk. *"Let your dome resound again / Let your bell tower toll again. / For centuries, gazing at the light of Masis / You've beseeched for the light of hope, my Gandzasar".* This was the idea of reunification [with Armenia] that was being shaped [at the time]. This song took birth in those ideas and became like a hymn.
>
> …. In February 1988, I first sang this song in the Central Square in Yerevan…. I addressed the crowd and informed them about the situation in Karabakh… Then I said I've brought you a gift, the new hymn of Artsakh, with the symbol of Gandzasar, and started to sing. People, the entire crowd, had lit candles in their hands — many improvised with twisted paper and whatever they can find to have a 'candle' in their hands. Everyone had a light in his hand and I sang.... (Interview in Stepanakert, 2 September 1995).

At this point in the interview, Gabrielian passionately sang the entire six stanzas of the song in the small room he and I were sitting, oblivious to the fact that his strong voice filled the entire building if not the whole neighbourhood.

172. See Chapter 1, under 'Re-writing Histories'.

173. All non-Georgian communities in Abkhazia were united under *Adygylara*; in addition to the Abkhazians, it included the Armenians, Greeks and Russians.

174. In April 1991, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the ultra-nationalist and controversial leader of Round Table-Free Georgia bloc, proclaimed Georgia's independence from the Soviet Union. A month later, he was elected president by popular vote. However, a bitter internal power struggle resulted in Gamsakhurdia's ouster by the military coup of December 1991-January 1992.

Eduard Shevardnadze, the leader of Georgia from 1972 to 1985, and foreign Minister of USSR from 1985 to1990, assumed power. He was elected president in October 1992. And the international community recognized Georgia's statehood immediately after Shevardnadze's accession to power.

175. Interview in London 15 March 2002, ref. Abk 0315: 136-138. Cf. Gamsakhurdia 1991; Suny 1992: 22.

176. In the aftermath of disturbances in Abkhazia in 1978 — over the rising dominance of Georgians in the autonomous republic — the Pedagogical Institute in Sukhum was upgraded to a university, thus making it the second university in the whole of Georgia. The other was the State University in Tbilisi, founded in 1918, where places for study were allocated for only a limited number of Abkhaz students (cf. Hewitt 1999: 174).

177. Popkov (1999: 103) adds that 'Following the Commission's decision about the inadmissibility of partitioning the Abkhazian State University, G. Enukidze, Georgia's Minister of Public Education, came out with a proposal for a federal structure for this educational establishment, with two rectors of equal standing, etc.' But it was too late to reverse the situation.

178. As the Georgians took the Georgian sector away, the Abkhaz authorities established an Armenian sector, as a gesture of accommodation to other communities in Abkhazia. In 1989, the Armenians formed 14.6% of Abkhazia's population (numbering 76,541). The Armenian sector at the Abkhazian State University continued after the Abkhazian military victory in 1993.

179. These incidents resulted in 14 deaths and 13 seriously injured on both sides. *Tbilisi Radio*, 17 July 1989.

180. The first public statement on the Karabakh issue by a Kremlin official was made in November 1987 by Abel Aghanbegyan, an ethnic Armenian and Gorbachev's chief economic adviser, who, speaking to a group of Armenian WWII veterans in Paris urged the Soviet leader to return Karabakh to Armenia. Sergei Mikoyan, son of former Politburo member Anastas Mikoyan, Zori Balayan, and Igor Mouradyan were the other three who helped articulate the Armenian position on the Karabakh issue in the early stages of *glasnost* and *perestroika*.

181. Mikhailov said: 'Remember, you are not the only ones who bring signatures. The Azerbaijani government has also brought signatures. And their signatures are of official level, not like you intellectuals. It is time that your problem is taken up by some governmental organ either in Karabakh or in Armenia' ('An Interview with Vaché Sarukhanian', *Armenian News Network / Groong*, May 14, 2001).

182. Interview in Stepanakert, 2 September 1995 (ref. K14 A & B: 119-288). Interestingly, when they met Mikhailov in Moscow, a member of the delegation, Vatche Sarukhanian, had secretly tape-recorded their talks with him on a small, pocket size recorder. When two weeks later Mikhailov came to Stepanakert to mediate between Azerbaijani officials and the Karabakh leaders, Karabakh Armenian leaders warned Mikhailov not to deny the 'signals' he had given to them in Moscow and told him they had his statements on tape. Mikhailov was stunned and angry, but in the end confirmed the 'pink and red hope' statement. My informant added: 'Later on Gorbachev sent him [Mikhailov] to Baku to stand up and say that he had said nothing to us, that all those statements were fabricated by us. They staged this denial to save themselves' (Interview in Stepanakert, 2 September 1995, ref. K14 A & B: 518-520).

183. In hindsight, a 40-year-old soldier told me in Stepanakert in 1995: 'The [Karabakh] leaders, like Gourgen Gabrielian, thought that the issue would be solved within a few days in Moscow. But they were so gullible. Within a few months, when the demonstrations [in Stepanakert] didn't work, it turned into armed conflict. While we were naively demonstrating, the Turks [i.e., Azeris] were getting their guns ready' (Interview in Stepanakert, 3 September 1995, ref. GN: 54-60).

184. Zori Balayan, a member of the delegation, reported that the delegation was praised as 'patriots' by Mikhailov (cf Malkasian 1996: 29). Igor Mouradyan, a People's Deputy and an activist arrested several times, was another key member of the group undertaking the early "lobbying" efforts in Moscow.

185. Interview in Stepanakert, 2 September 1995, ref. K14 A & B: 119-288.

186. Interview in Stepanakert, 3 September 1995, ref. GN: 33-37.

187. The Karabakh delegates in Moscow, by chance, got hold of a list of 'Official Government Telegram' phone numbers, which they found in the room of a 'hero of the socialist cause', an Armenian woman from Karabakh, where they were staying. They mischievously sent an unsigned telegram addressed to all official government officials and organs of Karabakh — including the Regional Soviet of Karabakh, the Communist Party leader, the leaders of the five regional areas, the secretaries of the regional committees, and to as many village leaders — instructing them to "Accelerate in Karabakh, the process of seceding from Azerbaijan and joining Armenia; [to] authenticate [their] decisions with the stamps of the local organs and send them to Moscow'.

The instruction reached their destination in Karabakh without passing through Azerbaijan, as the channel used was the one official Moscow would use bypassing republican channels. When the delegation returned to Karabakh, the various organs in Karabakh had already made their decisions, sealed them with their official stamps and sent them to Moscow, as they thought the instructions had come directly from the Party headquarters in Moscow. It was too late when

Baku found out about the telegram.

The same 'telegram trick' was used for Yerevan. The Karabakh activists sent a telegram from Martakert post office to Soviet Armenia's leader Karen Demirchian, the president of the Supreme Soviet, and to all official and party organs in Yerevan, and to the Regional and Village Soviets — in all 67 telegrams. The unsigned message read: 'The Regional Session in Karabakh has taken place and it was decided to secede from Azerbaijan'. It instructed all recipients to be present at 10 am at Demirchian's office in order to organize an expanded session. The intention was to force the leaders of Armenia SSR to discuss the issue of Karabakh (cf. 'An Interview with Vaché Sarukhanian', *Armenian News Network / Groong*, May 14, 2001).

188. Russian-Karabakh Armenian relations, especially on the personal level, have a long history. A host of Karabakh Armenians had held high positions in the military and administrative apparatus of the Tsarist Russian empire. At the turn of the 20th century, one of the most notable descendent of a Karabakh Melik house was Stepan Shaumyan, a leading Armenian Bolshevik until his death in 1918 and one of the Baku Commissars. Another Karabakh native is a 'two-times hero of the USSR' Marshal Hovhanes Baghramian.

189. Interview in Stepanakert, 2 September 1995 (ref. K14 A & B: 119-288).

190. A partial record of the conversation between Azerbaijan Party leaders and Karabakh regional Party officials, as recalled by journalist Nikolai Andreyev, is found in Rost 1990: 13-14.

191. As part of such efforts, on February 26 Baku television showed *Bloody Sunday*, a film 'depicting tsarist police gunning down peaceful protestors in the streets of Saint Petersburg in 1905' (Malkasian 1996: 48).

192. The 30 Azeri deputies in the Council did not participate in the voting, which was 110 to 7, with 13 abstentions. The resolution of the Council read:

> Supporting the desires of the labouring masses of the NKAO, we petition the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijani SSR and the Armenian SSR to demonstrate a deep understanding of the sincere aspirations of the Armenian population of Nagorno Karabakh and to resolve the issue of the transferral of the NKAO from the Azerbaijani SSR to the Armenian SSR. Concurrently, we petition the Supreme Soviet of the USSR for an affirmative decision regarding the transferral of the NKAO from the Azerbaijani SSR to the Armenian SSR (quoted in Malkasian 1996: 31-32).

193. The Karabakh movement in Armenia started on 22 February when some 150,000 gathered at the Opera Square in Yerevan for a mass protest. For an extensive discussion of the formation and activities of the Karabakh Committee in Armenia, see Malkasian 1996; Mouradian 1990: 405ff.

194. See footnote 11. References to the past and inter-communal clashes were common features of speeches for popular mobilisation. In recalling the protests of February 1988, Karabakh-born artist Vaché Sarukhanian (born 1942) — one of the founding members of the Krung Committee and a merited artist of the Azerbaijani SSR — provides a glimpse of the yet unsubstantiated stories retold — which, surely, would have reinforced popular anger toward Azerbaijan and Azeris:

> I told [the crowd] how in 1965 three Azeri teachers killed this one Armenian child. The child was eleven years old and on his head they had driven eleven 10-cm nails through his head, his body deformed. They had abused this boy in the dirtiest ways and had at the end (excuse me for saying this) cut off his genitalia and put it in his mouth and committed other ugly acts. When I told this and other stories, already the crowd had grown very large and many had come to listen.

To my knowledge, the factuality of these stories are not documented or verified.

195. The 55-member committee was made of seven members of Communist Party Oblast committees, four oblast and city soviet deputies, 22 enterprise and association leaders, and three

secretaries of factory party committees. Among the key figures were Igor Mouradyan, Gourgen Gabrielian, Hratchia Beglarian, Vartan Hagopian, Vatche Sarukhanian, Gagik Safaryan, Manvel Sargsian, and others. Krung was officially registered in Karabakh on 5 March 1988.

196. The core group was made of Arkady Manucharov, Silva Kaputikian, Zori Balayan, Igor Mouradyan and Vatche Sarukhanian.

197. Ten days after the formation of Krung, reportedly Igor Mouradyan formed another committee, which evolved into the "Karabakh Committee" in Armenia. Mouradyan was suspected of heading a "Karabakh Committee" created by the KGB to counter the activities of the popular Committee and to create divisions within the movement. Mouradyan refutes such accusations. 'Well, when they came to power,' he said referring to the members of the Karabakh Committee such as Levon Ter Petrossian and Vazken Manoukian, 'they entered the KGB archives, could they find anything about me? Have they been able to find anything about me? Let them look. Have they found any signature or endorsement that I was working with the KGB? It turns out that Ter Petrossian was a KGB man, Hambartsum Galstian and Alexan Hagopian were KGB agents, all these became clear later on' (Interview in London, 11 May 2001, ref. K0511: 711-717). For a discussion of the reasons for Mouradyan's falling out with the Karabakh Committee in Armenia, see Malkasian 1996: 69-74.

198. 'An Interview with Vaché Sarukhanian', *Armenian News Network/Groong*, May 14, 2001.

199. Interview with Igor Mouradyan, London 11 May 2001 (ref. K0511). For a discussion of the subsequent political and tactical differences between the Dashnak Party and the Armenian National Movement in Armenia, see Panossian 2001.

200. Subsequently transformed into the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus.

201. 'An Interview with Vaché Sarukhanian', *Armenian News Network/Groong*, 14 May 2001.

202. Karabakh activists even tried to convince the first secretary of the Central Committee of Georgia, Dzhumber Patiashvili, to support Karabakh's secession from Azerbaijan. But, as the messenger described, 'after two minutes, he simply chased me out of his office' ('An Interview with Vaché Sarukhanian', *Armenian News Network/Groong*, 14 May 2001). Support came even from as far as Lithuania. In July 1988, 'a rally of 100,000 in Vilnius voiced its approval for a telegram to Gorbachev supporting a referendum or plebiscite on self-determination in Mountainous Karabakh' (Malkasian 1996: 131).

203. On 23 February, Kevorkov was dismissed and replaced by Henrik Poghosian, First Deputy Chairman of the Party, who was sympathetic to Armenian concerns. After his dismissal and expulsion from the Party, Kevorkov became chief of a department in the Justice Ministry of Azerbaijan SSR.

204. While rejecting Karabakhis calls for unification with Armenia, on March 24 the Kremlin promised a 400-million ruble package for economic and cultural reforms in Karabakh to be implemented over a seven-year period. Ironically, the Kremlin's new package 'was to be administered by the same Azerbaijani government that stood accused of calculated repression' (Malkasian 1996: 63).

205. Sumgait, February 1998; Kirovabad, November 1988; Baku, January 1990. For Sumgait eyewitness accounts see Shahmaturian 1990 and Rost 1990: 25ff. See also, for example, Robin Lodge, 'Moscow Reports New Violence in Troubled Transcaucasia', *The Reuter Library Report*, 29 February 1988; *Los Angeles Times Sunday*, 21 January 1990; 'First Defendant of Sumgait Riots Sentenced to 15 Years', *Reuters*, 16 May 1988. Liz Fuller, 'Three Azerbaijanis Sentenced for Baku Anti-Armenian Pogroms', *RFE/RL Newline*, 17 May 1991.

For the Armenians, these events also evoked the memories of the 1915 genocide of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, thus putting the Armenian-Azeri conflict in a larger historical context of Turkish-Armenian relations. The Genocide, as Malkasian (1996: 55) put it, 'constituted a layer of collective memory that rested just below the surface of everyday life'.

206. Interview in London, 15 March 2002 (ref. Abk 0315: 212-242).

207. For cases in Baku and other cities in Azerbaijan, see Pilkington 1998: 131-132.

208. For cases of Abkhazians moving into Georgian homes in Sukhumi, see Steavenson 2002: 50-55.

209. Interview in Stepanakert, 10 August 1995 (ref. K2: 291-353).

210. Interview in Stepanakert, 10 August 1995 (ref. K2: 182-288). When the Armenian forces captured Shushi in 1992, this Armenian family took possession of their house again. Now the son and his family live there. The house had belonged to this family for three generations.

211. This seems to be more common in Shushi than in Stepanakert where Armenians were the overwhelming majority. In Stepanakert, Armenians seem to have had less "intimate" socialisation with Azerbaijanis. For example, when I asked a 78-year-old Armenian man whether he was familiar with Azerbaijanis' wedding traditions, he replied: 'I've never been to a Turk [Azeri] wedding, but I have heard that they kidnap the bride, keep her for a few days in secret… women don't participate in ceremonies…. things like that'. A young girl working behind another desk in the office where my interview with the old man was taking place, upon hearing my question interjected: 'Azeri women do not participate in weddings'; for her this appeared to be an important difference between how the Armenians and Azerbaijanis celebrate weddings (Interview in Stepanakert, 15 August 1995, ref. K3).

212. Today some 10,000 Armenians live in Baku, living in low profile, a large number of them women married or formerly married to Azeris or Russians, see *IWPR Caucasus Reporting Service*, No. 29, 28 April 2000.

As for Armenian-Azerbaijani mixed marriages in Karabakh, here are a few cases compiled during interviews in Stepanakert in 1995:

* An Azerbaijani man married to an Armenian was a lecturer in the Pedagogical Institute. 'They were a very loving family. When the Movement started, the wife stayed in Stepanakert and he escaped somewhere else. 'In those days, he used to come secretly and visit his wife. But now he cannot come anymore. This family has been destroyed'.

* An Azerbaijani man married to an Armenian changed his surname and stayed in Karabakh throughout the conflict. He died a few years ago. Neighbours say his son still lives in Karabakh. In fact, 'the son used to fight alongside our boys against the Azeris'.

* An Azerbaijani man married to an Armenian, 'refused to go anywhere else' during the conflict. Those who knew him recalled: 'He insisted on staying in Karabakh. He was a photographer and no one treated him badly. He continued to work and people respect his choice to stay'. But they add, 'The Azeris would not treat the Armenians the same way. They would be rough and less understanding'.

* An Armenian woman married to an Azerbaijani, left a husband, children and grandchildren behind in Aghdam and came to live in Karabakh. She still lives in Stepanakert.

* The Armenian husband of an Azerbaijani woman was killed during an attack on Stepanakert. But she still lives in Karabakh and has not changed her maiden (Azeri) name. The Armenian brother-in-law said: 'No one says anything to her or gives her a hard time. People have accepted her completely. I don't think the Azeris would have done the same if a similar thing happened in Azerbaijan'.

213. Interview in Stepanakert, 10 August 1995 (ref. K2: 364ff).

214. Interview in Stepanakert, 10 August 1995 (ref. K2: 376-382).

215. It might take at least two generations, if current relations between Americans and Vietnamese, characterised by 'forgiveness and pragmatism', could serve as an example; see David Lamb, *Vietnam, Now* (Public Affairs 2002).

216. *ArmeniaWeek.com* 12 July 2002, http://www.armeniaweek.com/july122002/council.html.

217. Interview in Stepanakert, 10 August 1995, ref. K2: 421.

218. Interview in London, 15 March 2002 (ref. Abk 0315: 264-285).

219. The Abkhaz leadership, including Ardzinba and parliamentarians, escaped to the city of Gudauta, northeast of Sukhum (cf. Anchabadze 1999: 140).

220. An Abkhaz journalist intimated that there was an abundance of volunteers during military emergencies. For example, during military mobilisation at the height of the tensions in the Gali region in 1998, the Abkhaz regular army had an 'excess of hundreds of volunteers', many of them former veterans, and had to turn them away (Interview in London, 16 July 2002). In January 1993, a separate 'Armenian battalion' was formed by the Armenian community in Abkhazia (UNPO 1994: 13).

221. Interview in Stepanakert, 2 September 1995 (ref. K14 A & B: 542-551).

222. For a detailed discussion of the formation of the Karabakh army, see Ara Tatevosyan, 'Nagorno-Karabakh New Army of "Iron Will and Disciple"', *Transition* (OMRI) 9 August 1996: 20-23.

223. These included Adyghes and Kabardians, ethnically related to the Abkhazians, Chechens, Ossetians, Russians (including Cossacks), as well as Abkhazians from the diaspora in Turkey and the Middle East (cf. Anchabadze 1999: 140, UNPO 1994:13-14).

224. For details and discussion of the use of mercenaries in the Karabakh conflict, see United Nations General Assembly's report on the 'Use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination', Doc. A/50/390/ Add.1, 29 August 1995.

225. For numbers and situation of refugees, see the Council of Europe's Report of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Demography, 'Situation of refugees and displaced persons in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia', Doc. 9480, 4 June 2002.

226. 'Bloodshed in the Caucasus: Escalation of the Armed Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh', Helsinki Watch report, September 1992: 7-9. The report adds: "'Operation Ring" featured the encirclement of Armenian villages by Soviet forces, followed by the entry of Soviet and Azerbaijani forces, who beat inhabitants, burned and looted homes, and arrested individuals who were held and often terribly mistreated in Azerbaijani prisons. Hundreds were detained, thousands were forcibly deported and over 20 villages were emptied'. See also 'Implementation of the Helsinki Accords. Human Rights and Democratization in the Newly Independent States of the former Soviet Union', compiled by the Staff of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, U.S. Congress, Washington DC. January 1993: 133-134; and 'Bloodshed in the Caucasus: Indiscriminate Bombing and Shelling by Azerbaijani Forces in Nagorno Karabakh' Helsinki Watch report, July 1993.

227. For a detailed discussion of 'Operation Ring', see Murphy 1992, Tatevosyan 1996, and Kotanjian 2000. Thomas Goltz reports (1998: 34) that in Chaykend (Getashen) 'There were houses smoldering. Not from chimneys, but from windows, broken and shattered windows. The deeper we moved into town, the stranger it became. The town looked like it had been bombed or involved in a battle -- and a recent one… Only later did I understand that we had walked into 'Operation Ring'… the police action mounted in the closing days of the Soviet Union to bring peace to the smoldering conflict in Karabakh by disarming local Armenians, even if it meant "cleaning" them from their homes'.

228. Signed by Nikitenko, Romanova, Molova, Mamiyera, Matsukhova in Nalchik (McKay 1991: 60-61).

229. Writing in *War Report* (June 1996: 40), Leila Yunusova reports that 'according to calculations of independent experts', during the Karabakh war, 11,000 Azerbaijanis were killed 'and about 30,000 wounded', and 6,000 Armenians were killed, with 20,000 wounded. For numbers and situation of refugees, see the Council of Europe's Report of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Demography, 'Situation of refugees and displaced persons in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia', Doc. 9480, 4 June 2002.

230. The districts of Lachin, Kelbajar, Kubatly, Jebrail, Zangelan, Aghdam, Fizuli.

231. Interview in Stepanakert, 3 September 1995 (ref GN: 12-17). For more details on these bombings, see 'Bloodshed in the Caucasus: Indiscriminate Bombing and Shelling by Azerbaijani Forces in Nagorno Karabakh', Helsinki Watch, Volume 5, Issue 10, July 1993.

232. *Bakinskiy Rabochiy* (26 February 2002), the official government newspaper, wrote: 'As a result of the Xocali genocide unleashed by Armenians on the Azerbaijani nation, 613 people were killed, 1,275 civilians taken hostage. The fate of 150 of them is still unknown. As a result of this tragedy, more than 1,000 civilians received different wounds and became disabled. Among the killed are 106 women, 83 infants, 70 old people. In addition, 76 underage people became disabled'. *RFE/RL* reported: 'Official Azerbaijani reports say ethnic Armenians…. killed some 485 Azeris' (Jolyon Naegele, ' Azerbaijan: Armenians and Azerbaijanis Remember Suffering', *RFE/RL*, 2 March 1998). See also, '600 Azerbaijanis Slain at Khojaly' *Los Angeles Times*, 12 June 12, 1992: A-6.

233. Azerbaijan's parliament accused former president Ayaz Mutalibov of responsibility for Khojaly and suggested taking him to the International Criminal Court in The Hague (see *Yeni Musavat*, 1 March 2002). For Karabakh Armenians' version of the incident, see Jolyon Naegele, ' Azerbaijan: Karabakh Rejects Azeri Version of Events', *RFE/RL*, 5 March 1998. For Azerbaijani position on the incident, see Fatma Abdullazadeh, *Karabakh* (Baku: "XXI" YNE, 1999): 90ff. Incidentally, in 1992, Karabakh human rights activist and chairman of the Karabakh branch of Helsinki Citizens Assembly, Karen Ohanjanian, publicly 'apologized to the people of Azerbaijan for the violence committed in Khojaly. It was published in the media and broadcast by Radio Free Europe, BBC, and others' ('An Interview with Karen Ohanjanian' *Armenian News Network/ Groong*, 15 November 2000).

234. Meaning systems could be expressed through myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, history, rituals, etc. Another notion presented by Weber is *ethic*, i.e., the entire perspective and values of a religious way of thinking. See his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Scribner, 1958).

235. One definition of religion provided by Durkheim (1995: 44) is relevant to our case studies: 'A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community… all those who adhere to them'. For a discussion of sociological definitions of religion, see, for example, Berger 1967: 175-177; Weber 1963; McGuire 1992.

236. In this reality, an individual member of society seeks 'to validate his self-interpretations by comparing them with the objectively available coordinates of his biography. In other words, the individual's own life appears as objectively real, to himself as well as to others, only as it is located within a social world that itself has the character of objective reality' (Berger 1967: 13).

237. See, for example, Greeley 1993 and Greeley 1994.

238. As a 24-year-old woman in Stepanakert put it, 'The Church is not clean (*makur*). It does not have a good image among many people. The clergy have given a bad image to the church. The clergy seem to be materialistic' (Interview in Stepanakert, 22 August 1995: ref. NB: 136-138).

239. I am grateful to Marat Shterin for bringing Krylov's valuable study on Abkhaz traditional religion to my attention and for translating certain sections of the article.

240. As there are no census data, other estimates put the number of Muslims at upwards of 40 percent (cf. Clogg 1999: 201). However, in a 1997 survey of 1448 people in Abkhazia (including non-Abkhaz citizens), 55 percent identified themselves as Christian, 17 percent as Muslim, and 22 percent as non-believers or unable to identify their religious affiliation, see Krylov 1998.

241. In 1994, eleven percent (624,910) of the population of Georgia was Muslim (http://www.adherents. com/adhloc/Wh_108.html#259).

242. In a 1991 publication, Gamsakhurdia wrote: 'Essentially, Georgian Christianity may be said

to be militant Chrsitianity. It is a Christianity of knights, fighters, and it may be said also that Georgia was a single spiritual Order of St. George, and it was perceived as such by the Crusaders and by foreign visitors of the country, this leading to the establishment of the designation Georgia, which of course comes from the pagan period' (Zviad Ghamsakhurdia, *The Spiritual Mission of Georgia*. Tbilisi: Ganatleba, 1991: 17-18); quoted in 'South Caucasus: Regional and International Conflict Resolution', Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Geneva, June 2001: 45n.

243. Interview in Stepanakert 1 August 1995 (ref. K13: 215-221).

244. *ibid.*

245. Interview in Stepanakert, 30 August 1995 (ref. K12: 135-152).

246. It should be noted that while in the West 'spirituality' is generally associated with some sort of religiosity; in Soviet Armenian discourse, spirituality, the *spiritual* (*hogevor*), such as 'spiritual values' (*hogevor arzhekner*) or 'spiritual wealth' *(hogevor harstutyun*) did not necessarily imply religious concepts, but things to do with the human (or national) 'spirit', i.e., the soul, aestheticism, ethos. For example, referring to the 'four-thousand-year old Armenian civilisation', Aivazian wrote: 'The spiritual wealth provided by national civilization and identity is inexhaustible' (Armen M. Aivazian. *Hayastani Patmutian Lusabanume Amerikian Patmagrutyan Mej [The history of Armenia as presented in American historiography]*. Yerevan: Artagers Publications, 1998: 8).

247. Interview in Stepanakert, 22 August 1995 (ref. NB: 155-156).

248. Interview in Stepanakert, 1 September 1995 (ref. K14a: 296-303),

249. Interview in Stepanakert, 6 September 1995 (ref. K17: 306-309)

250. Interview in Stepanakert, 6 September 1995 (ref. K17: 256-261).

251. Interview in Stepanakert, 6 September 1995 (ref. K17: 776-782).

252. Interview in Stepanakert, 1 September 1995 (ref. K14a: 307-311).

253. *ibid.* As explained by an Abkhaz NGO worker in Sukhum, most of the personnel of the government in Abkhazia, like in Karabakh, is still made of apparatchiks and people who worked in the Soviet system and come 'from the old Soviet leadership'.

> Even those who were too young to have worked in the Soviet system or were students at the time, the education and the mentality they have adopted is very much of Soviet type (Interview in London, 15 March 2002 (ref. Abkh 0315: 61-68).

254. For example, a young journalist in Stepanakert explained:

> Religion should not be forced or pressured, it should come from inside. The Leninism and Marxism that was forced during Soviet times is now replaced with Christianity. The cults (*aghantner*) are the propagandist preachers, like Jehovah's Witness and *Yeghpayragtzutyune* [Brotherhood or Fellowship]. This has negative effect like [Marxism-Leninism] did during Soviet times (Interview in Stepanakert, 22 August 1995 (ref. NB: 176-179).

255. Interview in Stepanakert, 1 September 1995 (ref. K14a: 137-147).

256. Interview in Stepanakert, 22 August 1995 (ref. NB: 35-51).

257. Quoted in Clogg 1999: 215.

258. Interview in Stepanakert, 6 September 1995 (ref. K17: 444-453).

259. Interview in Stepanakert, 6 September 1995 (ref. K17: 450ff).

260. Interview in Stepanakert, 6 September 1995 (ref. K17: 461-467). Along the same lines, a top

Armenian diplomat, Armen Sarkissian, speaking at the Vatican in 1999, characterised Armenia's conversion to Christianity as an 'act of self-determination', and added: '[Armenia's] faith in the values and principles of Christ has reinforced its support for the fundamental ideas of freedom, human dignity and the self-determination of free people' (*Zenit* 23 March 1999; cf. *Azg/Mirror-Spectator Online* 17 February 1999).

261. Interview in Stepanakert, 1 September 1995 (ref. GN). Another mother added:

> When we were in the shelters, the children, whenever there was bombing, instead of lying down or staying low, they would go and pray in front of Christ's picture. We, the adults, would be lying down for protection (Interview in Stepanakert, 22 August 1995).

262. Interview in Stepanakert, 22 August 1995 (ref. NB: 63-64).

263. Interview in London, 15 March 2002 (ref. Abk 0315).

264. During a field trip in Karabakh in August 1996, various informants working in the medical sector put the numbers of widows in Karabakh at about 6,000. Official numbers for the dead or the casualties of the war are not made public.

265. Interview in Stepanakert, 13 September 1995 (ref. K2: 179-183).

266. Interview in London, 15 March 2002 (ref. Abkh 0315: 477-483).

267. cf. Yeghishe, *History of Vartan and the Armenian War* (New York: Delphic Press, 1952).

268. Interview in Stepanakert, 2 September 1995 (ref. K14 A&B: 895-901). A deacon who was at the monastery when this incident happened recalls:

> 'As bombs from the air were raining over us, there was nothing we could do … we just went into the church and started to pray. We were praying that God might comfort and bring peace into the heart of the enemy… We were praying for our enemies, for peace in their hearts… one of the bombs fell on the church where we were praying, but it did not explode…Now, how could one not believe that it was God who protected us?' (Interview in Stepanakert, 18 August 1995 (ref. K6: 266-270).

Interestingly, similar accounts of bombs not exploding on religious grounds are also reported in Abkhazia; see Eric Baudelaire's diary entry for August 20th, 2000 (Baudelaire & Lynch 2000a).

269. Interview in Stepanakert, 2 September 1995 (ref. K14 A&B: 885-889).

270. This type of hagiographic literature has also been reprinted in newspapers in the Armenian diaspora (e.g., example, *Aztag* daily in Beirut, *Artsakank* in Nicosia, *Asbarez* in Los Angeles) and had been reproduced for wider circulation and consumption, see, for example, "Ungrgnelineru Jamanak'e", *Pakin Literary Series*, No. 1, (Aleppo: Kilikia Press), 1996; this 400-page book documents the lives of 143 'martyrs and heroes'; and *Pakin* (Literary and Artistic Monthly), No. 9-12; September-December 1993; a 432-page publication documenting 283 individuals/fighters.

271. Also, a battalion of the Karabakh Armenian forces was called 'Crusaders', as the soldiers had huge crosses painted on their backs. During the assault on Shushi in May 1992, not only the soldiers had crosses painted on their backs and helmets, but also on tanks and military vehicles. Officers and civilians interviewed on the subject insisted there was no religious connotation, that the practice was rather a way of distinguishing the Armenian forces from the Azerbaijanis as both wore the same Soviet-style, Russian-supplied uniforms and gear. The 'Crusaders' battalion was under the command of the Fresno-born Garo Kahkejian, who was 'shot in the forehead' during fierce fighting; see *The Armenian Reporter International*, 17 December 1994: 19. When Armenian forces captured Aghdam, crosses were painted over the signs of the Grey Wolves, the Azerbaijani version of the eponymous ultra-nationalist party in Turkey. Founded by former Azerbaijani Premier Iskander Hamidov in the 1990s, the Grey Wolves had reportedly sent fighters to Chechnya as well in early 1995. Their name was changed in 1995 to Party of National

Democracy (cf. *RFE/RL Newsline,* 3: 226, Part I, 19 November 1999).

272. The seven main shrines are Dydrypsh-nykha, Yebyr-nykha, Lapyr-nykha, Lashkendar, Ldzaa-nykha, Lykh-nykha, and Ylyr-nkha. For more details on particular family shrines, see Krylov 1998.

273. In certain cases Christian beliefs have been interwoven with certain *a'nyxa*, dedicated, for example, to a saint. Such practices are also common among the Ossetians. See, for example, Ksenia Gokoyeva, North Ossetia Honours "Pagan" Saint George'. *IWPR Caucasus Reporting Service*, No. 157, 28 November 2002.

274. Other gods are associated with hunting and war, the forest, water, thunder, fertility, domestic animals, agriculture, etc. There are also deities representing bears, snakes, dogs, horses, the moon, sun, fire, bronze, iron, so on. See Clogg: 1999: 212-214.

275. In a 1997 survey of 852 Abkhazians, 47.2 percent who claimed to be Christians admitted that they either had traditional shrines or had turned to such shrines for help; 66.5 percent of Muslims claimed similar practices (Krylov 1999: 116).

276. Abkhazian and Georgian accounts of the introduction of Christianity differ and are controversial, such as over the historical accounts of St. Nino's missionary work in the region. See, for example, Smith et al 1998: 58-59.

277. As described by F. Tornau, a Caucasian officer, quoted in Sh. Inal-Ipa, *Abkhazy*, (Sukhum, 1965), as cited in Clogg 1999: 208. When in 1810 Abkhazia became a Russian protectorate, it is reported that 'each extended family, regardless of its religious persuasion, customarily made an annual sacrifice to Saint George (Ilorskij), most often on the first day of Easter, otherwise on any other sacred day throughout the summer' (Clogg 1999: 209).

278. Interview in London, 15 March 2002 (ref. Abk 0315: 721-723). She explained further that, 'more or less' the only distinction between the Christians and Muslims is geography, i.e., the villages inhabited by a particular community, which are distinguished not by religious affiliation, but by 'those who eat pork and those who do not eat pork. This is the most important thing… they can do anything else'.

279. In the 1880s, Lakoba (1999: 87) writes: 'the Georgian clergy unleashed a storm of activity foisting on the autochthonous Abkhazian population a Georgian liturgy and the Georgian language, with which they were totally unfamiliar, whilst many Abkhazian surnames were registered by Mingrelian clerics in a Kartvelian form'. To counter attempts of the Georgian Church to spread its influence in Abkhazia, in 1892 the Russian Orthodox Synod in St. Petersburg founded 'the Commission for the Translation of Religious Books into Abkhaz'. According to Lakoba: 'A group of Abkhazian clerics and teachers began to take shape from precisely this time' (*ibid*).

280. Between February 1917 and January 1921, 'Russian Muslims' had published, among other languages, a periodical in the Abkhaz language (Benningsen 1985: 48n; see also Benningsen & Lemercier-Quelquejay 1964: 284-284).

281. Today Abkhazian seminarians study in Orthodox Church centres in Russia.

282. For example, ethnographic studies of Karabakh society from the late 19th century provide ample evidence of the diverse religious practices in Karabakh — many of which are still practised today. A significant source that provides detailed descriptions of such practices is Yervant Lalayan's ethnographic studies. Starting in 1886, Lalayan, a Swiss-educated ethnographer, studied and recorded the life of Karabakh Armenians and published his articles in *Ethnographic Journal* (Tbilisi), [in Armenian], from 1896-1916. Lalayan was the founder and editor of the *Journal*. Two of the five-volume collected works of Lalayan have been published, see Yerevant Lalayan *Works,* vol. 1 (1983) and vol. 2 (1988) Yerevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences.

283. In the American context, civil religion is defined as 'any set of beliefs and rituals, related to the past, present, and/or future of a people ('nation') which are understood in some transcendental

fashion' (Hammond 1976: 171); it has its myths, saints, national shrines, etc. See also Bellah 1996.

284. Interview K2: 212-215

285. In Karabakh it is common practice to keep the body in the house for two or three days, lying on a table and covered with white cloth. This is done to allow the relatives from distant places to come and pay their respects. On the second day, a coffin is ordered to be made, they are not pre-made. After the funeral a memorial meal is prepared. As explained by a local: 'the table resembles the same table of a wedding, only this time it is a memorial meal, a mournful event. The same wedding table with all its preparations and trappings, with enough food to feed a whole village'. Indeed, this is a large financial burden for the family to bear (Interview in Stepanakert, 13 September 1996).

286. Interview in Stepanakert, 13 September 1996 (ref. K2: 55-65).

287. Interview in Stepanakert, 5 August 1995 (ref. K13: 273-276).

288. Interview in Stepanakert, 22 August 1995 (ref. NB: 160-162).

289. This "genre" of Armenian prophetic or millenarian literature is not new. For example, according to an 18th century legend the Armenians were to be liberated from the Islamic yoke in 666 years by the help of an outside Christian state. Avedis Sanjian explains: 'the primary objective of the Armenian prophetic literature was to instil and perpetuate among the Armenians the hope for the resurrection of their political independence. This literature took the form of visions, often combined with predictory or prophetic pronouncements, attributed to some well-known Armenian Church leader… the agents of this liberation varied in conformity with the actual historical developments' (Avedis K. Sanjian, 'Two Contemporary Armenian Elegies on the Fall of Constantinople, 1453', *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 1, 1970: 229, 238).

290. 'Armenianness' also includes shared beliefs, values, symbols, and national rituals, passed down from one generation to another.

291. Interestingly, when in 1989 the agenda of the Karabakh Movement in Armenia 'became most encompassing [i.e. including independence of Armenia], school children were seen demonstrating in the streets of Yerevan chanting the [Armenian] alphabet as if it was the most revolutionary song' (Gerard Libaridian. *Armenia at the Crossroads: Democracy and Nationhood in the Post-Soviet Era*. Watertown, MA: Blue Crane Books, 1991: 35n).

292. Mesrop Mashtots (ca 355-439), a saint in the Armenian Church, was born in the village of Hatzegyats in Taron, Armenia. He studied in Antioch, where he learned Greek, Syriac and Persian. Upon his return, he worked as a clerk in the Royal Court. In 394 he left the palace and became a monk.

293. *Dzaynkagh Sharaknots* [Hymnal] (Jerusalem: St. James Press, 1914), 381-382. See also Catholicos Karekin II, *Hogh, Mart yev Gir* [Land, Man and Letter] Antelias, Lebanon 1991: 165-177 for a contemporary use of the Moses-Mesrop comparison.

294. Torgom, Ashkenaz and Hayk are the offspring of Noah's son Japheth.

295. See, for example, Khorenatsi 1978: 73-75; Toumanoff 1963: 306-336.

296. See, for example, *Republic of Mountainous Karabakh* 24 June 1995 about the Armenian community in Ukraine and containing an interview with the editor of *Arakadz* monthly published by the Ukrainian-Armenian community.

297. 'Our Language', trans. Diana Der Hovanessian, in *The Armenian Church* (New York) March-April 1996.

298. Interestingly, the letters of the alphabet cast in gold and adorned with precious diamonds, perhaps costing millions of roubles, are preserved in a vault in Ejmiatsin, the headquarters of the Armenian Catholicos, as an "eternal" monument of the Armenian language. It is occasionally

shown to visitors. The alphabet "monument" was commissioned in the 1980s during the tenure of Catholicos Vazken I and is the work of architect-painter Baghdasar Arzoumanian and goldsmith Jirair Chouloyan. Other two monuments in the "series", made also in gold and diamonds, are a *Khachkar* [cross-stone] and the emblem of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic.

299. Armen Hovanissian, *Reflections for Page Two* [in Armenian] Yerevan 1993: 3. In fairness to authors such as Hovanissian, it could be argued that the 'language' is used as a literary hyperbola and 'out of context' citations do not necessarily express their *religious* views.

300. For other ethnographic work on the role of Armenian language and culture, see, for example, Susan Pattie (1997) *Faith in History: Armenians Rebuilding Community*. Washington & London: Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press. Levon Abrahamian and Nacy Sweezy (2001) *Armenian Folk Arts, Culture, and Identity*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.

301. Interview in Stepanakert, 1 September 1995 (ref. K14 A&B: 58-59).

302. For an interesting discussion of the Karabakh dialect, based on a study conducted in Karabakh in 2000-2001, see Shahnazaryan 2001.

303. Press Release, *Mother See of Holy Ejmiatsin, Information Services*, 24 June 2000, posted on the Groong internet news mailing list at www.groong.com.

304. The monument was inaugurated in the autumn of 1967 and is the work of Karabakh-born sculptor Sarkis Baghtasarian (1924-2001), who died in Yerevan at the age of 77. *Pravda* (1973, No. 365) wrote that the monument is the first in its kind in the world for it is dedicated to people of longevity — a common phenomenon in Karabakh where people live beyond their 100th birthday. Popularly, Karabakh Armenians refer to the monument as "Grandpa and Grandma" (*Papik ou Tatik*). An male informant, recounting his childhood, said: 'I am the ninth child of my mother. It might sound funny or strange, but when I was born my father was 70 years old and my mother was 49 years old… My mother gave me milk [breast-fed me] for six years. Six years imagine! I remember… whenever I was late to go home [playing in the fields], she used to call my name and yell across the fields "milk to my child… come home…" She called me home with her breast-milk. I used to run home for the milk like a lamb who hears the voice of his mother in the field' (Interview in Stepanakert, 1 September 1995 (ref. K14 A&B: 49-56).

305. In the past, when the *tonir* was built in the house a priest would normally consecrate it with holy oil before it was used. For the role of the *tonir* in rituals, see Y. Lalayan *Works* Vol. 2 (Yerevan, 1988) 99-100, 123.

306. According to Soviet sources (1970s), 'about one thousand clandestine houses of prayers and some 300 major Holy Places of pilgrimage function[ed] as "parallel" or underground establishments [in Azerbaijan] (Lemercier-Quelquejay 1984: 47; a list of most important among such places are provided on the same page). Lemercier-Quelquejay notes that 'compared to other Muslim territories (especially in Central Asia), the Holy Place of Azerbaijan enjoy a greater prestige and are attended by greater masses of believers, probably because of the deeper, more popular, folkloric aspects of Shiism' (*Ibid.*).

307. Interview in Stepanakert, 1 September 1995 (ref. K14 A&B: 88-104). For a similar supplication for divine power in Abkhazia during WWII, see Krylov 1999: 121-122.

308. Cf. second and third stanzas. The words of the anthem are by V. Hagopian, (President of RMK Writers' Union), music by A. Nasipian. The official version played on Karabakh state radio and formal ceremonies is performed by Armenia's Radio and TV Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Ohan Durian.

309. See, for example, B. Ulubabyan *The Struggle for Artsakh* (Yerevan 1994); Z. Balayan *Hell and Heaven* (Yerevan 1995); V. Khochabekyan *Artsakh at the time of Crisis* (Yerevan 1991); V. Baghrian *Avo* [about Monte Melkonian] (Stepanakert 1993); H. Beglarian *The Road of Immortality* (Stepanakert 1995); Smela Saroukhanian *My Faith is Light* [poetry] (Stepanakert 1995); all are in Armenian.

310. 301 A.D. has been traditionally accepted to be the date of conversion. However, studies have shown that 314 was the actual date, see Archbishop Tiran Nersoyan, *Armenian Church Historical Studies* (edited by Nerses Vrej Nersessian) New York: St. Vartan Press, 1996: 63.

311. An ancient Armenian church named after St. Grigoris in the village of Nyugdi in the Derbent district of Dagestan was fully restored in 2002 through the efforts of the small Armenian community in Derbent. See *Arminfo,* 31 August 2002.

312. The tombstone and the inscription are still visible today to visitors to the monastery, situated in the village of Vank in the Martuni region of Karabakh.

313. See, for example, the report of the Diocese of Karabakh about the elementary school in Shushi presented to the Catholicos in Ejmiatsin. It gives statistics on the student body, teachers and committees, as well as a financial report for the academic year. *Ararat* 4, 5 (September 1871): 295-301; cf. Parse1963: 63-43.

314. For the history, purpose and content analysis of the journal see Mouradian 1990a.

315. One of the nuns was Deaconess Varvara Bahatrian (*Ararat* monthly December 31, 1887: 562). For a general discussion on the subject, see Fr Abel Oghlukian, *The Deaconess in the Armenian Church* (New Rochelle: St. Nersess Seminary Press, 1994).

316. Throughout the interview, the old man referred to Communists as "Gorbachev". For him Gorbachev embodied all the ills and failures of the Communist regime. I had the feeling also that he was using Gorbachev as an image and personality that I, as a foreigner, would be most familiar with as the man who "destroyed Russia".

317. Interview in Stepanakert, 15 August 1995 (ref. K4b and K4c: 503-513).

318. Interview in Stepanakert, 15 August 1995 (ref. K3: 69-81).

319. Antranik Baghdasarian continued, 'I have been through a lot, but one of the happiest moments in my life was to see the re-opening of the Armenian Church in Samarkand two years ago — before losing my eyesight' (*AGBU* magazine, March 1998: 14).

320. In a 16 March 1927 report to the Commissar, Vertanes writes: 'In response to your verbal request on 8 March, I herewith have the honour to give you the details of our activities as Prelate of Karabakh… Being a disciple of the High Priest Jesus, the preacher of human equality, brotherhood and harmony and a servant of His principles, our sermons have been and shall be purely religious in content, so that, remaining loyal to the Church and the Christian commandments of love, brotherhood, harmony, the faithful may strive and work, for, as the apostle Paul says, 'Anyone unwilling to work should not eat' [2 Thess. 3:10] (Behbutian 1994: 101).

321. Ejmiatsin Archives and *Documents* in Behbutian 1994: 172, 242.

322. While, to my knowledge, no formal statistics exist about the number of clergy in Karabakh and its regions, *Ararat* monthly (Vagharshapat) provides a valuable source of information. From 1871-1887, the December issues of *Ararat* list all the names of its subscribers, lay and clergy, with the names of their respective regions, towns and villages. Based on my calculations of the number of clergy subscribers between 1871 and 1887, the average number of priests in Karabakh is 277 in four major regions alone: Shushi 178, Noukhi 55, Gantsak 32, Norshen 12. (See *Ararat*, December issues of 1871, 1873, 1875, 1877, 1879, 1881, 1883, 1887). Started in May 1871, *Ararat* was the official organ of the Catholicosate of Ejmiatsin, which covered 'religious, historical, philological and moral' topics. In 1887, it had 1,287 clergy subscribers throughout the Russian empire (including Armenia, Karabakh region and the rest of the Caucasus).

323. An association of lay men and women under the auspices of the Armenian Church, who hold bible studies and prayer gatherings in homes and public spaces.

324. One of those who converted in 1987 was a 24-year old student, who later became very

active in Christian ministry. 'I used to smoke hashish and be involved in a thousand and one strange things. When I accepted Jesus, I went to Yerevan and got baptized in the Armenian Church. At the time we didn't have a church in Karabakh. God changed my life. Since that day I've had peace in my heart and until today I continue to walk with Jesus' (Interview in Stepanakert, 30 August 1995, ref. K12: 81-86).

325. Interview in Stepanakert, 30 August 1995 (ref. K12: 230-232).

326. Interview in Stepanakert, 30 August 1995 (ref . K12: 247-249).

327. An official communiqué from the Chancellery of the Catholicosate of Ejmiatsin, dated 3 July 1989, announced that four churches were opened in Karabakh: St. John's Monastery of Gandzasar (built in 1238), St. Gregory of Amaras (4th century), St. Garabed of Martakert (1883), and Holy Resurrection of Hatrut (1671). *Ejmiatsin* monthly, July 1989: 10.

328. Interview in Stepanakert, 5 August 1995 (ref. K13: 256-281).

329. Hastings (1997: 185ff) argues that 'every ethnicity is shaped significantly by religion just as it is by language'. For an engaging discussion on Armenian identity from a theoretical perspective of nationalism, see Panossian 2002.

330. For example a 5 January 1992 letter of Bishop Barkev Matirossian sent to: 'The Hierarchs of all Christian Churches, the UN General Secretary, the Heads of All States, All Charitable Organisations and Societies, and All People of Good Will' in which he appeals for intervention to stop the war. He writes, 'It is not only the perpetrators of crime and evil who commit sin, but also those who stand by, seeing and knowing, and who do not condemn it or try to avert it'. For Catholicos Vazken I's cable-messages sent to the Pope, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Patriarch of Russia, the World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches, see *Soviet Karabakh 4* May 1991. See also Balayan (1995: 498) about Bishop Barkev's visits to foreign embassies in Moscow and other international fora on behalf of Karabakh. For similar appeals by Azerbaijan's religious leader, Sheik-ul-Islam Allah-Shukur Pasha-Zadeh, to Islamic countries and his 1989 official visits to Turkey, Syria and Iran with Zia Bunyatov, a member of the Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences, see *Spurk* (Beirut) 1 January 1990.

331. Bishop Barkev Martirossian, whose parents are from Chardakhlou, Karabakh, was born in Sumgait in 1954. At the age of six, his parents moved from Karabakh to Yerevan. In 1971 he graduated from Yerevan State University, majoring in Mathematics. He later studied at the Russian Literature and Foreign Language Institute, where in 1976, he submitted a thesis on Mikhail Bulgakov's 'The Master and Margarita' — for which he was awarded a golden medal for the 'Best Thesis in the Union'. After completing his military service in the Soviet Army, in 1981 he first studied at the Seminary in Ejmiatsin and two years later at the Leningrad Theological Academy, where he wrote a thesis (later published as book) on 'Knowledge of God' in both Christianity and non-Christian religions and philosophies, such as theosophy. He was appointed Prelate of Karabakh in November 1988.

332. Interview in Stepanakert, 18 August 1995 (ref. K6: 278-290).

333. The reference is to deployment of Soviet troops in Baku on January 19-20 to impose a 'state of emergency' and ostensibly to 'prevent the ouster of the Communist-dominated government of the Republic of Azerbaijan by the nationalist-minded, non-Communist opposition'. Some 132 people were killed and at least 744 wounded in the 'Black January' incidents. For details, see 'Conflict in the Soviet Union: Black January in Azerbaidzhan', Helsinki Watch/Memorial Report, May 1991.

334. Interview in Vank, 28 August 1995 (ref. K11: 164-207).

335. For example there is a regular column in the official organ of the Diocese of Karabakh, *Khosk* [Word], called 'Contemporary Miracles' that documents 'miracles' taking place in Karabakh.

336. *The Armenian Reporter International* (New York), 10 June 1995.

337. Gandzasar Theological Centre, Yerevan 1995, pp32, (30,000 copies printed).

338. Interview in Stepanakert, 18 August 1995 (ref. K6: 287-289).

339. It should be noted that the refusal on religious grounds to serve in the armed forces is the most contentious issue. It is argued that due to the existing military situation, this is not only a matter of religious differences but a serious 'national security' issue. A case in Karabakh, told by a human rights activist, illustrates this dilemma:

> During the aerial bombardment of Stepanakert in September 1993, a serviceman in the [Karabakh] air defence artillery refused to fire a missile at an Azerbaijani bomber, which went on to cause the death and injury of 51 people. The serviceman was a Jehovah's Witness who had taken an oath before his community not to shoot…. It was at this point that the Nagorno Karabakh security service began its campaign to persecute the religious minorities.

Karen Ohanjanian, 'Societal Responses To Religious Diversity And Pluralism In Nagorno-Karabakh', (unpublished) paper presented at *The Spiritual Supermarket. Religious Pluralism and Globalisation in the 21st Century: the Expanding European Union and Beyond*; held at the London School of Economics, 20 April 2001: 4.

340. For example, in 1995, a decree of President Vladislav Ardzinba banned Jehovah's Witnesses in Abkhazia, which still remains in effect. In June 1998, seven Jehovah's Witnesses were arrested and sentenced by the Abkhazian authorities for refusing military service. See *Keston News Service*, 3 June 1998; also 'The religious situation in the unrecognised Transcaucasian state of Abkhazia', *Keston News Service,* 25 February 2000). The public pronouncement in Yerevan of the Bishop of Karabakh is a representative example of the anti-sectarian discourse in this region. He stated: 'The dissemination of the ideology of Jehovah's Witnesses bears the most horrible threats to our people, our state, our faith… This sect is not only of totalitarian, universal character, but it also of ill character. The onward march of sects is an alarming signal to everyone: the clergymen, the laymen, the rulers and the fighting men. In my opinion, it's a matter of national concern, it's a problem for all of us and it must be resolved by joint efforts' (*Noyan Tapan* 17 August 1998).

341. A journalist, who had lived in Georgia for two years and visited Abkhazia on several occasions, writing as late as 2002, described the Abkhazians as 'more likely to be Muslim than the Georgians (although there are plenty of churches in Abkhazia and no actual mosques)' (Steavenson 2002: 252).

342. Three percent is Christian and less than one percent Jewish, 'the rest of the population adheres to other faiths or consists of non-believers', see US State Department, '2000 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom: Azerbaijan', released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 5 September 2000.

343. 'Azerbaijan Country Profile Part II of IV' *Turkistan Newsletter TEB Volume 100:006*, 12 February 2000 (electronic publication of SOTA, the Netherlands). See also Lemercier-Quelquejay 1984; Hikmet Hadjy-Zadeh, 'Human Rights and Religious Freedom in Azerbaijan' a presentation made at the Human Rights Centre in Columbia University in 1996, posted on *Turkistan Newsletter Volume 3:230,* 8 October 1999. For the historical background of Panislamism and Panturkism in the Caucasus and Central Asia, see Benningsen 1985.

344. According to Kuliev there were 969 Shi'ite mosques and about 100 Sunni mosques. See *Kommunist* (Baku) 6 July 1928, quoted in Lemercier-Quelquejay 1984: 39.

345. Mass and organized anti-religious propaganda in Azerbaijan was unleashed in 1924. Communist authorities established the Azeri Union of Godless Militants (*Allahsyzlar*) in 1925. By 1928, the organization had 3,000 members, made up of Azeris (about 30 percent), Russians and Armenians, and had published 20 anti-Islamic pamphlets in Azeri. See Lemercier-Quelquejay 1984: 37-8.

346. The Muslim board had authority over all Shi'ites in the USSR. According to Lemercier-Quelquejay (1984: 46), these included: 'Azeris, Tats, Central Asian Iranians (31,000), plus an unknown number of Shia city dwellers in Uzbekistan (Samarkand, Bukhara, Tashkent); and

to the Sunnis of Transcaucasus, Sunni Azeris, the Georgian Muslims (Ajars, Ingilois), Muslim Abkhaz, Kurds and Meshketian Turks'.

347. *Ibid.*

348. *Emirates News (Reuters)* 25 January 1990.

349. Of the 2,000 religious organizations in Azerbaijan only about 400 were officially registered in 2001, see Valiyev and Valiyev 2002.

350. The construction of one of the most influential mosques in Baku, the Cuma or Abu-Bekr mosque, was financed by the Kuwaiti foundation, the 'Restoration of the Islamic Heritage' (Fuller 2002).

351. www.azerigenocide.org/view/bv.htm (12 February 2002).

352. For details, see for example, *RFE/RL Newsline* Vol. 4, No. 185, Part I, 25 September 2000; *IWPR Caucasus Reporting Service* No. 50, September 22, 2000.

353. Virtually all Islamic political parties in Azerbaijan have been shut down and key members of radical groups have been arrest, tried or extradited. For example, the Islamic Party was banned and its leaders arrested in 1996 on suspicion of 'espionage for Iran'. In 2000, ten Wahhabis were extradited to Russia and several activists of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, who had opened a branch of Al Qaeda in Baku were arrested and extradited. Since coming to office in 1993 President Aliyev has 'expelled most Iranian missionaries, with the exception of some mullahs working in refugees camps financed by Iran' (cf. Vilayet and Vilayet 2002).

354. President Aliyev was emphatic: "We will not allow changes to be made to the democratic, secular and legal state structure [of Azerbaijan]' (*Anatolia* news agency, 22 July 2002). Shaffer reports that 'Ankara is [a]ctive in fostering its official version of Islam in the region through the institutions and employees of its Ministry of Religious Affairs. Residents of the Caspian region have remarked that even Turkey's version of non-political Islam is more religious than that which is prevalent in the region and, thus, Ankara may inadvertently be promoting Islam through these programs' (Shaffer 2000).

355. *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts* 8 May 1998.

356. *Emirates News*, 25 January 1990. Interestingly, Ayatollah Khomeini urged Mikhail Gorbachev, in a 1989 open letter, to abandon materialism and engage in 'serious study' of Islam. *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, ME/0354/A, 10 January 1989: 4-6.

357. *Resala'at* (Tehran), 18 January 1990; *Attela'at* (Tehran) 18 Juanary 1990.

358. *Los Angeles Times*, 22 January 1990.

359. On the development of Azerbaijani-Turkish relations in the early 1990s, especially under President Ozal, see Swietochowski 1994: 290ff.

360. In recent years Baku has instituted administrative mechanisms, such as the State Committee of Relations with Religious Organisations, for closer watch of religious funding by foreign states. For detailed discussion see, Gulnara Mamedzade, 'Azerbaijan: State Hounds Muslim Leaders', *IWPR Caucasus Reporting Service,* No. 124, 12 April 2002.

361. *Al-Shi'raa* weekly, 15 January 1990. See also *Al-Safir,* the second largest Islamic newspaper in Lebanon, 21 January 1990; *Al-Ah'hed,* the organ of Hezballa (Party of God), 26 January 1990.

362. *Al-Kifah al-Arabi* (Beirut), 29 January 1990. For the response of the Armenian Popular Movement to these allegations, see *Al-Kifah al-Arabi,* 12 February 1990: 9; *Spurk* (Beirut), 1 March 1990: 1-2.

363. *Al-Ah'hed* (Beirut) 19 January 1990. Similarly, in Chechnya, as reported by *Turan* (Baku,

28 February 1995) the 'Chechen Wolves' organization, meeting at a Grozny suburb, adopted a resolution on 'sentencing' and 'annihilating' all Armenians serving in the Russian army. Reportedly the resolution was adopted in view of the 'announement that two Armenians had been awarded by the Russian Government for military activities in Chechnya'. The organization's statement went on to declare: 'All Chechens, wherever they are, are ordered to annihilate those who directly or indirectly take part in the war against our nation'.

364. *Al Majalla* 12 February 1990: 22-23.

365. *Al Ayam* (Saudi Arabia) 13 April 1992: 10.

366. This notion of Islam goes back to the social discourse at the turn of the 20th, which was different from the 'politico-philosophical' Panturkism in 'the Ottoman Empire or the rest of the Arab word' (Benningsen 1985: 40). For Azerbaijani intellectuals, such as Mardan bey Topchibashy and Mehmet Emin Rasul Zade, as for their colleagues in Central Asia, Islam was to be 'despiritualised and laicised but preserving all its cultural and social values' and 'was to remain the basis of unity' for Muslims in the Russian empire (Benningsen 1985: 44).

367. Fundamentalist here is defined as the discourse of faith-based answers to all aspects of social, political and economic life and/or literal interpretation of religious texts.

368. An Iranian newspaper commented: 'Shortly after coming to power, he [Aliyev] began a policy of suppressing Muslims which filled the country's dark prisons with young Muslims… Now that Aliyev sees that he has lost his former popularity due to his anti-Islamic measures, he is trying to show his total allegiance to the West…' (*Jomhuri'ye Eslami* (Tehran) 3 August 2000).

369. *Anatolia* news agency (Ankara) 22 July 2002.

370. *525 gazet* (Baku) 28 June 2000 and *Kavkaz-Tsentr* news agency 29 June 2002. Regarding Azerbaijani citizens involved in the fighting, for example, in Chechnya, see 'Mercenaries will be tried in Azerbaijan' *RFE/RL Azerbaijan Report* 11 December 2001. The mother of Javid Muftizade, who was killed in Georgia's Kodori gorge along with Chechen fighters, 'claimed that her son died for religious goals' and that 'her son visited the Abu-Bekr mosque before going to Chechnya and fell under the influence of missionaries' (*ibid*).

371. For example, the same mujahideen leader criticised the authorities for "compromising" with the Council of Europe on decriminalising homosexuality in Azerbaijan — 'such shameful depravity as sodomy is allowed [in Azerbaijan], although it is called by fashionable names of homosexuality, gay culture and non-traditional sexual orientation', said the public appeal on Radio Kavkaz. (*Kavkaz Tsentr* news agency 29 June 2002). See also *Frontier* (Oxford) November-December 1995: 1-2.

372. *SwissInfo* 4 July 2002; *Kavkaz-Tsentr* news agency 29 Jun 02, posted on www.groong.com.

373. *Turan* in Russian 10 August 1999.

374. The Chechen name for Karabakh is 'Arts'. "'Without comment exclusive interview" with Movladi Udugov', *Golos Armenii* in Russian 28 July 1999 (FBIS Translated text); originally published in *Aravot* daily in Armenian 14 July 1999.

375. For more on Chechen and mujahideen participation in the Karabakh war, see, for example, Malashenko 2000, Khalilova 2002, Bodansky 1999; Liz Fuller, 'Azerbaijani politicians discuss expediency of partisan war', *RFE/RL Caucasus Report* Vol. 2, No. 42, 22 October 1999; Sanobar Shermatova 'Khattab and Central Asia' *Moscow News,* 13 September 2000.

376. *ANS TV* (Baku) 17 July 2000. Basayev complained: 'But when we saw the situation, there was no sign of jihad. Often great casualties were sustained because of the lack of talent and stupidity of the officers… and commanders' (*ibid*). Earlier, Basayev, in an open letter to the authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran, had questioned as to 'Why are you assisting Armenia against Azerbaijan, while the majority of Azeris are your next of kin both in belief and ethnicity?' www.kavkaz.org (22 June 2000); *Mediamax*, 22 June 2002.

For details on Azerbaijan's claims of the Armenians' use of mercenaries (mainly diaspora Armenians) see Azerbaijan's UN ambassador's submitted document attached as 'Annex' to the *United Nations General Assembly, Fifty-first session, Third Committee, Agenda item 110,* ref. A/C.3/51/9 (30 October 1996). For details on Armenia's claims of Azerbaijan's use of mercenaries, see Armenian Deputy Foreign Minister's submitted document attached as 'Annex I' to the *United Nations General Assembly, Fiftieth session, Item 106 of the provisional agenda*, ref. A/50/390/Add.1 (29 August 1995).

377. 'Private Azeri television defies government', *BBC World Service*, 17 July 2000.

378. Liz Fuller, 'Could 'alternative' Islam become a force in mainstream Azerbaijani politics?' *RFE/RL Caucasus Report* Vol. 5, No. 10, 14 March 2002.

379. Baroness Caroline Cox, 'Open Letter to the Armenian People', *Letters to Groong,* 30 March 2000; www.groung.com. Cf. 'Azeri Islamists call for "active struggle" for liberation of Karabakh', *Turan* (Baku), 2 March 2001.

380. See OIC Final Communiqués at Casablanca, Morocco, 13-15 December 1994 (paragraph 68); Tehran, Iran, 9-11 December 1997 (paragraph 57); Doha, Qatar, 12-13 November 2000 (paragraph 61); Khartoum, Sudan, 25-27 June 2002 (paragraph 37).

381. *Ekpress* (Baku) 1 May 2001. The Azerbaijani ambassador to Saudi Arabia reported that the document was 'sent to the OIC, the Muslim World League, the Islamic Information Agency' and to each of the '56 of the world's Muslim heads of state'.

382. See, for example, 'Azeri president welcomes Muslim countries' support over Karabakh', *ANS TV* (Baku), 27 December 2000; 'Pakistani official supports Azerbaijan's position on Karabakh', *ANS TV,* 17 April 2000; ' Azeri, Iraqi ministers discuss bilateral ties', *Turan*, 30 July 2001; ' Turks, Muslims Must Act Jointly Against Armenian Terrorism', *Anatolia* (Ankara) 27 February 2001; 'Campaign to help Azeri refugees', *Kuwait Times,* 15 June 2002.

383. *ANS TV* (Baku) 25 October 2001.

384. For extensive discussion of legal issues related to Abkhazia, see, for example, Coppieters et al 2000; Coppieters 2001; regarding Karabakh, see Asenbauer 1996; Luchterhandt 1993; Kotanjian 2000.

385. UN General Assembly Resolution 2625 (XXV), 24 October 1970, *Declaration on Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation Among States in Accordance With the Charter of the United Nations.*

386. See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the concept of autonomy in international law. In brief, autonomy is generally defined as the right of internal self-government of a group or a region granted by a national or central government. It also implies formal recognition of 'partial independence' from the influence of the national or central government (cf. Heintze 1998: 7). According to Hannum, 'Autonomy is one step below full self-determination but one step above minority rights' (quoted in Hannikainen 1998: 86).

387. For a discussion of various theories of self-determination in international law, see Berman 1988.

388. A. Cobban writes that 'the definition of the nation, as the term is used in the theory of self-determination, is essentially political. The nation is a community that is, or wishes to be, a state' (quoted in Berman 1988: 91).

389. Azerbaijan considers this pivotal to its legal position vis a vis Karabakh. For a discussion of this issue and generally the Azerbaijani legal arguments, see Mollazade 1998: 24ff.

390. Radan (2002: 19) provides other contemporary cases of unresolved secessionist movements that resemble the case of Bangladesh, such as 'the Tamil rebellion in Sri Lanka, the Bougainville rebellion in Papua-New Guinea and the claims to political domination of Fiji by its indigenous people'.

391. Multi-ethnic Bosnia-Herzegovina is populated by Muslims (40%), Serbs (32%) and Croats (18%). For an extensive discussion on the legal aspects of the conflict in Kosovo, see International Crisis Group, 'Intermediate Sovereignty as a basis for resolving the Kosovo Crisis' (A Discussion Paper). *ICG Balkans Report* N°46. Public International Law & Policy Group for the International Crisis Group, 9 November 1998.

392. The opinion of Judge ad hoc Luchaire in the *Case Concerning the Frontier Dispute (Burkina Faso and Mali)* is relevant here*:*

> [T]he frontiers of an independent State emerging from colonization may differ from the frontier of the colony which it replaces, and this may actually result from the exercise of the right of self-determination. (*International Court of Justice* Rep. 554, p 653 (1986).

Radan adds that 'implicit in the judge's comments is the fact that the population of a colony could contain a number of peoples rather than only one people' (Radan 2002: 43).

393. For example, in the late eighteen century, the five Meliks of Karabakh — Avanians, Beglarians, Hasan-Jalalians, Israelians and Shahnazarians — received foreign recognition of their sovereign status when, through a charter of Tsar Paul (1796-1801) dated 2 June 1799, they accepted the suzerainty of Imperial Russia (Hewsen 1975-1976: 240n).

394. Alfredsson (1998: 134) affirms that 'International law is, after all, made by States for States, and very much aims at maintaining the status quo and preserving the interests of States'.

395. This position was further reiterated in a resolution of the UN General Assembly in 1960 (1514, XV), which, in part said: 'Any attempt aimed at the partial or total disruption of the national unity and the territorial integrity of the country is incompatible with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations (UN General Assembly, 15th Session, Official Records, Supp. No. 16 (A/4684), p. 66). At a press conference in 1970, UN Secretary General, U Thant, stated: 'As far as the question of secession of particular [territorial] section of a Member State is concerned, the United Nations' attitude is unequivocal. As an international organization, the United Nations has never accepted and does not accept and I do not believe it will ever accept the principle of secession of a part of its Member State'. *UN Monthly Chronicle* 36, February 1970, quoted in Emerson 2000: 8).

396. UN General Assembly Resolution 50/6, 24 October 1995. Interestingly, in the background of the military conflict in Chechnya, Russia's representative to the 56th UN General Assembly, Dmitrii Knyazhinskii, told the Assembly on 9 November 2001 that 'the right of peoples to self-determination cannot be invoked as a justification for undermining the territorial integrity or political unity of existing sovereign states' and called for measures to 'decisively block any separatist manifestations and firmly and in a thoroughgoing manner defend the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity of states, and the inviolability of their borders' (*RFE/RL Newsline* Vol. 5, No. 215, Part I, 13 November 2001).

397. Alfredsson (1998: 135) cites, for example, the report of Asbjorn Eide, Special Rapporteur of UN Sub-Commission of International Labour Organisation (ILO); UN Doc. No. E/CN.4/Sub.2/1992/37, paragraph 165. Interestingly, clause 5 of the 1991 Agreement on the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) also emphasised 'the inviolability of existing borders within the framework of the Commonwealth'.

398. See, for example, Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, pt. I, para 2, UN Doc. A/CONF. 157/24 (pt I) (1993); and United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2625 (XXV), UN GAOR, 25th Sess. Supp. No. 28, p. 121, UN Doc. A/8028 (1970). Chirikba (1999: 258) adds: 'The Abkhazians argue that they used to be a majority in Abkhazia until the end of the 19th century. They eventually became a minority due to the Tsarist Russian policy of deportation and ethnic cleansing in the 19th century and the deliberate policy of population transfer pursued by Soviet Georgian leaders'. Similarly, the Armenians had always been a majority in the *mountainous* areas of Karabakh (see Chapter 1).

399. Berman cites International Court of Justice cases on Namibia in 1971 and Western Sahara in 1975, and how, for example, with regards to South Africa's occupation of Namibia, the UN

revoked South Africa's League of Nations Mandate and declared illegal its continued occupation of the territory. 'The Court agreed with the U.N. that such a material breach had occurred, *inter alia*, because of South Africa's policy of apartheid. The Court rejected South Africa's contention that it should consider South Africa's motives for applying that policy. The Court held that, regardless of motivation, apartheid constituted a violation of South Africa's duties under the Mandate, as well as its obligations under the U.N. Charter to "observe and respect, in a territory having an international status, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction of race' (Berman 1988: 96-97).

400. For a discussion of the legal and political dimensions of secession, see 'The rules of secession. Four principles by which to judge your breakaway brethren,' *The Economist* 29 January 2000.

401. Duursma 1996: 99-100, quoted in Chirikba 2000: 242.

402. Indeed, the Abkhazians had voted in favour of preserving the Soviet Union in Gorbachev's March 1991 Union-wide referendum.

403. *Bakinskii Rabochi* ('Baku Worker'), 31 August 1991.

404. *Baku*, 7 November 1991.

405. *Kommunist*, 5 October 1989.

406. For the text of the agreement, see Hovannisian 1971: 35-37; cf. Arslanian 1994: 92-104. The Karabakh Armenians agreed to put Karabakh 'under the jurisdiction of Azerbaijan provisionally until the Paris Peace Conference and its outcome' (Hovannisian 1971: 29).

407. 'The frontiers of Azerbaidjan and Armenia are for obvious reasons not yet settled', *League of Nations, The Records of the First Assembly. Meetings of the Committees, II*. Geneva: League of Nations, 1920: 631.

408. 'Application of Azerbaidjan for Admission to the League', *League of Nations The Records of the First Assembly. Meetings of the Committees, II*. Geneva: League of Nations, 1920: 173, 642. It should be noted that Georgia and Armenia were also not admitted, but, unlike Azerbaijan, they were invited to participate in 'Technical Organisations of the League as are of general interests' (*Ibid*, 613, 630).

For extensive discussion of Armenia's case in the Assembly, see *ibid*, 587-595, where, *inter alia*, the President of the Assembly of the League of Nations, stated:

> The Assembly earnestly hopes the efforts of the President of the United States, energetically supported by the Governments of Spain and Brazil, and by the Council of the League, will result in the preservation of the Armenian race, and in securing for Armenia a stable Government exercising authority throughout the whole of the Armenian State, as the boundaries thereof may be finally settled under the Treaty of Sevres, so that the Assembly may be able to admit Armenia into full Membership of the League at its next Meeting' (*ibid*, 593).

For the discussion in the Assembly on Georgia's application, see *ibid*, 630-634, where, interestingly, delegates in support of Georgia's admission argue (as articulated by Norway's Delegate) that

> there is another reason for us in this Assembly to wish to see Georgia a Member of the League, that is, if we really mean anything by the words which we have so often repeated that we are anxious to help Armenia. It is obvious, without it being necessary to explain any further, that it would be of great assistance to us, if we are anxious to help Armenia, to have Georgia a Member of the League. The communications with Armenia to a very great extend go through Georgia, and if Georgia is not a Member of the League there may be some difficulty in getting her to allow transit to our friend Armenia (*ibid* 631).

409. *League of Nations, The Records of the First Assembly. Meetings of the Committees, II.* Geneva: League of Nations, 1920: 219-220. See also, "The Request of Azerbaidjan for Admission", *The Record of the First Assembly. Plenary Meetings (Meetings held form the 15th of November to the 18th of December 1920).* Geneva: League of Nations, 1920: 642. Azerbaijan's request for admission was rejected by 28 votes (28 against and 14 abstained), none voted in favour. As for Georgia: 10 for, 13 against, 19 abstained; Armenia: 8 for, 21 against, 13 abstained (*ibid*, 651, 633, 579).

410. Text in *Soviet Gharabagh* (NKAO's daily newspaper), 21 February 1988.

411. *Bakinski Rabochi*, 14 June 1988.

412.. In late 1988, a four-member Armenian delegation of Communist Party officials, headed by Leonard Petrossian, head of the Oblast Executive Committee, had gone to Baku to explain that NKAO 'is not against being part of Azerbaijan, but demands full autonomy' (Interview with Karen Ohanjanian, 23 June 2002).

413. Again, for legal purposes, it should be noted that Azerbaijan's law on abolishing NKAO was based on the 1978 Soviet-era Constitution (Principle Law) of Azerbaijan (Article 10, Para. 2). But the 1978 Constitution had lost its force by the adoption (through referendum in November 1995) of a new Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, which came into force on 27 November 1995, as well as on the basis of Article 4 of 'The Constitutional Act on the State Independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan'.

414. 'Law of the USSR Concerning the Procedure of Secession of a Soviet Republic from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics', Register of the Congress of the Peoples Deputies of USSR and Supreme Soviet of USSR, No. 13, p. 252 (3 April 1990).

415. The declaration of independence was based on 'The Act on the Independence of Georgia on 26 May 1918', as affirmed in the 9 April 1999 'Appeal to the Peoples of the World', signed by Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Chairman of the Georgian Supreme Soviet (cf. Avtonomov 1999).

416. Nodia 1998: 33; Nodia 1999; for a wider discussion of this issue see Chirikba, 2000: 237-238.

417. Chapter 1, Article 2 of the Constitution. In 1991, the Georgian parliament had already unilaterally abrogated the autonomy of South Ossetia.

418, *RFE/RL Newsline* Vol. 6, No. 194, Part I, 15 October 2002.

419. Avtonomov (1999) points out that there are a few instances in international practice where the 'fate of the peoples who take no part in the process of approving such a constitution' are decided within a constitution. 'However, as a rule, such attempts end without results'. He cites the example of the clauses related to former colonies in the 1958 Constitution of France; the 'proposals in the relevant chapters of the constitution remained ineffective and were abolished in 1995'.

420. In the 1921 Constitution of Georgia, Abkhazia's autonomous status was 'only mentioned but not specified' (Chirikba 2000: 234). Georgian scholars insist that 'Abkhazia had always been part of Georgia, being also de facto part' of the Democratic Republic. 'In their view, modern Abkhaz "statehood" was a product of Bolshevik occupation of Georgia and Sovietisation of the region' (Coppieters 2000: 23-24).

421. Georgians refer to the 7 May 1920 Russian-Georgian Treaty, recognising the borders between the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic and Democratic Georgia. Avtonomov (1999) explains that 'this treaty merely recognised that the territory beyond the River Psou was under the control of Georgian military forces, nothing being said about the fate of Abkhazia'.

422. Chirikba (2000: 236) points out that in the context of the 1995 Constitution of Georgia, 'the official Georgian terminology in respect to Abkhazia is still "the Abkhaz Autonomous Republic", which implies a recognition of Abkhazia's statehood (a "republic" is by definition a state)'. He adds that 'it is not this statehood which is at stake in the dispute between Georgian

and Abkhazia, but rather the degree of sovereignty for Abkhazia within the framework of the common state'.

423. The Text of the declaration is found in *Abkhazia Newsletter*, Vol. 2, No. 20, October 1999 (electronic version).

424. *Prime News*, 12 May 2001.

425. *RFE/RL Newsline* Vol. 5, No. 196, Part I, 16 October 2001.

426. *Le Monde diplomatique*, October 1999, cf. *The Washington Post*, 28 April 1999: 17 and *Zerkalo* (Baku) in Russian, 2 July 1999: 2.

427. 'Nagorno-Karabakh striving for independent status', *Interfax News Bulletin,* 12 January 2002.

428. *ANS TV* (Baku), 15 October 2002. In an interview in Istanbul a few days later, President Aliyev added: 'We must bear in mind that if I cannot resolve the Karabakh problem then no one in the world will resolve it' (*Agence France Presse*, 15 October 2002).

429. *RFE/RL Armenia Report*, 13 February 2002.

430. In the early stages of the Karabakh Movement in the late 1980s, union with Armenia was the main goal (cf. Malkasian 1996: 119-120).

431. Montevideo Convention on Rights and Duties of States, Article 1, signed 26 December 1933 (*American Journal of International Law* (AJIL) 28 (Supp.): 76). New expectations added to the criteria of statehood in recent decades include compliance with international laws, the guarantee of minority rights and democracy. For a general discussion of 'declaratory' and 'constitutive' theories of state recognition in international law, see Grant 1999; and for a discussion of the ongoing legal debate since the Montevideo Convention, see Duursma 1996.

**432.** For example, Andorra (population 66,000), Liechtenstein (32,000), Marshall Islands (66,000), Monaco (32,000), Naura (11,000), Palau (18,000), San Marino (25,000) and the Federated States of Micronesia (132,000).

433. For example, Georgians consider the 1921 'annexation of Georgia by Communist Russia as an act of military aggression' (Nodia 1999).

434. In 'An Open Letter to the Georgian People', published in the 21 July 1989 issue of *Literaturuli Sakartvelo* (*Literary Georgia*, a weekly published in Tbilisi), the British linguist George Hewitt asks: 'What have you to lose, my Georgian readers, if you recognise just one more crime committed by Stalin and Beria [against the Abkhazians] and apologise for it, since it was done in your name? — absolutely nothing, and what a glorious prize might be won'. Interestingly, the information on the Abkhazians on the official Georgian Parliament Homepage, states: 'Like many other Soviet peoples, [the] Abkhazians suffered great losses from the repression in the 1930s, especially under Beria'. (http://www.parliament.ge/index.html (17 October 1995).

435. Another of Stalin's legacy is the Russian-Japanese dispute over the Kurile Islands in the Pacific. In an 1855 treaty, Russia had agreed that the Southern Kuriles would be Japanese, but Stalin, two weeks after the end of World War II, broke a non-aggression pact with Japan and invaded the islands. Since then there has been no official peace agreement between Russia and Japan and the legal dispute continues (cf. *The New York Times*, 2 October 2002).

436. For a more extensive discussion of this issue from an international legal perspective, see Duursma 1996.

437. Quoted in Vitaly Naumkin (1998) "Russia and the Transcaucasia", *Caucasian Regional Studies* 3:1.

438. See, for example, Cohen 1999, Baudelaire & Lynch 2000, and Lynch 2001.

439. Dov Lynch makes an insightful observation at the end of a long visit to the South Caucasus. He concludes: 'Each state that we have travelled through exists in its own terms. [And as one of his interlocutors put it] "What is Georgia? What is Armenia? What is Azerbaijan? These states never existed before Stalin." And he is correct… What is Abkhazia? What is Karabakh? It is difficult to answer…. Each of these states exists because it has defined its own space in terms of land, and its own time in terms of history' (see diary entry for August 31, 2000 in Baudelaire & Lynch 2000a).

440. See, for example, Liz Fuller, 'Georgia Ponders Threats to Statehood, Stability', *RFE/RL Caucasus Report,* Vol. 1, No. 18, 1 July 1998; Claudia Rosett, 'Potentate Jr. [Azerbaijan]', *The Wall Street Journal,* 6 November 2002; Richard Giragosian and Khatchik Derghoukassian, 'Corruption in Armenia: Analyzing the "Weak State" Syndrome From an Economic Perspective', *The Armenian Weekly*, 12 January 2002. For Abkhazia, see Henze 1998; and for Karabakh, see *RFE/RL Armenia Report*, 30 July 2002.

441. Bureaucratic authority, as defined by Weber (1947: 329-363), is based on a system of established rules, with a clearly defined hierarchy of positions and spheres of competences — it is 'rational in the sense of being bound to intellectually analysable rules'. Charismatic authority, on the other hand, is based on 'special' qualities ('gifts') of an individual 'by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities'.

442. Zviad Gamsakhudia in Georgia, Abulfaz Elchibey, the leader of the Popular Front in Azerbaijan, Levon Ter Petrossian, the leader of Armenian National Movement in Armenia, Vladislav Ardzinba in Abkhazia, and charismatic activists, including Robert Kocharian, in Karabakh. The listing of these leaders here does not imply that they all share equal qualities, styles or ideologies. This is far from the reality. For instance, Gamsakhurdia's ideology and style were starkly different from the others mentioned above.

443. That is, turned into 'traditional authority' — the exercise of authority according to traditionally transmitted rules or inherited status (cf. Weber 1947: 341ff).

444. For example, regarding Abkhazia, Henze (1998: 106) writes: 'Ardzinba and his colleagues are increasingly unsure of popular support. …. They cannot risk democratisation for they could not survive it. They lack both the inclination and the means to begin to develop an open market economy.'

445. The President of Abkhazia, Vladislav Ardzinba (b. 1945), a philologist specialising in Hittite and Near East history, was the director (from 1988) of the Institute of Language, Literature and History in Abkhazia. He was elected the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia in 1990. The Prime Minister, Anri Djergenia, a 60-year old former Prosecutor-General of Abkhazia, who succeeded Vyacheslav Tsugba in 2001, was ousted in December 2002. Since Djergenia departure, Vice President Valery Arshaba has become the virtual 'head of state' of Abkhazia. The President of Karabakh, Arkady Ghoukassian (b. 1957) is a philologist and former journalist. He was elected president in 1997, succeeding Robert Kocharian who became Prime Minister of Armenia at the time. Until his arrest in 1999, Samuel Babayan (b. 1963), Defence Minister of Karabakh and since 1992 commander of the army, was one of the most influential actors in the political and military affairs of Karabakh.

446. As a report by Humanitarian Initiative, a British NGO, put it, 'they suffer from post-Soviet "hangovers" in the sense of an incomplete political and economic transition. Despite some appearance of Westernisation there is an underlying continuity of the old Communist leadership' (Vaux and Goodhand 2002: 10).

447. For centuries, in the absence of full independence, the elite in Abkhazia and Karabakh have played pivotal role in the process of defending the rights of their people. This has ranged from negotiations for political, economic and religious rights with a host of foreign rulers to armed struggles to protect their physical existence. Efforts toward a 'diplomatic solution' to Karabakh's problems is documented as far back as the late seventeenth century, when the Meliks of Karabakh sought even the assistance of Pope Innocent XI — in a letter dated 19 April 1699 — entertaining the idea of converting to Roman Catholicism in return for the Pope's

support. (For the original Armenian text see G. Ezov, *Snosheniya Petra Velikago s Armyanami Dokumenty* (St. Petersburg, 1898), reproduced in English in Bournoutian 1998). In the early 1800s, Keleshbey, the ruler of Abkhazia, made similar overtures to Napoleon's France. In 1862, an Abkhaz-Adyghean delegation visited London to seek military assistance from the British Empire. They met the Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston, who was sympathetic to their plight, but the delegation returned empty handed (Lakoba 1999: 69, 80).

448. For a discussion of Robert Kocharian's entry into Armenia's political scene, see Tchilingirian 1997, 1997a.

449. In the words of President Ardzinba: 'It becomes difficult to negotiate in good faith with a counterpart who has declared and shown [its] intent to destroy you as a nation' (UNPO 1992: 19).

450. Cf. 'Self-determination in relation to individual human rights, democracy and the protection of the environment', UNPO Conference Report (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation, The Hague) GA/1993/CR.1, especially pp.10-11.

451. For a discussion of the level of 'integration', see Cohen 1999 for Abkhazia; Panossian 2002 and Tchilingirian 1998 for Karabakh.

452. For example, 70% of the population of Abkhazia hold Russian Federation citizenship. By late June 2002, an estimated 150,000 people in Abkhazia acquired the new Russian passports, in addition to the 50,000 who already possessed Russian citizenship (*IWPR Caucasus Reporting Service*, No. 135, 27 June 2002).

453. See, for example, Danilov 1999; Nodia 1997-1998: 40-44; Tom de Wall, 'Abkhazia: A Long Bridge to Cross', *IWPR Caucasus Reporting Service,* No. 117, 22 February 2002.

454. For a more extensive discussion, see Tchilingirian 1998, 1997a, 1997b.

455. Eric Baudelaire, a Frenchman visiting Abkhazia, wrote: 'The institutions of statehood in Abkhazia are as manufactured, blatant and shallow as sets on a theatre stage…. Institutions of statehood exist in Abkhazia, but they lack the means for coherence and efficiency…. The only leg of Abkhaz statehood that is missing completely is the one they cannot achieve by themselves: recognition' (Baudelaire & Lynch 2000). At least one example in Georgia might put this in a comparative perspective. Georgia's budget shortfall for the first 10 months of 1998 was $120 million. As a result, the Georgian government owed $9 million in wages to public sector employees and a staggering $35 million in pensions (cf. *RFE/RL Caucasus Report* Vol. 1, No. 38, 18 November 1998 and Vol. 2, No. 35, 2 September 1999).

456. Interview in Stepanakert, 6 September 1995, ref. K17: 428-436.

457. For instance, Gerard Libaridian, who was involved in the Karabakh negotiation process as advisor to the President of Armenia, stated: '[Azerbaijan's attitude is] a major paradox because if you claim that these [Karabakh Armenians] are your [Azerbaijan's] citizens you should be able to sit and talk to them rather than treating them as the enemy and giving them absolutely no reason to trust you' (*Armenian Forum* 1, 2, 1998: 140).

458. For example, in 2002, three quarters of Karabakh's $22 million state budget came from Armenia in the form of long-term credits and subsidies to cover basic needs, such as social welfare, education and health. In 2000-2002, diaspora Armenians invested about $30 million in Karabakh's economy (*RFE/RL Armenia Report*, 23 September 2002). Another significant investment of the diaspora is the building of a 169 km. north-south highway within Karabakh at an estimated cost of $25 million; this is in addition to the 80 km. Goris-Lachin-Stepanakert highway, at a cost of about $9 million, that the diaspora funded.

459. See, for example, on Abkhazia: Cohen 1999, Kvarchelia 1999, Allen Nan 1999, Lynch 2001, Baudelaire and Lynch 2000; on Karabakh: Vaux and Goodhand 2002, Tchilingirian 1999; Salpi H. Ghazarian, 'Rebuilding Karabakh', *Armenian International Magazine*, April 1999: 31-35.

460. In the case of Karabakh, the problem of recognition is also a contentious issue in the negotiation process, whereby Azerbaijan's refusal to recognise Karabakh as a side to the conflict has hampered the possibility of direct talks for rapprochement. However, since 1998, this has been substituted by direct talks between the president of Azerbaijan, Heidar Aliyev, and the Karabakh-born president of Armenia, Robert Kocharian, who, incidentally, was branded a 'rebel' and 'war criminal' in Azerbaijan when he was president of Karabakh.

Karabakh's foreign policy evolves around two main tracks: a) In the short term, it involves efforts toward full recognition as a side to the conflict and toward direct talks with Baku; b) In the long term, as with the case of the Abkhazian, it involves efforts toward recognition of statehood or a 'special status' by other states. Toward this end, the Karabakh leadership has developed close contacts with "sympathetic states" which might possibly provide limited or full recognition. The establishment of such contacts have been possible with the support and lobbying efforts of the Armenian diaspora, especially in the Middle East, Europe, South and North America. Currently, Karabakh has unofficial representations ('Information Offices') in Moscow, Washington, Paris, Beirut and Sydney. It has received the most vocal support from Arab countries where there are significant Armenian populations. For instance, the Lebanese Parliament Speaker, Nabih Berri, has stated that Lebanon would recognise the Nagorno Karabakh Republic as an independent state if the population votes for independence in a UN sponsored referendum (cf. *RFE/RL Newsline*, Vol 1, No. 118, Part I, 16 September 1997).

461. In the words of Abkhaz President, Vladislav Ardzinba, 'It's not necessary to have recognition. Recognition needs to be made by the people and secondly by the international community' (quoted in Steavenson 2002: 254). Karabakh's President, Arkady Ghoukassian, on the10th anniversary of the Republic of Mountainous Karabakh, stated: 'independence had not been granted to Karabakh by international institutions but gained in bloody battles' and that Karabakh's leaders would spare no efforts to defend their independence (*Noyan Tapan*, 23 February 1998).

462. As described by the former defence minister of Karabakh, Samvel Babayan (*Snark News Agency* 12 May 1997).

463. For example, as reported by the media, about $1 billion worth of arms were transferred from Russia to Armenia in 1994-1996. In turn, Azerbaijan, in addition to purchases of weapons from Russia and Ukraine, the country's Air Force and other army units have benefited from Turkish financial assistance and training programmes. Interestingly, Azerbaijan's Air Force Chief Ramiz Rizayev told journalists in Turkey, in April 1998, that 'Azerbaijan is considering purchasing F-16 fighters manufactured in Turkey under US licence' (*Azadlyg* (Baku) 4 April 1998).

464. For example, as one report about Azerbaijan stated: 'Recent episodes of worrisome sabre rattling appear to be aimed at drawing international intervention on Azerbaijan's behalf by governments concerned about a possible disruption in the flow of the country's oil, a dangerous strategy that could provoke renewed armed hostilities' (*Political Risk Services*, 14 November 2002).

465. For instance, the defence establishment in Karabakh argues that the high combat readiness of the Karabakh army is an important safeguard against renewed fighting with Azerbaijan. In 1998, Aleksandr Lebed, former Russian Security Council secretary, had assessed Karabakh's army as probably 'the most professional in the entire CIS' (Liz Fuller, 'Karabakh A Quasi-Independent State; South Ossetia's Status Unclear', *RFE/RL*, 27 July 1998).

466. For example, Henze (1998: 106) notes that in Abkhazia there is an 'economic decay under an oligarchy that maintains a political system in most respects identical to what existed in the old Soviet Union'. In Karabakh, the former defence minister was heavily involved in setting up enterprises in the name of 'revitalising' Karabakh's economy. See, for example, Tara Warner, 'Small privileges, big problems for Karabakh', *The Russia Journal*, 10 October 2000.

467. *Hayastani Hanrapetutyun,* 27 April 1995.

468. Until the late 1990s, Armenian diaspora's assistance has been primarily in Karabakh's infrastructure, such as building of roads and water supply systems, as opposed to microeconomics. In recent years, investments in factories and enterprises by diaspora Armenians have increased.

469. 'For instance, in Azerbaijan, 'jobless, without hope, unintegrated in Azerbaijani society, the refugees construct and reconstruct their horrible past' (Laitin & Suny 1999).

470. For example, the formation of a Karabakh Coordinating Council of '19 women's organizations of political parties and women NGOs', is 'expected to wage campaign to fight defeatist feelings among people, enhance their resistance power and mobilize for wiping out the Armenian aggression, mount massive protest acts, enlightenment activities and propaganda' (*Assa-Irada* (Baku) 26 November 2001).

471. Abkhazians had repeatedly filed complaints about military attacks by such groups. Abkhaz President Ardzinba had warned President Shevardnadze back in 1997 that 'unless the latter takes measures to halt ongoing terrorist activities by Georgian saboteurs on Abkhaz territory, hostilities may erupt and the progress already achieved in mediated talks on a settlement of the Abkhaz conflict will be demolished' (*OMRI Daily Digest*, No. 54, Part I, 18 March 1997).

472. *RFE/RL Newsline* Vol. 6, No. 85, Part I, 7 May 2002.

473. *RFE/RL Newsline* Vol. 5, No. 143, Part I, 31 July 2001; cf. *RFE/RL Newsline* Vol. 3, No. 118, Part I, 17 June 1999; *Alia* (Tbilisi) No. 37, 8 March 1999. Tamaz Nadareishvili, chairman of the Parliament in Exile, called for 'terrorist attacks in the crowded tourist resorts of Gagra and Pitsunda' in Abkhazia (*RFE/RL Newsline* Vol. 6, No. 134, Part I, 19 July 2002). In 2001, the White Legion, in a leaflet distributed in Abkhazia's Gali region in the south, warned 'that it will burn down schools in the district unless the teaching of the Georgian language and history is introduced at the beginning of the new academic year' (*RFE/RL Newsline* Vol. 5, No. 143, Part I, 31 July 2001). *RFE/RL Caucasus Report* Vol. 4, No. 35, 22 October 2001. Cf. the report prepared by 'the parliamentary ad hoc Commission on the Problems of Abkhazia' for the Parliament of Georgia, *Labyrinth of Abkhazia* (Tbilisi 2000): 197ff.

474. For a more detailed discussion see Liz Fuller, 'Kto Vinovat ?', RFE/RL *Caucasus Report* Vol. 5, No. 6, 14 February 2002; cf. Dov Lynch's dairy entry for August 7th in Baudelaire & Lynch 2000. Indeed, before Shevardnadze stabilised the situation, in the early 1990s, Georgia, as described by Suny (1997) 'self-destructed, tore itself to pieces in an orgy of chauvinistic nationalism, inviting, indeed encouraging, secession of its minorities and intervention of Russia'.

475. *Turan* news agency 6 November 2001.

476. *RFE/RL Azerbaijan Report*, Press Review, 18 September 2001.

477. *RFE/RL Azerbaijan Report*, 15 October 2001 News Briefs.

478. On 12 September 2001, the day after the terrorist attacks in the United States, *ANS TV* in Azerbaijan headlined: 'Possible Armenian connection in the US attacks'. The sensational headline was based on the broadcast's claim that there are 'a sufficient number of organisations in the USA who help Armenian terrorists organisations' and that 'the two planes, which carried out the actions, took off from Boston, which has the second largest Armenian community' in the US. See also *Assa-Irada* (Baku) 5 October 2001.

479. *Zerkalo* (Baku), 12 October 2001; see also 'Azeri scientific gathering moots "Armenians' inclination to terrorism"', *Zerkalo* (Baku), 12 October 2001.

480. There is also 'ecologist'. According to an Azerbaijani expert, Telman Ismayilov: 'Armenia has been conducting a deliberate policy of ecocide against Azerbaijan for a long time' by dumping '3bn cu. m. of sewage in the Kura River basin every year, which leads to its physical, chemical and biological contamination' (*Bilik Dunyasi* 16 November 2001). No credible evidence has been presented for any of these claims, or the methodology of how these "studies" were conduced. Moreover, Armenia and Russia 'are engaged in poisoning the [occupied] territories', by 'burying spent nuclear waste' in the occupied districts and villages of Nagorno Karabakh. Consequently, vegetation in the Kolatag, Seyidbeyli and Almali villages of the northeastern part of Khojaly has been destroyed'. (*RFE/RL Azerbaijan Report*, 16 November 2001, Press Review). Ironically, when in November 2001 an Azeri army officer was detained in Istanbul for manufacturing mustard gas, which is used for chemical weapons, the media in Baku was virtually silent about it.

The incident was reported by *TRT 2* television (Ankara) 28 November 2001).

481. Western observes (e.g., Lynch 2001, Vaux and Goodhand 2002; Takeyh and Gvosdev 2002) contend that 'the legal limbo in which [separatist states, such as Abkhazia and Karabakh] exist had made them welcoming source points and transit zones for international criminal activities' (Lynch 2001: 2). In the absence of any credible evidence — notwithstanding low-level criminality — such observations could be construed as a reflection of what is presented by the metropolitan states. Indeed, the volume and frequency of international criminal activities are more rampant in the metropolitan states. The problem is systemic rather than 'separatist' specific. See, for example, 'Georgian parliament deputy again accuses guerrillas of smuggling, *RFE/RL Newsline* Vol. 4, No. 114, Part I, 13 June 2000.

482. See, for example, 'South Caucasus and the Caspian: A View from Baku. Transcript of Mr. [Ilham] Aliyev's Remarks', Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Johns Hopkins University, 22 October 2002; http://cacianalyst.org and Q&A http://www.sais-jhu.edu/mediastream/caci_qa.ram; 'Azeri refugees address UN, Council of Europe, OSCE', *Bakinskiy Rabochiy* 26 February 2002; *Azerbaijan News Service*, 1 August 2001; *Our Century* (Baku) 17-23 October 2001; *Azerbaijan News Service,* 17 August 2002.

483. *Azg*, 11 July 1998.

484. *Artsakh Monthly Newsletter*, 6, June 1999, published by the Nagorno-Karabagh Republic Public Affairs Office, Washington, DC; cf. *Groong News Network,* Daily news from NKR.am, 23 March 2000.

485. See for example, Elizabeth Shogren, 'Thousands of Armenians Mourn Azerbaijan Deaths', *Los Angeles Times*, 5 May 1991; '14th Anniversary of Events in Sumgait', *Arminfo,* 4 February 2002; *Transitions Online,* Week in Review, 17-23 January 2000*,* http://www.ijt.cz.

486. *RFE/RL Armenia Report* , 16 January 2003. General Secretary of the Council of Europe, Walter Schwimmer, 'expressed regret' over Kocharian's statement (*Noyan Tapan Highlights* N5, February 2003).

487. *Agence France Presse*, 10 May 2001 ('Armenians comparable to Hitler's armies: Aliyev').

488. See 'Five organisations of Armenia and Karabakh drum up support for "In Defense of Liberated Territories" public initiative', *Noyan Tapan,* 2 May 2001; *Noyan Tapan,* 22 February 2002, 1 July 2002; *Golos Armenii*, 8 May 2001; *Haykakan Zhamanak*, 27 February 2002; 'Hardline Groups Against Return of Occupied Azeri Lands', *RFE/RL Armenia Report*, 22 December 2001; 'Armenian Nationalist Party Head Demands Full Independence for Karabakh', *Arminfo*, 29 June 2002; 'Dashnaks Reaffirm Hard line on Karabakh', *Arminfo,* 18 September 2001; 'Armenian political parties oppose return of "liberated territories"', *Arminfo*, 7 March 2002; 'No part of Armenian land can be subject of talks', *Noyan Tapan* 30 April 2002; *Snark*, 29 September 2000.

489. In this regard, the statement of Vafa Guluzade, former senior advisor to the President of Azerbaijan, is pertinent: 'I, Vafa Guluzade, propose that the entire Armenian population of Nagornyy Karabakh should be moved from there because the Armenians carried out ethnic cleansing in Armenia [i.e., Azerbaijanis fled from the then-Armenian SSR in late 1988]. This problem will not be resolved as long as Armenians are in Nagornyy Karabakh' (*Yeni Azarbaycan* (Baku) 14 November 2001).
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490. See, for example, Celac et al 2000; Vaux and Goodhand 2002; Coppieters 2001; Lynch 2001; 'South Caucasus: Regional and International Conflict Resolution', Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Geneva, June 2001; 'The Nagorno-Karabakh Crisis: A Blueprint for Resolution'. A Memorandum Prepared by the Public International Law & Policy and the New England Center for International Law & Policy, June 2000.

491. President Shevardnadze, speaking to displaced persons from Abkhazia, stated: 'I am sure we will return to Abkhazia and it will happen very shortly. I will go ahead with you. We have more resources now and international support.... We are closer to victory than any time before' (*RFE/RL Caucasus Report* Vol. 4, No. 35, 22 October 2001). President Aliyev, while visiting the tomb of

Hero of Soviet Union Azi Aslanov to mark Victory Day celebrations, stated: 'The Armenians who invaded Azerbaijan should know that they will never find justification. Today they are celebrating the occupation of Shusha, but they should not think that this is for ever.… An aggressor [i.e., the Armenians] must always be punished. An aggressor must receive punishment. Those who killed people brutally, destroyed hospitals and schools and burnt houses must receive their punishment, and they will receive it' (*ANS TV,* 9 May 2001).

492. Quoted in Floriana Fossato, 'Georgia/Abkhazia: Stalled Peace Process Needs New Start'. *RFE/RL*, 6 December 1999.

493. The assessment of Vaclav Havel, the first president of the Czech Republic, who had become a symbol of the 'new order' in post-Communist Eastern Europe, is pertinent. Speaking in Prague in May 2002 he observed: 'There will be peace in the world when everyone's right to a place in the region which he feels a part of and to which he historically belongs is recognized. Any violation of the will of nations always results in violence and war conflicts' (*RFE/RL Caucasus Report*, Vol. 5, No. 15, 3 May 2002).

494 For instance, as Coppieters (2000: 54) observes, 'Georgian attempts to mobilise Western governments to its own advantage and the lack of Western impartiality in the conflict has raised the level of distrust between Georgia and Abkhazia'.

495. See, for example, MacFarlane & Minear 1997: 90ff.

496. Michael Ignatieff', 'When a Bridge is Not a Bridge', *The New York Times*, 27 October 2002.

497. *AssA-Irada* (Baku) 5 August 1999; see also *ANS TV* 26 February 2001.

498. See, for example, Celac et al 2000; Coppieters 2001; 'South Caucasus: Regional and International Conflict Resolution', Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. Geneva: June 2001 (at www.hdcentre.org); 'The Nagorno-Karabagh Crisis: A Blueprint for Resolution', A Memorandum Prepared by the Public International Law and Policy Group and the New England Center for International Law & Policy. American University College of Law, June 2000 (at www.nesl.edu/center/pubs/nagorno.pdf).

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